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Addressing basic needs: village by village

Safe, clean drinking water and safe, proper sanitation facilities are basic human rights. After the death of her husband by snake-bite, Ravendra Delavar, found it difficult to fulfill her basic needs. Out of modesty and for safety, village women are often forced to use the open fields early morning or late evenings to relieve themselves. This is a common practice throughout rural India. Widows are especially vulnerable to harassment.

Since its inception in 2001, Vishal Himalaya Foundation (VHF) has come full circle: Driven by the lack of basic sanitation for many in India, VHF has

built 40 family toilets in 2009. The model: VHF, with a Rotary grant, provided funds for materials for the structure, the government provided toilet bowls, and the homeowner built structures and pits.



Mrs. Delavar in front of her outhouse.

Clean water, sanitation and Rotary

In Goregaon Village, less than 10% of the population has access to sanitation facilities. In collaboration with the Mercer Island Rotary Club and Akola Midtown Rotary, Vishal Himalaya Foundation plans to supply each household with a toilet and clean drinking water facility by 2011. More than 1,500 villagers will benefit from this project.

With the support of a grant provided by the Mercer Island Rotary in 2008, forty family toilets are already built. VHF has used this grant money to pay approx. \$75 towards the construction of each toilet. The Indian government supplements ceramic bowls at a cost of \$44 per bowl. Homeowners are responsible for building the structure and digging the pit.

A subsequent Rotary International grant will be dedicated to the construction of outhouses in five select villages. A single Reverse Osmosis drinking water facility will be installed in each village as well. This emphasis on both clean water and sanitation will help eliminate unhygienic practices and provide a model for clean water facility development.

In 1998, VHF, Mercer Island Rotary Club and Akola Midtown Rotary received a matching grant of nearly \$70K. The object is to build about 22 check dams to impound rain water. Each dam backs up a mile long lake. In Phase I of the 2-year project, 5 dams were completed by January 2009. A much larger triple arch dam has been nearing completion.

Seattle Teachers visit Akola schools

Five teachers from Highline and Mercer Island School Districts are visiting Akola from July 19 through July 27th. They are conducting a series of workshops in VHF's India Teachers' Center, formerly known as Akola Teachers' Center.

Master teacher Dr. Sandy Hunt leads the team, four of whom are seen here planning for their trip. They are from top left, Sue McCabe, Vicky Mann, Dr. Sandy Hunt and Roseanne Esposito. Shannon O'Keefe, not pictured right, but in light blue below left, is part of the team as well. Planned workshops are in Language Arts, math, and science. The goal of this VHF Educator Exchange Program (VEEP) is to exchange ideas on teaching between the two countries. The VEPP group will illustrate US classroom methods.

The Visiting Teachers take to Akola an open mind and heart, although with a diverse set of experiences, which cover teaching in pre-K through university and beyond, to adult education. The teachers are excited to share their professional successes and challenges with teachers in Akola, while at the same time look forward to discovering the successes and challenges faced by Akola teachers.

More about the teachers' visit to Akola will be published in September's issue.

“Minds are very hard things to open, and the best way to open the mind is through the heart.”

*Jonathan Haidt,
psychologist, University of
Virginia*



From right to left: Roseann Esposito, Vicky Mann, Sandy Hunt, Sue McCabe, Shannon O'Keefe, and Eva Agrawal at a planning meeting.



Mobile Library

Reading opens worlds and its immense possibilities to a young mind. But, yet the pleasure of reading, of discovering new worlds and allowing the mind to imagine, is not open to the majority of students in emerging nations. Since 2005 VHF began to introduce reading for pleasure to students in schools that it sponsored. What began as ChitraCar has expanded into PustaCar, a mobile library that goes from school to school allowing students to check out books to read for a month. Books are rotated on monthly bases between schools. *Left:* The arrival of new books.

Students' Clean Water Drive

The Mercer Island Interact Club, a Rotary International youth service club, held a fund drive for Vishal Himalaya Foundation from March to May in the area. Students sold aluminum water bottles to raise money for clean water initiatives in villages outside of Akola. The students raised \$3,000. Funds from the effort will be used toward a foot pump, bore well, and water purification system to be placed in a village.

The students kicked off the Clean Water Project on March 22nd during the Mercer Island Rotary Half Marathon.

Members of the Club initiated the drive, designed the bottle logo and sold the bottles to the public for \$15 each. The project was led by Rotarian Vali Somers.



Interact Club members selling water bottles during Mercer Island Rotary Half Marathon

Reaching across waters to overcome poverty

Overcoming poverty is a challenge for the 21st century. It is not a local issue, but a global one. For VHF that first step taken back in 2001 has mushroomed into a grass-roots movement in which a community of communities is involved.

What had begun as a group of friends holding occasional meetings to better the villages and schools from which they came, has turned into groups of perfect strangers with big hearts and ideas working to better life for many.

In addition to the projects and initiatives featured above, VHF helps schools with setting up computer education, funds a vocational training institute for carpentry, Kalakaar, and operates a video on wheels ChitraCar. VHF is

funding a village women's self-help group to get started with earning by making handcrafts. Other programs include funding for instrumental music education in several schools, tree planting campaigns, weather monitoring, etc. It's all about a broad education, learning by doing.

Executive Director, Prashant Gawande, oversees all of our projects in Akola and surrounding villages. Our staff in India has increased from 3 full time employees to 7. Recently, our US Board was restructured, and a Board of Trustees was created in Akola, headed by long time VHF supporter and friend, Dr. Nikhil Kibe. This allows for easier fundraising both in the US and in India. VHF has developed a deep partnership with Rotary International, and appreciates their support of our many projects.

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

--Nelson Mandela

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.vishalhimalaya.org

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CLICK above.**

About Our Organization...

Vishal Himalaya Foundation's mission is to promote knowledge-based development.

VHF sponsors a range of programs in schools, vocational training, teacher development, water access, and environmental beautification.

To date, VHF's projects have been in the city of Akola and its surrounding villages in central India.

SAVE THE DATE

October 24, 2009, VHF celebrates Diwali

*January 5-24th, 2010: Rotary/VHF Akola., India
Trip*

*March 2010: VHF fundraiser at Meydenbauer Center,
Bellevue*

Vishal Himalaya Foundation is a 501(c)-3 non-profit organization registered in the State of Washington.

Vishal Himalaya Foundation
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