

“With Love, from Vatsalya”



www.vatsalya.org

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Warm greetings from Vatsalya, Jaipur...☺!

Life at Vatsalya has been a like big roller coaster ride this year! And as roller coaster rides are, we have had everything- Awe, fear, anxiety, joy, amazement, excitement and relief –Almost everything! Life is stabilizing slowly with all these elements still very much present...☺ ! We keep our hand on our hearts and say “All is Well”; the famous mantra from Amir Khan continue our efforts with a smile on our face and hope in our heart...☺ !

I will be very brief in this newsletter of Vatsalya, sharing some latest positive developments at Vatsalya very quickly and, end the newsletter with an intriguing story!

Some small but **IMPORTANT** developments at Vatsalya:

- Vatsalya Udayan has a new Solar Workshop that offers technical training to village youth...
- Anmol; one of our brightest young girl after passing 12th class with 86% is now studying in Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), a premier institution in India...
- Vatsalya will be having a wedding in its campus in November! Two of our own children; who grew up in the campus are now independent adults and will be coming home to be blessed by all who care for them as they begin this new journey...
- Vatsalya Shiksha Niketan had 182 enrollments this year and about 135 students are regularly attending the school...
- The work force and the women strength in Vatsalya’s Self Help Group has increased to 435, out of which 255 women are earning an average Rs. 5000 (\$80) per month through Aanothi...

Proposed future initiatives of Vatsalya

We are gearing up for the following projects and hope to start them in the beginning of 2014. They are important and crucial and we also already have almost 50% of infrastructure required for implementing them. These are:

- Senior Citizen Home in Vatsalya campus (for 10-12 persons)
- Protection and Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (courses on self defense and personality development)
- Livelihood for marginalized women through home based employment
- Vatsalya Sports Academy for promoting local and indigenous sports
- Mobile Computer Education –A unit of Vatsalya Shiksha Niketan
- Mobile Education Centers for Street Children

A silver lining!

About 8 months back, we had started planning to organize a visit to the US to meet our partners and supporters and, explore with them, the opportunities and possibilities of expanding our network of friends and volunteers. The visit plans are finalized and we are embarking on our journey on the 18th of September; one of the longest trips to US so far. There are planning meetings, house parties, presentations, dinners, exhibitions and sales and a BIG Fashion Show -a GREAT mix of promising activities that may open new doors and new possibilities for Vatsalya and Anoothi. We are excited and optimistic but a bit nervous as well, trying to keep our expectations in control...☺. The entire visit has been sponsored by our friends, family and partners in India and the US and we are extremely grateful for their support, friendship and total trust endowed on us!

During our 40 days trip, we will be in the states of California, Nevada, Colorado, Texas, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York , Maryland and Washington DC and we are looking forward to seeing lots of old friends, especially volunteers and interns who have been at Vatsalya during last 10 years or so.

We up date our progress and activities on our face book page 'Vatsalya Udayan' regularly, however, many of our friends do not access it. We had a really interesting and enlightening experience a few months back and I want to leave you with that story. It might intrigue you a little but most importantly, it will make you understand our work, our style of work our challenges and our overall approach as we try to serve the most deprived...☺.

So here it is. Hope you enjoy reading it.
Thank you for your time...☺

**Warmest regards,
Jaimala**

Life Is Like That!

I was doing the routine work during my weekly night stay visit at Vatsalya Udayan a few weeks back.

One of the major tasks on my list was to talk to the two boys (age 12 and 15) who had admitted of stealing some money from a staff about a week ago. As our planned strategy to manage children's behavior, we play "Good Cop Bad Cop" often, to keep it balanced and to get the point across, and, I am always the good cop...☺! And this is how it went:

07.30am, Saturday:

I had it all planned - Have them come to my room, offer them those nice 'imported candies' gifted by a German volunteer, make them watch the Malala speech video in the United Nations and just tell them how we all love them so much and how we wish them to become something someday! So, I asked the younger brother of one of the two boys to send them to me after the breakfast. I waited and waited and waited and then thought, may be, the little child forgot to give them the message. After the school, at 1.30 pm, I asked one of the teachers to send them over. That's when we realize that they have been missing after the breakfast! The teachers thought they were with me and I thought they were in school...(one disadvantage of having a big open campus with vegetable farms and agriculture fields, especially at the time of a good Monsoon!)

02.00 pm, Saturday

Satyam takes the motorcycle and drives to Achrol hoping they may be there, some of the big boys climb up the surrounding mud hills of Achrol to look for them, and others search in the fields where the crops are standing tall. It turns out that they were last seen at around 9am.

03.00 pm, Saturday

We get a phone call from Babu Lal ji that the boys were seen in a village 10km from Achrol where he was visiting someone. As he called after them, they disappeared in to the fields.

04.00pm, Saturday

Ramkishan ji and Satyam go to the police station to report about missing children. The police officer first scolds them and then declared that we must not be taking good care of the children otherwise, why would they run away? After Ramkishan ji's pleading and assurances about the best possible efforts on our part, the police officer relented a little, consoled them and also gave a few tips as to how to look after the children better. The police then assured that they will look in to it ASAP and apologized for being 'a bit tied up with a murder case at the moment'...!

