

November 2022

Dear Friends,

Now a bit of news about how our students are doing . . .

Just after I sent the last newsletter, we celebrated 15 August. It's a chance for us to remember those who struggled and died to secure India's independence from the British. It's also a chance for our students to perform in front of their classmates and teachers.



आशा दीप विद्याश्रम



Students gather to watch the unfurling of the flag and sing India's national anthem.



Our little ones sang a patriotic song.



Some of our 8th grade girls, dressed in India's flag colors, also sang.

The next chance for an all-school gathering was Teacher's Day which is celebrated on September 5th each year. To give our teachers a rest on their special day, our 8th graders always plan and execute this event. This year, along with some dance performances and funny teacher mimicry, each teacher was asked to share a story, joke, poem or the like. They also served cake to the teachers and a small treat to all the students. It was a lot of fun!



Later in September I caught our kindergarten and first grade teachers supervising outdoor games:



Of course, it's not all fun and games. Our classes continue with some serious learning taking place. Here our 2nd graders are watching a classmate spelling on the board.



Kiran Ma'am, who teaches our youngest children, used a class art project to teach about different colors.



At the end of September, everyone wrote first term exams to demonstrate their progress since the start of the school year. During exam time, our students sit on the ground with classes interspersed to make cheating more difficult.





On October 3rd, report cards were distributed. A guardian is required to come receive the marksheet so that parents and teachers have a chance to talk. It also allows me to interact with parents, sometimes to give advice for improving performance and sometimes to praise a child's good work.

This year, on the same day the guardians came to get report cards, we used a variety of saris to set up a temporary photo studio and snack corner in the downstairs gallery. I wanted a chance to take some family photos. The photos were taken by a former student who now does professional photography and videography. After some editing, I gave one portrait to each family. You can see a few of these photos at the end of this letter.



In July we welcomed a new volunteer, Andrew. An American citizen, Andrew got his bachelor's degree in cell and molecular biology before coming to India and getting his master's degree in social work from a nearby renowned university. At Asha Deep he started out helping in the library and tutoring a few students who needed a bit of extra attention. In September he made a proposal to stay on with us as a volunteer social worker. We just got the fantastic news that his volunteer visa was approved. We are very excited to have a trained social worker at our school! Teachers will recommend needy students to him. Then, Andrew will try to identify underlying problems whether they be academic, emotional, or social, and will create a plan to help the student cope with whatever situation he/she is facing. This may mean extra academic help, counseling, or

going to homes to try to work with parents. He'll be starting his new role soon in a half-time position. We feel very lucky to have him with us!

Andrew giving a small group of students some extra time to practice English reading.



After being closed last week for a combination of celebrations (including Diwali, Bhaiya Duj, and Dala Chhath), we are now open and digging back in for some more study and smiles until second term exams which will be completed before Christmas.

And now for the bonus photo of this letter . . .



Incredibly, I did not pose these girls. I saw them like this in the hall. All I did was ask them not to move while I went to grab my camera! Lots of promise in this shot . . .

love,
Connie

Here are a few of the family photos I mentioned above. First some mothers and daughters:



I was amazed to see the confidence on the face of Jamuna at the far right. Now in 8th class, she has a right to face the world like this. She's one of my top students and is working hard to create a good future for herself. It's astonishing to see this strength in a fatherless girl who lives in a one-room hut. I'm sure she's heard in a thousand ways that someone like her can never amount to anything. She's determined to prove them wrong.



Here's a father and son. It's hard to tell who is leaning on whom. This family belongs to the "sweeper" (toilet cleaner) caste, one of the lowest in the Hindu caste hierarchy.

These children are often late to school. I was getting ready to have a serious talk about it with Soni, the eldest daughter who is now studying in 1st grade. Then I heard from her teacher that she wakes up at 4 a.m. to clean the house and cook the food for the day before she comes to school. I record their tardies along with other late children, but I don't punish them for coming a bit after 8 a.m.



And finally, I used photoshop to give a few of the photos an artistic effect. I love the look of these. Is it just because I know these families, or do you like them too?



This is the pair that inspired me to get these family pictures taken. The uneducated father sells vegetables from a cart which he pushes around neighborhoods calling out for buyers. He obviously wants a better life for his son. His sacrifice shows when you take note of who is wearing the watch in this photo. The father's high expectations are a big load for a son to carry. Sonu, now about 14 years old, is currently in 5th grade.

