

# Beautiful Minds

February 2012 | Issue No. 2

## Letter from the Founders



Greetings!

From everyone at AANCHAL, we like to wish you all a prosperous new year. Hope the year brings happiness, joy, success and love to all of us.

An international study, Lancet Series of Global Mental Health, reveals that 1 out of 5 children have a mental health problem in India. While in the Western countries the treatment ratio is 1:3 in India only 1 in 50 are fortunate to get some treatment. Experts believe that maximum growth of the brain takes place in the child's first five years of life. For children with developmental issues, it would translate into the critical window to start therapy to improve their development.

Helping special needs children in India needs a multi-pronged approach:

- Awareness about developmental issues in children
- Early diagnosis of children with developmental delays
- Access to and knowledge of therapy and treatment options
- Social attitude change towards children with special needs; to view their qualities rather than their disabilities; to support and encourage them
- Parent skills education; and
- Create opportunities within school setting for these children to learn and grow.

While a lot of effort is being put in by various institutions and individuals, much work needs to be done in order to extend a helping hand to these children and their families.

In this newsletter, we discuss one severe developmental disability - Autism, a social communication disorder. It is a life long condition that affects the way a person may interpret, relate and communicate with people around them. It has no known cure yet; about 1-2 per 1000 people (closer to 6 per 1000) worldwide have autism. It is more common in males than females; the ratio is 3.5 to 1. There is no single known cause of autism. However, it is generally agreed that it is caused because of abnormalities in brain structure and function; genetic and environmental factors being other reasons. In India, there are no known numbers of incidences of autism.

Ms. Claire Bolton, one of our advisory team experts, provides an introduction to autism, its symptoms, and the need to help children with this condition. Currently based in London, she has over 8 years of experience working as a speech and language therapist, speech pathologist, and life coach in Australia and the UK.

We take this opportunity to thank you for being a part of this journey. We would like to thank our donors for their contributions. We would like to extend our most sincere thanks to Shri. Ashok Goel, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Essel Propack and Director, Essel World, Mumbai for his generous contribution and initial support for this noble cause. We would especially like to thank all those who are volunteering their time for this cause. We look forward to your continued support and encouragement.

Cheers,

Shruti Agrawal and Devang Parikh  
Founders, AANCHAL Foundation

## Contact

Registered Office:

404 Advait, Near Sandesh Press, Ahmedabad 380054

Phone: + 91 79 26763991, Cell: +91 9737792111

Email: [info@aanchalfoundation.org](mailto:info@aanchalfoundation.org)

Website: [www.aanchalfoundation.org](http://www.aanchalfoundation.org)

**Association for Awareness of Nutrition, Child Health And Learning**



## **AANCHAL Preparatory Meeting**

AANCHAL Foundation held its first preparatory meeting with invited experts on November 20, 2011 at Ellisbridge Gymkhana in Ahmedabad. The meeting was attended by 29 participants who discussed how the Foundation's activities should be promoted and advanced. These included experts in the field of child health and development, paediatricians, paediatric neurologists, physical therapist, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, special educators, psychologists, psychotherapists, educators, business persons, and media.

A brief presentation introduced experts to AANCHAL Foundation's vision and its activities, mainly, AANCHAL Child Development Service (ACDS), "Barefoot" therapists, and AANCHAL Awareness Program. Each of these is elaborated on p 3 of this newsletter. AANCHAL's activities will be targeted to children aged 0-5 years.

Given the prevalence of special needs children in Gujarat and India, experts from various fields lauded and endorsed AANCHAL's efforts and indicated strong need to help young children and their families. It was pointed out that it is not just an urban phenomenon but it is equally present among the rural and tribal populations. Hence, they also must be covered in AANCHAL's program. Experts endorsed the idea of holistic and multi-disciplinary approach most needed for helping special needs children. The idea of "barefoot" therapist was welcomed though it was suggested to coin more appropriate Gujarati word for the same. Barefoot therapists will be volunteers who would be a link between therapists and families and provide therapy under the direction of a professional therapist.

Experts unanimously recommended:

- A very strong family-centred view for care and treatment of the special needs child rather than focus on the individual child.
- To include children up to age 10 years in order to ensure that children who already attend school can get help.
- Extensive use of media for creating awareness to reduce social stigma and helping families recognize child developmental problems.



*Participants at AANCHAL's Preparatory Meeting*

## **Administration and Set-up**

AANCHAL Foundation is now a registered non-profit charitable trust and literary society under (the) Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 and (the) Bombay Public Trust 1950. All donations made to AANCHAL Foundation can receive 50% tax-deduction under Income-Tax Act under section 80-G valid from April 2011.

AANCHAL has a bi-lingual website in English and Gujarati ([www.aanchalfoundation.org](http://www.aanchalfoundation.org)) and a Facebook page.

