

# THE PRASAD PROJECT

*Philanthropic Relief, Altruistic Service And Development*

Autumn / Winter 2004

## HIV/AIDS Program Makes Headway in India

The staff of the Muktananda Mobile Hospital has seen a dramatic rise in the incidence of HIV in the Tansa Region over the past decade. Doctors and nurses of the new Gurudev Siddha Peeth Netra Chikitsa Hospital are diagnosing more and more HIV-infected children, and are meeting orphans whose parents have died from AIDS-related diseases. HIV-positive pregnant women have begun to attend the clinic held under the Reproductive Child Health Program.

In response to this situation, Prasad Chikitsa rolled out their HIV/AIDS Program last spring. Its goal is to prevent new infections, treat current ones, and continually reduce the incidence of HIV in the region through raising public awareness, preventing maternal-to-child transmission, testing, counseling, and supportive care. In addition, they are working on an infrastructure that will help make antiretroviral medications widely available to people of all age groups.

Today, Prasad Chikitsa is happy to announce that the HIV/AIDS program is making headway in all aspects of its plan. Their efforts in awareness raising have already touched the lives of about 2,000 people living in the Tansa Region. Staff have given separate HIV/AIDS classes to men, women, boys and girls across the entire social spectrum of students, teachers, farmers and village women. Through these classes

myths and fears surrounding HIV/AIDS are debunked and people of the Tansa Valley are developing a greater willingness to address the social and medical issues that HIV brings.

The Reproductive Child Health Program, which offers a full range of prenatal, postpartum and neonatal care to women in the Tansa region, is now providing treatment to HIV-infected pregnant women. This treatment focuses on stopping transmission to the baby by providing antiretroviral drugs to infected pregnant women. They also provide milk formula for the first six months of a baby's life



Mandara & her mother: Prasad Chikitsa HIV patients

because there's a 30% chance of a newborn getting infected through breast milk. If a baby does happen to be born infected, antiretroviral drugs are provided on a long-term basis to the children. Prasad Chikitsa continues working

*continued on page 4*

## Prasad Chikitsa Holds Special Clinic for HIV-Infected Children

On the first Monday of every month, Prasad Chikitsa holds a special clinic for children who have been diagnosed as HIV-positive. The staff gives them special gifts, balloons or chocolates that have been donated. They also treat any opportunistic infections such as those that affect the skin and lungs, and give the children homemade protein powder, vitamins and minerals for the month ahead.

Three months ago, a six-year old girl named Mandara came to the clinic with her mother and her four-year old brother. Mandara's father died three years ago of AIDS; HIV also infects her mother and her brother. Mandara was particularly sick when she first came to the clinic; her body was covered with a severe rash. She had a persistent cough and was so weak that she wanted to squat on the ground all the

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# Interview with Dr. Gita Sen about PRASAD CHIKITSA



Dr. Gita Sen

**Dr. Sen was interviewed by Vinaya Webster, a journalist from Hong Kong about the work of Prasad Chikitsa.**

*Dr. Gita Sen is the chairperson for the Board of Trustees for Prasad Chikitsa. She holds the Sir Ratan Tata Chair Professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India, and is an Adjunct Professor of Population and International Health at the Faculty of Public Health at Harvard University. She received her Ph.D. from Stanford University and combines a*

*distinguished academic career with policy advocacy. Dr. Sen is a pioneer in the field of gender and development. Her academic and policy activism have been an inspiration to a whole generation of researchers and non-governmental activists.*

*Dr. Sen has authored many articles and books. As well, she has represented India as a delegate for the United Nations at conferences in 2002 and 2003 and is on the Board of the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and serves on several other international organizations and advisory groups.*

*“ I think it’s worth looking just historically at where PRASAD’s been so one gets a sense of why we’re going in the direction we are right now.”*

*Dr. Gita Sen*

**VINAYA:** We now have the HIV program and Water-Harvesting in addition to our health and children’s programs. How do you see Prasad Chikitsa with this diverse range of programs?

**GITA SEN:** I think it’s worth looking just historically at where Prasad Chikitsa’s been so one gets a sense of why we’re going in the direction we are right now. While it’s true that there’s a diversity of programs, it’s also important to realize that they’re not all of the same size or magnitude.

Historically the signature of Prasad Chikitsa was/is work in health, healthcare. We had first the Mobile Hospital and the Netraprakash Eye Camp and then spread into more general health – Maternal Care and Child Health – and now we’re getting more into these programs that sustain the community. That’s been pretty much where it’s been.

Early on, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda brought our attention to the poor nutrition of the Tansa Valley children and PRASAD started expanding the focus from health to nutrition. That’s where we got the PRASAD Bhojan Nutrition Program, the Milk Project, and part of it had to do with, I think, the recognition that when you provide health services, you are in a sense addressing the problem right at the end where it’s already manifesting as a problem. We also needed to do something that would address the roots – from which the problem is arising. Now as we know when you look at an area that is poor, not very well developed and where people are poor, then poverty itself is often a big source for people’s poor health.

You have seen this here in New York, just with the Dental Program – the lack of dental care for

poor kids and where that comes from. It’s partly from poverty which means they don’t get regular screenings and check-ups. It also means that nutritionally they are probably not eating the right things or taking care of themselves.

