

Chairman's Message

Dear Friends of Polio Children,

Meet Ammedi. I met her last February when I visited Sucheta Kriplani Shiksha Niketan (SKSN), the largest school in India for physically-challenged children and our primary program of support. She looked so elegant in her 'Namaste' greeting posture. However, she was a totally different person when she first came to SKSN almost 8 years ago. The eldest of 6 siblings, she contracted polio in her left leg during her infancy. She does not remember much about the first 7 years of her childhood that she spent in her village where her father is a laborer earning less than \$500 a



year – well below the poverty line. "But my life changed when I came to SKSN. I got a caliper for my leg so I no longer had to crawl on the ground to get around. And I enjoy school." Well, she certainly does. The 15-year old has consistently ranked in the top 3 in her class, excels in math and science, and is a much sought-after player for 'kabbadi' and ping pong. She aspires to be a physician or a pharmacist. In this respect, she is not unique. With the launch of our University Education Program in 2003, the students at SKSN saw, for the first time, a real possibility of pursuing higher education and fulfilling their dreams. And how they have taken this opportunity to heart! Of the 30 students taking the final high school exams in 2008, an incredible 26 of them, including all 7 girls, achieved First Class. But success brings its own challenges. An average cost of 1 year of undergraduate education is about \$1345. This includes tuition, books, accommodation, transport, and clothing allowance. The addition of these 26 students to an already existing pool of 28 students means that we will need to raise substantially more funds to enable children like Ammedi to pursue their dreams. While we may be able to redirect some of the funds earmarked for food and healthcare (the number of new cases of polio seems to be dropping) to higher education, they will not be enough. Thus, to assist us in this venture, I urge you to share this newsletter and information with your friends and colleagues. I am acutely aware of the challenging economic times and of donor fatigue. But the fruits of our labor are paying off and we need to redouble our efforts for this final push. Together we have come so far in changing the lives of these unfortunate children. And together, we can help them clear this last hurdle as they join the mainstream of society as independent and dignified individuals.

As always, thank you for your continued support and wish you happy holidays.

Shirish Patel

Board of Directors : Shirish Patel (Chairman), Arun Sangave (Treasurer), Shashi Patel, Shobhana Patel

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Helping them achieve independence - with dignity - one step at a time.



Raj, who has polio in both her lower limbs, is carried by her father as she sets out from her village in 2000 to enroll at SKSN (*left*). 3 years later and in a much better state of health she sits poised in a wheelchair donated by *Polio Children* (*middle*). Now 17 years old, her confidence knowing no limits, she participates (*in red saree*) in the school's annual cultural show, 'Koshish' (*right*). Having completed her high school, she is currently learning tailoring at the school's vocational training program also sponsored by *Polio Children*.

Vocational Training (since 2007)

- ☑ 12 boys trained in motor-winding, welding, motor-cycle repairing, tractor-repairing, and battery and dynamo assembly.
- ☑ 10 girls trained in tailoring

University Education Program (since 2003)

- ☑ More than 70 students have received varying levels of scholarships from *Polio Children's* University Education Program.



Bintu, who has polio in all her limbs except the left arm, crawls her way up to her 2nd floor apartment that has no running water or bathroom facilities (*left*). Provided with a tricycle by the local community she was barely able to maneuver herself out of her yard let alone ride it to college that she attended on a scholarship provided by *Polio Children's* University Education Program (*middle*). This April, she took possession of an autoscooter, donated by *Polio Children* (*right*). Now a qualified teacher, she has returned to her village to take care of her widowed mother and 2 younger sisters. In her 'spare' time, she chauffeurs 'the less fortunate' people in her community to grocery stores and to medical appointments.

Computer Lab



Up and running since July 2009, the lab still needs software, printers, and accessories to make it fully operational.

Projected Costs: \$24, 900



Self-Help Groups



During my visit to the school last February, I provided formal training in setting up and running self-help groups. Today, all 370 students meet every Sunday, in groups of 10-15, to support each other on issues ranging from coping with anxiety and depression to finding ways of enhancing academic achievements. Says Dr Bhati, the school's President, "If we had had this resource a few years ago, we would not have lost some of our children".

Projected Cost: \$5000/yr to provide light refreshments to students and nominal honorariums to the supervising staff.

