

Chairman's Message

Dear Friends of *Polio Children*,

One year ago, I had articulated in this newsletter our hopes of continuing to build on the success of our educational endeavor at Sucheta Kriplani Shiksha Niketan (SKSN), the largest boarding school in India for physically disabled children and the primary recipient of our support. Unfortunately, the turn of events in the global economy has temporarily thwarted our efforts. Through generous donors like yourself, we had managed to collect \$22,000 to build a Vocational Training Center (VTC) for boys and girls who for one reason or another were unable to pursue higher education. However, because of skyrocketing food prices (specifically, in Jodhpur these shot up by 30% in a short span of 6 months), the funds earmarked for the VTC had to be diverted to the purchase of grain and cooking oil as the very basic survival of the school hung in balance. Yet another crisis was averted, but at a cost.



Regrettably, there were additional casualties of the global recession. You may recall that the dairy project was one of our premier initiatives at SKSN. Since its inception 6 years ago, it had provided a daily supply of milk and milk products to more than 400 children. Prior to *Polio Children's* involvement at the SKSN, milk was a luxury for these children and *ghee* (clarified butter) was unheard of. As the costs of fodder and electricity continued to rise, the dairy farm initially coped by reducing the number of cattle from its peak total of 38 down to 10. Finally, in July this year, the project had to be wrapped up.

However, not all the news from SKSN is bleak. The University Education Program (UEP) continues to flourish. At present, 8 girls and 22 boys are enrolled in higher education classes because of support from *Polio Children*. Additionally, last year, 8 boys obtained undergraduate degrees and 4 boys obtained post-graduation qualifications. Equally heartwarming is the fact that every single graduate of our UEP managed to find competitive employment in his/her community. Two of them even returned to their alma mater to teach in preference to higher paying jobs in the community. What wonderful role models these students of SKSN have proved to be!

We are confident that these hard times, too, shall pass. In the meantime, *Polio Children* remains unwavering in its commitment to enhancing the quality of life of these physically disabled children.

So does your support, we trust.

With best wishes for the holiday season!

Shirish Patel

Inside This Issue	
Your Donations at Work	2-3
Fund Raising Activities	4
Planned Projects	5
Donor Form	6



During the six years of our operation, many people have asked us if we have been able to affect any real change in the lives of children affected by polio given that all our contributions come from private donors and that we receive no corporate sponsorships. Some have also wondered (loudly!) how it were possible for us not to feel overwhelmed given the magnitude of the 'problem'. Well, let me share with you the stories of two teenagers both of whom are challenged with polio. After reading these narratives you can decide for yourself whether your donations have had any positive impact on their lives.

The first case is that of a 18 year-old boy named D. Singh. No one in his family knows how old D. Singh was when he contracted polio. His mother recalls that he had just learnt to walk when "one day he came down with fever". When the fever subsided, he was unable to move any of his four limbs. His family's meager resources precluded obtaining any medical help. He was considered a disgrace to the family; someone who needed to be hidden from the rest of the world with prayers for nature to take its course quickly. D. Singh was forced to spend most of his time in one corner of his parents hut, depending upon others for even his most basic needs. Totally ostracized from all social contacts and completely devoid of any physical activity, he had developed severe contractures in all 4 limbs by the time he came to *Polio Children's* attention.

We surmise that his initial physical disabilities were probably no more severe than that of the 900+ children whom we have come into contact with through our association with SKSN. However, because of a lack of appropriate physical and remedial therapies his condition deteriorated much more significantly than the children who accessed care at SKSN.

Early this year, my brother [himself a polio victim since he was 2 years old and one of the founding trustees of *Polio Children (U.K.)*] met D. Singh quite by accident when he accompanied one of the outreach workers from SKSN on his rural case finding mission. Even now he chokes up when he recalls their first meeting. "Words cannot describe the utter misery and the intense anger I felt when I saw this young man," he says. D. Singh's limbs were emaciated and he had developed contractures in his hands and legs because of years of inactivity. His speech was rudimentary as a result of social isolation. But beneath that crippled body was a brave soul. When he saw that my brother also had polio and wore a caliper in his leg, D. Singh broke into a smile and attempted to rise from the bed. His smile became even broader when he was shown the wheelchair donated by *Polio Children* that would give him mobility for the first time in the 18 years of his young life. *Polio Children* has also donated funds to build a small pool near his father's hut where D. Singh will receive hydrotherapy to loosen up his contracted limbs. If only he had come to *Polio Children's* attention sooner.....

Contrast this case with...

...that of 19 year-old Bituben. Like D. Singh, Bitumen too contracted polio at a very young age. Once again details are sketchy other than that after a bout of fever she was "unable to walk". In fact, the scourge of polio had paralyzed 3 of her 4 limbs leaving only her left arm unaffected. She too grew up in a poor family. Bituben attended a local school in her village where she flourished. She graduated from high school with flying colors. At this point her mother brought her to SKSN where *Polio Children* had just initiated its University Education Program. Bituben was accepted into the program with full scholarship. She will now be able pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher.



Incredibly, just a little financial support from *Polio Children* was enough to bring out the fierce determination that lay beneath the crippled shell of this young lady. When told that the college she wished to attend was 2 miles away on a route with no public transport, without blinking an eyelid, she said she would ride to and from the college herself. And true to form, every morning, navigating the dirt tracks of downtown Jodhpur, Bituben can be seen riding her tricycle using the only unaffected limb in her body. She is on track to graduate in December 2009, a day she can hardly wait for when she hopes to take over the upkeep of her two younger brothers and send her mother into a well-deserved retirement!

It is the smile on faces of children like D. Singh and the intense desire to become independent demonstrated by girls like Bituben that gives us the courage to continue with our mission. The resiliency and the fortitude of these unfortunate victims of polio deeply reflects their fierce determination to join the mainstream of the society—just like any able-bodied child.

