

# Beautiful Minds

## Letter from the Founders



Dear friends and well-wishers,

Greetings from London!

A very heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to the cause of AANCHAL. With great pleasure we are writing to celebrate the 1st Anniversary of AANCHAL Foundation. Additionally, we would like to bring to you AANCHAL Foundation's first newsletter, Beautiful Minds.

Over the past year our focus at AANCHAL has been on starting its charity work, learning and understanding the legal and logistical issues involved with such work, collaborating with people and organizations to further and expand AANCHAL's vision, and working through the administrative aspects of setting up a Foundation. Through this annual newsletter we would like to share news, accomplishments, hurdles, and future plans.

AANCHAL Foundation was inaugurated on September 20, 2009 at a small gathering in New Jersey, USA. The event was attended by friends and family members in person as well as via the internet from various parts of United States.



Inauguration of AANCHAL Foundation;  
September 20, 2009; New Jersey, USA

We are grateful to three of our Governing Board members Prof. Perna Mohite, Smt. Shashi Bhatt and Dr. Binod C. Agrawal for contributing to this first newsletter. Prof. Perna Mohite is the former Dean of Faculty of Family Studies and Community Sciences at M.S. University, Baroda. She has garnered more than 30 years of experience in child/human development with specialization in early childhood development and education. Her opinion piece sheds light on child development issues in India and the need for an approach customized to Indian children within their socio-cultural settings. Smt. Shashi Bhatt is the Principal of Shri Ram Vidyalaya, Ahmedabad. This is an integrated school which provides equal opportunities and education to differently-abled children along with normal students. More about her school and the special needs program is described by her in a subsequent section in this newsletter. Dr. Binod C. Agrawal is the Director General of TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad, Vice-Chancellor of Himgiri Nabh Vishwavidyalaya, Dehradun, and former Director of Mudra Institute of Communication, Ahmedabad. He is an international expert in communications research. In 2009, he received the AMIC award for Leadership in communication research in India. Through a real life narration, Dr. Agrawal emphasizes the need for a paediatric therapy institute.

We take this opportunity to thank you for being a part of this journey. We would once again like to thank our donors for their generous contributions. We look forward to your continued support and encouragement in making this dream a success and being able to provide financial help and educational assistance to special needs children.

Regards,

Shruti Agrawal and Devang Parikh  
Founders, AANCHAL Foundation

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Association for Awareness of Nutrition, Child Health And Learning



## Administration and Setup

We have started the process of registering AANCHAL as a Foundation and setting it up for tax-exempt status to be able to provide tax-exemptions for all donations received by the Foundation. The process got a little delayed than expected because of our migration from New Jersey to London. We have started the registration process in India. We have a Governing Board whose members comprise of well-established educators and researchers, special needs educators, child developmentalist, paediatricians, behavioural experts and financial experts. We are in the process of setting up a website for AANCHAL Foundation and hope to have that up and running by the end of the year.



## AANCHAL Charity

Since its inception, AANCHAL Foundation has provided financial support to four children with Infantile Spasms (IS) and/or epilepsy for short durations, ranging from a one-time medication to medication for two months. All kids supported by AANCHAL were above the age of 5. We have not been able to continue the medication because of certain legal and logistical issues and are currently working around it. We hope to get this sorted soon and continue our charity efforts in a more effective way.

Although a small start, it has been a fulfilling experience and has given us the motivation and the energy to keep going. We take this effort as a pilot which has brought to the fore the hurdles and deficiencies of the system. It will help us in being more efficient in planning the expansion of this charity effort. We are also exploring the option of not only supporting kids with IS but widening the financial help to kids with other neurological and long-term illness.

As this was a pilot, we have not used the donation for a specific child and so did not start our suggested program of "Support a Child". We will start it once the legal and logistical issues get sorted.

## Future Goals

In line with our vision for AANCHAL Foundation, we are very excited to announce that we will be working towards setting up a paediatric therapy institute in Ahmedabad. AANCHAL's Institute will be set up to provide early childhood intervention therapy of all kinds to children of all ages with special needs including developmental delays. It will also engage in providing education, knowledge, practice, consultancy, training, support, and advice to parents, care givers, and others involved and/or related with care of special needs children.

Early childhood intervention is for children who are discovered to have or have the potential to develop a special needs condition that affects their development. These programs are designed to focus on the child and their families providing them with the education and skills they need to remedy, prevent or lessen the effects of developmental delays.

We are in the infancy stages of this project. We are collaborating with TALEEM Research Foundation for this venture. We are very excited about this new venture of AANCHAL Foundation and hope that we can garner the funds to be able to jump-start this necessary endeavour.





## Early Childhood Care and Education in India An Overview

It is duly acknowledged time and again that in India there is an urgent need to reach out to economically marginalized children and families. India's performance in areas such as health, life expectancy, education, hunger has lowered the overall human development position from 124 to 127 (2003 Reports).

Critical appraisal of the contemporary situation indicates that now there is adequate political will, there is sound research and knowledge about children and their development and several successful interventions. What we have to work towards is to evolve effective social programmatic strategies to maximize development. This of course is a great challenge given the diverse context in which children live.

The need of the time is not restricted just to add programmes, funds and coverage, but to introspect, reflect critically on the existing programmes and lessons learned. We need to plan initiatives that are grounded in current scientific knowledge about children in their own context, recent research findings and new conceptions about children's learning and development.

