

## AFA Happenings September 2009 – December 2009 Editor's Corner

*Hello everyone! Here's wishing you and all your loved ones a Happy New Year and a wonderful year ahead. We bid adieu to yet another year as we close our winter term that was as usual packed with fun, zest, and laughter. Teacher's Day, Dussera, Diwali and Christmas gave us ample reasons to celebrate. The term saw us interacting with our very own Delhi Daredevil's captain, Gautam Gambhir. We made it to 'Page 3' with our gala Annual Charity Dinner held at the Hyatt Regency in November with the 'Who's who' of Delhi letting their hair down whilst supporting this important cause. Fun and games, is that all? Absolutely not! The 'tribe' continued getting the same high quality of services that AFA is synonymous with, as our teachers, staff and volunteers put in their very best. And the learning continued for us as AFA hosted a workshop on Structured Teaching that was conducted by Autism AACTION, Chicago.*

### At Open Door

Reinforcement for the staff came in the way of Teacher's Day on 4 September. The Trainees of the Diploma in Special Education (Autism Spectrum Disorders) gave the teachers a rare day off, as they organized a viewing of the movie 'New York' whilst they took over the classes. This was followed by delightful skits and performances, and ended with chocolates for the children and games and yummy eats for the staff.

The Diwali Mela on 10 October had music, games and a mouthwatering spread. The 'Festival of lights' saw a great demand for diyas and greeting cards made by the children and trainees of Aadhar.

On 3 December World Disability Day an 'Autism Walk', through the lanes and bylanes of the homes and commercial districts of Jasola Vihar was our effort to sensitise the residents and office goers in our neighborhood.

The Christmas spirit of giving and sharing was reflected at our joyous Christmas party on 19 December. Our students and the Diploma trainees together put up a beautiful nativity play as carols filled the air and Santa appeared to the tune of 'Jingle Bells' and distributed gifts to all the children present. The food was a gastronomical delight, with each family contributing something special for the party.

### What is new at AFA

Commuting to AFA just got a little easier for some of our students. We now can boast of our very own transport, which was donated to us by the kind generosity of Kesarwani Family and The Special Child Trust. The latter was inaugurated by ace batsman Gautam Ghambhir on 7 September 09. Gautam Gambhir took a look at the various programmes run by AFA and whilst at it, had the opportunity to have an impromptu 'net practice' with our 'aces'.

As part of our efforts towards inclusion, in November 2009 AFA initiated a year-long project in partnership with the DAV schools in the National Capital Region.

### Visitors

As always we played host to many visitors to the centre who came to learn more about the services we provide and share their opinions and thoughts with us.

- Rehabilitation professionals Sheetal and Lovy visited to get familiar with the field of Autism.

- Ravi Singh, a parent from the USA came to observe Open Door School and learn about AFA's other activities.
- Jagdish Yadav, Secretary of a leading rehabilitation organization from Gonda, UP visited to learn about AFA programs.
- Michael Rosanoff, from Autism Speaks, visited AFA in September to meet with staff about the ongoing research project AFA and Creating Connections that is funded by Autism Speaks. While at AFA, Mr. Rosanoff was able to observe classes and part of the Annual Training Workshop.
- Susie Sywlka from Onsite Language Service and Ginnyzele, a special educator both from USA came to learn about opportunities for training and helping children with disabilities.
- Students of DSE (MR) from NIMH (Secunderabad) came along with A T Thressakutty and their coordinator Namrata Amar to observe teaching practices at Open Door.
- The Swedish Minister of trade Dr Ewa Bjorling came to understand the functions and activities of Action For Autism and its future plans
- Deepa M and Akhila Vaidyanathan from S. Prashanthi Academy came to see our programs.
- Jackie Hooper a volunteer from Roshni, Gwalior stopped by.
- Amita Puri, CEO, and Puja Bhalla, Senior Manager Development Support of our partner Charities Aid Foundation came to learn more about the programs CAF supports.
- Shaminderjit Singh, Activity Professional (Samarth Project) and Priyanka, Assistant Teacher from Umang- Red Cross Institute of Special Education came check out our classrooms.