AANCHAL now has on board its team Mr. Mayur Parmar, M.A. Psychology from Kanoria Centre for Medical Education, Gujarat. He is responsible for managing AANCHAL's daily activities. We acknowledge and appreciate the substantial efforts of several professionals from different fields including our Governing Board members who are volunteering their invaluable time for AANCHAL. Mr. Utpal Shah, Director, Shah Investor's Home Limited continues to support by providing an advisory role in planning AANCHAL's set-up and activities. Prof. Sanon, Former Professor and Dean, Faculty of Social Work, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, continues to help through intellectual input, coordinating various meetings and recruiting volunteers. Dr. Shaun Noronha, Health Workforce Officer at IntraHealth International, USA has been helping us with design and publishing of this newsletter. Mrs. Mamata Pandya, Program Director, Instructional Design at Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad and Dr. Brajesh Singh, Bureau Chief-Gujarat at Star News have been providing an advisory role for planning AANCHAL's activities and working with media.

We are currently recruiting volunteers/interns for field work. We are looking for students with a background in psychology, child health, social work, psychiatry who want to have a unique experience working with special needs children. Students from other fields of social sciences are also welcome to apply.



## Autism

Speech and language therapists work with children who have a range of communication difficulties, including autism. Autism is a condition that is diagnosed by paediatricians and is known as a triad of impairments. The three difficulties include speech / language / communication skills (verbal and non-verbal), social communication / interaction abilities and play / imaginative / flexible thinking skills. Problems in all three areas are required before a diagnosis is considered. It is also important to note that autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that each individual is different, with severity being variable.

A delay with communication skills is evident when children do not reach their speech and language milestones. They also may not use non-verbal communication (e.g. pointing to initiate joint attention). Social communication difficulties include struggling to interact with other children or take turns during play. Children with autism may present with limited eye contact or an inability to recognise the perspective of others. Play skills may be affected due to difficulties playing imaginatively, with a preference for repetitive activities (e.g. repeatedly lining up cars or spinning car wheels instead of pretending to drive the cars around).

There is no cure for autism, but with the right support, children can make good progress and early intervention will make a big difference. Speech and language therapists and occupational therapists provide intensive therapy programs to maximise the potential of people affected by autism. Children with autism have a lot of strengths. If in doubt, it is important to seek professional advice from paediatricians and therapists. Also, never underestimate the importance of talking with other parents to seek support and share similar experiences.

Claire Bolton  
Senior Speech & Language Therapist, UK  
Email: [info@apexability.com](mailto:info@apexability.com)  
Website: [www.apexability.com](http://www.apexability.com)

## Future Goals

AANCHAL Foundation will provide a holistic integrated family-centred approach to child development. Through its projects, AANCHAL aims to create awareness of child development issues and help parents of special needs children through consultancy, advice and support. Here is a brief introduction of AANCHAL's upcoming projects:

### **AANCHAL Child Development Service (ACDS)**

ACDS will cater to children who have significant concerns in one or more areas of development including gross motor skills, fine motor skills, speech and language skills social skills, and play and interaction. ACDS will provide information, consultancy, assessment, and referral for a child's developmental concerns through its unique multi-disciplinary approach.

### **AANCHAL Awareness Program**

AANCHAL will launch an intensive awareness program through traditional and non-traditional media to educate people about child development issues.

### **AANCHAL Support Group**

AANCHAL will set up a support group for parents whose children have a range of developmental disabilities. The group aims to provide a secure place for parents to share their stories, bond with each other, learn from each other's experience, develop understanding of their child's developmental issues, and meet and discuss with experts.

### **Barefoot Therapist**

AANCHAL aims to provide therapy to special needs children whose parents might not be able to afford it. It will do so through a concept called "Barefoot therapist", an under-trainee therapist who will work and carry out a plan given by the professional therapist. It will provide to-be therapists experience in paediatric therapy and provide intensive therapy to children, whose parents cannot afford it, in a home setting.







## Grant-in-aid and Donations

We have started a corpus fund for AANCHAL Foundation for all charity contributions and donations. Our first generous contribution of Rs. 8 lakh has come from Shri Ashok Goel, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, Essel Propack and Director, Essel World, Mumbai. Shri Goel is a philanthropist and deeply believes in this cause.

The residual amount of USD 1200 from AANCHAL's first fundraiser held New Jersey in 2009 will also be added to this corpus fund.



## How You Can Help

Any contribution will help young children whose future is at stake in the absence of largely non-existent therapy and especially those for whom therapy is beyond their reach. If you would like to make a difference in the lives of special needs children, here are some ways you can help.

### Donate:

If you would like to support AANCHAL's cause you can make your contributions to AANCHAL Foundation; contributions will be accepted in cash and check. Please send your contributions to our registered office:

AANCHAL Foundation  
404 Advait, Near Sandesh Press, Ahmedabad 380054

### 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
- spreading the word

For more information and volunteer opportunities, please contact us at: [info@aanchalfoundation.org](mailto:info@aanchalfoundation.org)

### Take action:

If you are aware of any children in need of special help in India please inform them about us and we will help them.