In my view, education of young children should take place in context of their local culture. One of the main reasons why programmes do not yield desired outcomes is their alienation and distance from the local cultural setting, from lived experiences of children and community. So far, barring few innovative initiatives, most programmes have been adapted or borrowed from western setting. In fact, the very construction of children and childhood has been more western than Indian. Fortunately, now there are several attempts to move away from purely western concepts and evolve 'Indian' Models and Paradigms with reference to theory building, research as well as curriculum for young children. The need is to develop indigenous models of development that harmonize both, the global and the local. Traditional ideas can be developed with global perspective so that we are in touch with all the advances taking place globally and yet we are rooted in Indian culture. Socio-cultural and religious frame of reference should guide our understanding on human/child-development in India.

*Prof. Prerna Mohite is the former Dean of Faculty of Family Studies and Community Sciences at M.S. University, Baroda.*

### Shashi Bhatt- a Special Teacher

Smt. Shashi Bhatt (B.sc., M.A., B.Ed.) administers a school, Shri Ram Vidyalaya, which has been successfully running a special education program along with its normal education since 1995. The main aim of the school is to focus on the overall development of students. Development of pre-vocational skills is also a part of the curriculum.

The aim of the special education program is to provide an educational platform to students suffering from learning

### Hope...

*The following narration is an anonymous true case study from India observed by Dr. Binod C. Agrawal.*

Thirty years ago a baby girl was born in a small town of Uttar Pradesh, India. Her parents lived in a modest home and had small income from a cloth shop run by her father. She being the oldest child, her birth was rejoiced by other family members and neighbours. Nothing abnormal was felt by the mother except that the baby would not speak a word till she became about 18 months. The anxious mother reported this fact to her husband, in-laws, and friends. Most of them told the mother that few children take time to speak, so she should not worry. More than anybody else the mother continued to worry but she could not do much except pray since there was no medical facility in the small town to take care of this "special problem" of her daughter. Years passed by and the pretty girl became almost five without speech; she would respond to other commands, cried when hungry, and played with her toys. Finally around age five she mumbled few words to great happiness of mother and family alike. Like other children in the household she was sent to school. Of course, by then, she was seven while her classmates were five. The speech delay was just one observable fact but there were other associated problems with this child in the classroom. She was a slow learner compared to other children in her class who were younger to her. As she grew older these differences became pronounced and were noticed by one and all. Being a girl not much emphasis was given to her education and by the time she turned 20 she was married.

There are several such children born in India who due to ignorance of parents or due to the absence of proper medical facility remain untreated and suffer lifelong. A small help, proper medical care, and counselling can help them lead a normal life. AANCHAL is a small but significant step to help such children and their parents. AANCHAL plans to assist both the parents and children in almost all stages of child development within the cultural and socio-economic context of India supported by a group of eminent doctors, child development experts and social scientists.

*Dr. Binod C. Agrawal is the Director General of TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad and Vice-Chancellor of Himgiri Nabh Vishwavidyalaya, Dehradun.*

disabilities, behavioral problems or mental limitations. The program aims to develop social and academic skills of the special needs children and focuses on making them independent and capable to carry out their basic needs and action in life. Special needs children at the school have various levels of learning difficulties arising due to conditions like Down syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and brain damage.



## Collaboration with TALEEM Resesarch Foundation

AANCHAL Foundation is very excited to collaborate with TALEEM Research Foundation. TALEEM is a literary, scientific, charitable society and trust, 'TALEEM', meaning education and training, is also an acronym for Transnational Alternate Learning for Emancipation and Empowerment through Multimedia. TALEEM's mission is to:

- provide access and opportunities for quality education through distance and open learning leading to employment and income generation
- promote research
- and utilize information technology for the development of the less privileged.

Social science research with a focus on health, communication, microeconomics, social audit and poll studies is the main strength of the Foundation. In more than 14 years of its existence, the Foundation has carried out a wide range of research projects funded by several national and international agencies. For more information on TALEEM visit their website: <http://taleemindia.org/>



## Financial Statement

Last years fund-raiser generated a capital of \$1550. Out of this, we have spent \$ 350 in providing financial help to children diagnosed with IS and/or epilepsy. Given that we are still in our set-up mode we have decided to not have a fund-raiser this year. For this financial year, we plan to use the existing funds from the charity. We will have our annual fundraiser next year.

All donations that have been and will be made for the AANCHAL charity will be used exclusively for providing financial support to children with Infantile Spasms, neurological disorders or other long-term illnesses. Given that we are in the infancy stage, we have decided that for the first two years, no donations will be used for administration and set-up costs of the Foundation, which include registration of the Foundation, building the website or writing proposals to obtain funding for the Institute.

If you would like details of the financial statement, please do contact us.

## How you can help

**Donate:** If you would like to support AANCHAL's cause you can make your contributions to Shruti Agrawal or Devang Parikh. Contributions will be accepted in cash and check. Please send your contributions to 41 Marlborough Court, Pembroke Road, London W8 6DF, UK. We currently do not have a tax-exempt status; we are in the process of getting one. At this point we will not be able to provide tax-exemption for your donations.

**Volunteer:** You can volunteer in a lot of ways: assisting with writing grant proposals; preparing documents such as newsletters, annual reports, educational material for parents and caregivers; communicating with doctors, educators, therapists and parents; identifying, developing and communicating with donors; public relations and media; organizing events; and spreading the word.