## Training, Workshops, Conferences, Seminars, Talks

- 70 participants, parents and professionals from all over the country and from our neighbouring countries attended the two day Continuing Rehabilitation Education Programme on "Structured Teaching" on 29 and 30 December 2009 conducted by Christopher Flint, Lally Daley, Heera Chandani and Katie Hench, of Autism ACTION, Chicago.
- Indrani Basu gave a lecture on 'Behaviour Modification' at Soch in Jalandhar
- Priti Siwach delivered a lecture on the topic of 'Functional Assessment' for the students of Bachelor of Rehabilitation Therapy at the NIMH.
- Merry Barua and Garima Pant participated in a meeting organized by Radhika Alkazi, at Aarth Astha on the Right to Education bill.
- Nusrat Ul Hussan delivered a Lecture on the topic of 'Sensory Integration' for students of Bachelor of Rehabilitation therapy organized by NIMH.
- Indu Chaswal gave a lecture on 'Understanding Autism' at Arth Astha.
- Chandan Goyal and Garima Pant attended the 'Knowledge Workshop' organised by the National Trust.
- Indu Chaswal and Viveka Chattopadhyay gave lectures on 'Screening tools'. The talks were held to sensitize teachers of DAV Dayanand Vihar, Gurgaon, Shalimar Bagh, Pushpanjali Bag and Jasola Vihar.
- Preeti Siwach delivered a lecture on the topic of 'Behavior Modification' for the students of Bachelor of Rehabilitation Therapy organized by NIMH.
- Several presenters from AFA gave series of lectures on Annual Training Workshop organized by AFA over four days attended by parents, professionals and teachers from various organizations in India and from the neighbouring countries.

- Nidhi Singhal delivered a lecture on 'Screening and Diagnostic Assessment' for the students of Bachelor of Rehabilitation Therapy organized by NIMH.
- Sudhanshu Grover delivered a lecture on 'Communication' for the students of Bachelor of Rehabilitation Therapy organized by NIMH.
- Merry Barua, Sudhanshu Grover, Urmila Taneja and Achyutanal Guha presented lectures on 'Workshop on Mental Retardation and Autism' at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences
- Garima Pant and Chandan Goyal made a presentation about Action For Autism and its various activities at a workshop organized by UNHCR
- Garima Pant attended a two day workshop and debate organised by NCPEDP on a new disability law versus and amended disability law
- Merry Barua participated in the meeting of the Expert Committees of RCI on Hearing Impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Retardation, and Visual Impairment for reviewing B.Ed. and M.Ed (Special Education) curriculum and for discussion on comprehensive teacher training programmes in Special education and Inclusive Education.
- Merry Barua and Chandan Goyal participated in the Disability Awareness Expedition, 'Badhte Kadam' by The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Garima Pant attended the discussion on the conceptualisation of the first draft of the National Health Bill 2009 as well as disability in the context of right to health.
- Merry Barua attended a conference as Chief Guest on Relationship Development Intervention by Dr Steven Gutstein and Dr Rachel Sheely organized by SAI, Mumbai where she was the Chief Guest
- Merry Barua was part of the online 'AWARE Conference'
- Merry Barua, Sudhanshu Grover, Garima Pant gave a talk at Parivartan School, Ghaziabad on mainstreaming and Inclusion on the occasion of World Disability Day 2009
- Merry Barua conducted a workshop on 'Behaviour Modification and Communication' organized by Forum for Autism and Zee TV in Mumbai
- Garima Pant participated in a meeting on Focus Consultation organised by India Alliance for Child Rights and Arth Astha
- Merry Barua and Dr. Nidhi Singhal attended a four-day training program at Sangath Goa in Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule conducted by Prof Anthony Bailey

## External trainees / interns/ volunteers at AFA

- Julia Gollner, Alkag Raziye Murvet and Serap Nayir students from Germany interned at Open Door School and participated actively in their role
- Heather Lambert from USA joined us as a volunteer in October 09 and is contributing her time and skills in structured teaching in the different classrooms at the Open Door School
- We are indebted to our regular volunteers for being so committed in giving their time to us and helping in the smooth functioning of programmes run at AFA. Taposhi and Geeta assist at Aadhar, whilst Chandrasekhar, Garima, Shivani, Mona, and Puja devote their much appreciated services in the Open Door Day School Programme

## HRD etc

We bid some of our staff goodbye and welcomed new people on the AFA team. Chandan Goyal Nusrat Ul Hasan have moved on and we wish them the very best in their future efforts. We are very happy to have on board, Arpita, as our Occupational Therapist; Krishna, as a Teacher, Kathakali, as the Project Coordinator and Sumon as a Caregiver. We welcome all of them on the team and wish them a wonderful and productive time at AFA. Sourosen is interning with us as office assistant, and we hope to be able to find a suitable placement for him in 2010.

## Upcoming!

In the months to come, we have a lot of exciting things ahead.

- We look forward to our classrooms being 'set up' by the AACTION Chicago team, plan on having a 'retreat', a 'fun day' along with being a team building exercise for the support staff at AFA.
- Dr. Mathew Belmonte, an assistant professor in the Department of Human Development at Cornell University, and a senior research associate at the Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge and Dr. Stephen Underwood, a clinical Psychologist holding a Master of Clinical Psychology from the Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia and a Bachelor of Psychology from University of New England, will both be presenting interactive lectures at AFA, in January and February respectively.
- We are gearing up for the World Autism Awareness Day and our Annual Day in April and look forward to events that are as successful as those in past years.
- And, of course we look forward to the release of the much awaited film, 'My name is Khan', with Shahrukh Khan playing an individual with ASD.