John Lewis, the renowned civil rights leader and now a U.S. Congressman, when asked by his parents as to why he wished to join the civil rights movement at such a young age and especially when the threat of personal violence was so great, calmly responded, "If not me, than who? If not now, than when?"

We derive our motivation from credos like Congressman Lewis's.





Drs Ashwin (left) and Achala (right) Patel at the Baroda Medical College Alumni Convention in Orlando, FL, where they presented a check for \$25,000 for *Polio Children*.

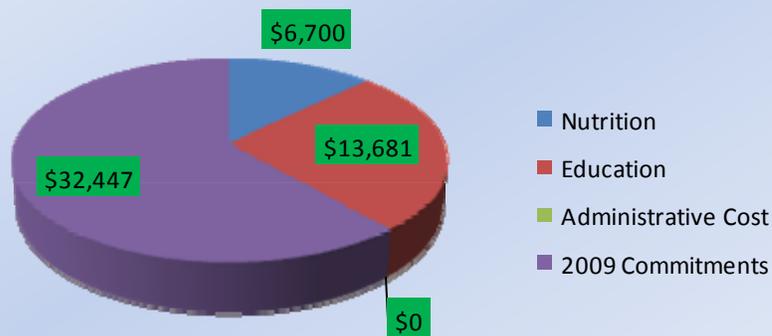
And our sincere gratitude to all the donors who have supported us over the years! We could not have done what we have without your support.

Thank you!

Ashvin 'Ash' Patel, Chairman of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association at AAHOA's annual convention in San Antonio, TX, where he presented a check for \$8000 for *Polio Children*.



Polio Children (USA)
Financial Summary - 2008



Multipurpose Assembly Hall

A critical need for the boys and girls of SKSN is a multipurpose assembly hall. At present the huge ground located between the school and the boys hostel is utilized for various activities. But its use is severely limited by weather and other factors because it is an open ground. In the summer, the temperatures in this region of the Thar desert can soar to 115⁰F exposing the children to the risk of sunstroke and dehydration. During winters, temperatures drop into single digits. The rainy season brings blowing sand, flooding, and mosquitoes. Simply putting up a roof and laying in a concrete floor will allow the more than 350 students to meet regularly for assembly, to participate in recreational activities (indoor games, movies, physical exercises), to put up cultural shows, and to engage in various physical exercise programs.

Total Project Cost: \$108,000

Computer Lab

Soon after launching the University Education Program about 5 years ago, the importance of teaching computer skills in school became readily evident to us. This initial batch of students that was enrolled in the higher education program possessed only rudimentary computer knowledge because none of them had had prior access to one. While we remedied the situation by providing them with a few desk top computers, we also realized that the future generation of undergraduates will need to be better prepared if it was to stand any chance of competing with able-bodied students either at school or in obtaining competitive employment. A brief survey of the local market shows a tremendous need for expertise in computer-related skills such as in preparing applications for utilities, in petitioning the courts and in other related legal work, in publishing resumes, and in preparing and maintaining general accounts for small businesses—all tasks that could easily be performed by these disabled people. Thus, the need to teach basic computer skills to the middle and the high school students has become even more imperative.

Fortunately, about 18 months ago a friend of SKSN donated \$9000 to build a computer lab. This was accomplished late last year. As noted earlier, a part of the \$22,000 we had collected was earmarked for this project. For reasons already mentioned it was not to be so. We now need to raise funds to equip the completed lab with computers, printers, furniture, and an air cooler, and to partially support a teacher's salary. When fully equipped, the lab will have a capacity to accommodate 25-30 children at any one time.

Total Project Cost: \$ 32,400

Funds Raised: \$9000

Funds Needed: \$23,400

Wheelchairs

In every crisis there lies an opportunity. As a result of a severe shortage of teachers, the State of Rajasthan (where SKSN is located) has made a commitment to fund 997 educational establishments across the State. These establishments will offer a 2-year undergraduate program (B.Ed.) that will meet the credentialing requirement for primary school teachers. SKSN has applied to be one of these sites. The school already has the necessary infrastructure to offer such a program. More importantly, this would be a golden opportunity for the disabled students of SKSN. Having a training institute on-site means they will not have to travel to faraway institutions or to look for accommodation in a community that is not very disable-friendly. Except for one challenge. Although an all-season pathway exists between the proposed classrooms and the student's accommodation, fewer than 20% of them have a wheelchair. Providing each eligible student with a wheelchair will make it possible for him/her to pursue higher education at a fraction of the cost than would otherwise be the case. This is truly a rare opportunity that has come knocking on SKSN's door!

Total Project Cost: \$13,125

Cost/wheelchair: \$208

Wheelchairs Needed: 63

YES! I WOULD LIKE TO HELP A PHYSICALLY DISABLED CHILD BECOME INDEPENDENT!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail: _____

Please accept my gift of:

V\$1000 V\$500 V\$100 V\$50 Other \$ _____

Check: please make it payable to *Polio Children*

Credit Card: Due to the high costs of maintaining credit card accounts, we are no longer able to accept credit card payments. Please consider donating in an alternative form.

Thank You!

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- ✓ *Polio Children* is a 501 © 3 registered charity.
- ✓ We guarantee that every penny you donate will go directly to the children in need since all administrative costs are borne by the founding trustees.
- ✓ We do not use any professional fundraisers.

* * * *

Polio Children

Shirish Patel, M.D. (Chairman), 155 Dunrovin Lane, Rochester, NY 14618

Tel: (585) 442 2505

E-mail: Shirish@poliochildren.org

www.poliochildren.org



A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...
But the World may be different because I was important in the life of a child.