06.00pm, Saturday

We call the grandmother of one of the boys to inform about the incident and to request her to inform us immediately if the boys come to them. The grandmother is all distressed, wails and blames us over the phone but assures that she will call as soon as the children reach home, or IF they reach home... We also call the distant aunt of the other boy but her number remains un-responded.

07.00pm to 10.00 pm, Saturday

Ranjeet, RC and Motilal spend hours at the Railway station and Bus Station in Jaipur looking for them.

08.00 am to 04.00 pm, Sunday

Four staff members from Vatsalya Udayan drive in different directions for hours on motor bikes looking in the villages, highways and asking people if they had seen the two boys. None of them take a break to come back and eat their lunch that day.

In the mean time, the grandmother calls again and threatens us that if her grandson was not returned to her, she will take 'action'!

Also, in the mean time, I get a call from a senior staff in Vatsalya Udayan informing about how one of the junior staff was scared and worried about being sent to jail for negligence. I spend next half an hour explaining him that if any one goes to jail for any wrong doing in Vatsalya, it would be ME and no one else as I am the In Charge. (I don't think it helped as later he was reportedly telling another staff that he is not even married yet and if his name was tainted, he will not have any decent family wanting to marry their daughter with him..!)

05.00 pm, Sunday

The head of the local police station arrives at Udayan with his team to enquire in to the case. He takes a round of the campus, talks to the children and after an hour, leaves saying this "I have never seen such a beautiful place which is meant for orphaned and abandoned children! I have not seen such happy and bold and open children who have the courage to talk to me with such clear thoughts. They are really fortunate and we are grateful and proud that people like you are around..." And, the search for the boys continues, now with a warmer collaboration between the Vatsalya and the local police teams...

07.00pm to 10.00pm, Sunday

Two members of Vatsalya team spend three hours again at the train and bus station in Jaipur, looking for them, but to no avail.

11.00 am, Monday

Satyam looks in one of the slums in Jaipur. It was from here that one of the boys was picked up about 5 years ago during our street children health camps. The boy reportedly is an orphan but his aunt lived there at that time. Now she is not there, nor does her phone respond.

12.00 Noon, Monday

Satyam calls saying he did spot one of the boys but lost him in the lanes of the HUGE slum.

01.00 pm, Monday

The grandmother comes to Udayan, cries and curses the Vatsalya staff and threatens again about taking an action if her grandson was not found and returned to her. She also then went to the Achrol police

station and reported about his missing grandson (the police of course knows already) But she made it very clear to them that 'this NGO' was bad and not treating her grandson well and that is why he ran away. Police duly expressed their sympathies with the 70 year old grandma who was naturally distressed...

05.30 pm, Monday

RC and Motilal leave for the slum where Satyam had seen our boy in the afternoon. RC is very well known in this slum as he has organized over 100 health camps in this neighborhood in last several years. He asks a teashop owner about the aunt of the "boy who lives with Vatsalya". In no time, 4-5 young and old men get in to our jeep and tell RC to drive and assure him that they will show where our boy could be. RC drives for 4-5 km inside the slum; a maze of confusing lanes and by-lanes and as anticipated by our friends, there was our boy- Happily riding pillion on a bicycle with one of his old buddies! Motilal wasted no time and gallantly jumped from running jeep to get hold of our precious boy as RC slowed down a little and got hold of the bicycle with another hand (simple stunt, not too difficult for we Indians!) Well, he had successfully ditched Babu Lal ji and Satyam on two previous occasions and leaving it to a chance was out of question now...!

07.30 pm, Monday

Relieved that with the older boy in our safe custody now, it won't be long when we would find the younger and the more vulnerable one. All the time in last 2-3 days, there was a huge concern for the younger one as he had never been on his own, was brought to us by the village head after his parents succumbed to AIDS about 3 years ago. So, once they all settled down to drive to Achrol, we asked where the other child was?

We were not at all ready for the sensational revelations from our dear boy! The story goes like this...:

After they left Vatsalya Udayan, the two boys went straight to the village where the grandmother of the younger one lived. She warmly welcomed them, fed them and put them to sleep lovingly. The next day, they continued to stay there and the grandma made those distress calls. The third day, the old woman took the older boy to the slum in Jaipur and left him with his 'cousins' there. Then, she came to Udayan to remind us of consequences if her grandson was not returned. Then, she went to the police station before returning back to her village. All the while when Vatsalya people were running from one place to another and spent two restless and sleepless nights, she had her grandson very much with her. She was not only hiding the truth from us but also kept threatening us!

It is astonishing that an old woman at 70 can be capable of such deceit and such ungrateful conduct towards people who were taking care of her, not one, but, FOUR grand children! We passed from the state of disbelief to annoyance to a sense of disenchantment but, well, finally, it all came to the end with the loudest laughter from all of us- What a story, what an experience and Oh, what a Grandma!! It's a shame that she could not make it to Bollywood...!

As for us, we just go on with Bhagwad Gita Gyanam- "**Karmanye Vadhika Raste, Ma Faleshu-Kadachana**"- You have the right to work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive!"