University Education Program

Started in 2003:

- Has supported more than 234 school-years of higher education.
- 71 students have benefited from the program. Courses they have enrolled in include:
 - Medicine
 - Bachelor of Arts
 - Bachelor of Science
 - Bachelor of Education
- 19 graduates have gone on to procure competitive employment:
 - Teaching: 14
 - Commercial Sector: 3
 - Govt. of India Postal service: 1
 - Tourist Guide: 1

Projected Cost: \$1345 per student /year





Being welcomed to 'Koshish' night in the traditional way with garland and bracelet

Entering the gates of SKSN, with some trepidation I must admit, I expected to see a rundown school building with dismal children. My perception could not have been any further from reality. I was blown away by the school, its sponsors, and most of all, by the children.

That first evening was 'Koshish' night - an annual event hosted by the students to recognize their teachers and to give a warm send-off to the new graduates. As I sat with the girls and watched the performances from up close, I realized that these children with physical deformities were dancing far better than I ever could, primarily because they had confidence. I realized that these children were no different than my friends or I. They still had their cliques and they also chatted through the performances and joked about their fellow classmates. We were of the same color, spoke the same language, and wore the same traditional dresses. The only way I could distinguish between "me" and "them" was that they were afflicted with polio. But the children had

adapted to their disabilities in such a graceful way that eventually I began to think of their gait as a different way of walking and soon became accustomed to it. It was true that Mira couldn't walk properly and had to use a wheelchair, but she had adapted so well to his disability, and Polio Children had provided so much for her through amenities such as ramps that everyone around her acted as if she were a completely able-bodied child. Whatever the children lacked in physical capability, they more than made up for it in personality, charisma, and versatility. I grew close to some of the girls that were my own age. Together we put on 'mehndhi', braided each others' hair, and told stories of our different worlds.

The primary goal of my visit was to help the school start their own newsletter which it has not had in its sixteen year history. Interviewing students, teachers, and administrators really helped me to break the ice and get to know the people at SKSN. At first, I found it difficult because my Hindi is not fluent. However, I swore not to speak English, and slowly, I began to slip into the Hindi mode of thinking. When I failed to find a word, there would always be someone there to interpret my charades for the Hindi word I was seeking.

Most students come from villages where being disabled is scorned at and where there are no special amenities. Coming from the USA, where every building and every room is wheelchair accessible, it was disheartening to learn about this lack of basic support. Polio Children has done so much to change the lives of the children, like providing opportunities for university education and building a hostel for the girls. But there are things that still remain to be fixed. For one thing, the wheelchairs currently in use are not suited to the rough terrain found in the desert area and are constantly in need of repair. Another urgent need is the provision of a computer teacher because learning computer skills is extremely important for the 21st century.



Rejoicing with my new friends on my last night at SKSN

If there is one thing I learnt from my trip, it's the word 'koshish' (Hindi for effort) and its implications. SKSN is built around the philosophy of 'koshish', and Polio Children helps to preserve that philosophy. The word reverberates in the heart and soul of every child at SKSN: 'koshish' is an effort, a push, a chance to create your own destiny.

The visit to SKSN changed my life. It is not just a cliché! My time at SKSN truly transformed the way I thought of disability as well as my outlook on life. As the week flew by, we became more comfortable in each others' company and I left having made many new friends. In parting, I promised that I would come over for the next 'Koshish' evening.

Divya Seth is a senior at Brighton High School in Rochester, NY. Last February she visited SKSN to experience first hand all she had heard about Polio Children and its work in India.



Serving students before the 'Koshish' night



Traditional welcome with anointing of forehead



Students put up a belly-aching skit



Graduating class of 2008 garlanded as evening honorees



Dr. Bhati, school President, with a memento presented by the graduating students



A student receives a graduation gift of a wristwatch



Young boys putting up a number

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail: _____

Please accept my gift of:

\$1345 : Sponsor-a-Student for one year of higher education.

(I would like details of the student who receives my sponsorship Yes , please No, thanks)

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

Please make your check payable to Polio Children

(Due to the high cost of maintaining credit card accounts, we regret that we are no longer able to accept donations by credit cards. 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 the founding trustees will continue to bear *all* administrative costs, as they have for the past 6 years.
- ✓ We do not use any professional fundraisers.

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Polio Children

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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.