And when you get to a situation like the Tansa Valley which is where Prasad Chikitsa works, the people in that valley are extremely poor. They are people, who in India are called ‘tribals.’ Because their economic status is weak and they are mostly agriculturists – the farming they do is not usually enough to sustain them through the year – they are very undernourished. There are not very good public health facilities available and the government programs aren’t working terribly well in the area.

So, it’s become very clear that if we have to provide health care services, we might also actually be helping our own work if we were to provide something that was more in the way of Community Development. This would support the people being able to become nutritionally better off and affect their lives.

It’s from that basis when we started doing some needs assessment over this past year, we recognized the importance of giving all of Prasad Chikitsa’s work an umbrella that you could call Community Development. We have Self-Help Groups that have been in existence for 2-3 years now. This is a big movement in India at this point. Our large picture right now is to do things that lift people up out of poverty. That is the current basis for all our work. Community Development means a range of different things and we are developing new programming in that area such as HIV and Water Harvesting.

*to be continued in next issue*

*“...we recognized the importance of giving all of PRASAD’s work an umbrella that you could call Community Development.”*

*Dr. Gita Sen*

# A look at

# THE PRASAD

Philanthropic Relief Altruistic Service And Development  
PROJECT

## Our Origins

The PRASAD Project was initiated in 1992 by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, the spiritual head of the Siddha Yoga path, and a meditation master in the ancient tradition of India. The humanitarian work of PRASAD manifests core values of the Siddha Yoga mission - selfless service, enduring commitment and respect for all people, regardless of their race or belief.

## What we do

PRASAD's mission is to uplift communities through health and sustainable development programs. Over 70,000 people a year are direct recipients of PRASAD's work around the world.

Whether through the mobile dental clinic in Sullivan and Ulster Counties, NY, the newly established hospital in Maharashtra, India, or eye camps in Mexico, the goal of each PRASAD organization is the same - to provide the resources to help people help themselves, their community and their natural surroundings.

There are incorporated PRASAD entities in the USA, India, Mexico, Spain, Australia, Italy and France that carry out and support the work of PRASAD. The international work of PRASAD is made possible through contributions by individual donors in a number of countries, as well as a range of corporate, private, governmental and not-for-profit sources.

*PRASAD provides the resources to help people help themselves, their community and their natural surroundings.*

## PRASAD: A Sustainable Future

"We started helping people in the simplest, most direct way. They had no health care, couldn't get to hospitals. So, we put a hospital on a bus and went to them," is from *PRASAD: A Sustainable Future*, a new video hosted by Tony award winner and PRASAD spokesperson Phylicia Rashad. The video tells the story of how PRASAD got its start, how it came to be what it is today, and how it has given hope and help to hundreds of thousands of people along the way. Rare archival footage provided much of the video's history and a Tansa Valley video crew supplied recent documentation about the newest programs that PRASAD supports such as Water Harvesting, HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment, and Self-Help Groups.

Shooting completed at the end of September, and in its final edit the video will be a total of ten minutes long. It will be turned into a DVD and distributed to donors. Notably, this is the very first time PRASAD has ever used a DVD to inform constituents about current projects.

"The work of PRASAD is really worth knowing; it is expansive and expanding," Phylicia Rashad said during a moment of downtime in shooting. In a wholehearted embrace of this work, Phylicia served as a volunteer at the second Netraprakash

eye camp in 1991. She was so moved by what she saw there that she continued to offer her service to many of PRASAD's programs throughout the years including the Milk Project and the Bhojan Nutrition Program. As the host of the new video, she said, "It's wonderful to give voice and presence to such worthwhile work."



*Phylicia Rashad at PRASAD Filming*

*"The work of PRASAD is really worth knowing; it is expansive and expanding."*

*Phylicia Rashad*



# Children's Corner

Communities in need are targeted through PRASAD's work worldwide. People of all ages are the recipients of the many eye, dental and health care programs we offer. While restored eyesight or sustainable development projects lend new dignity and hope to adults who must support families – when the life of a child is changed (by a PRASAD cataract or strabismus surgery, expert dental care or HIV treatment), suddenly years of healthful and happier living stretch out before them.

Children receive the help from PRASAD with touching simplicity and gratitude. Life changes for these young people, sometimes overnight! The following are some examples of the ways just a few young lives have been brightened with the healthcare and love offered by PRASAD due to the ongoing gifts from PRASAD donors all over the world.

## **The Newness of Brushing**

Johnny came back for a check-up and was happy to tell the dentist and the dental assistant that he was still brushing his teeth every day. This was a new routine because though he was eight years old, Johnny had never taken care of his teeth in a regular way. He reported back to the CDHP staff: "I am brushing every morning and every night, just the way you showed me."



*"I am brushing every morning and every night, just the way you showed me."*

*Johnny, 8 years old  
Sullivan County*

He was very proud of himself and the bright new look to his smile.

## **One Small Life Forever Changed**

Pedro had surgery for a cataract on his first eye one year ago. When he returned to have his second eye surgery, he had become the experienced one!

Pedro proceeded to share with the other two children that they need not be frightened. "Everything happens so fast! In a few hours, you will be fine, having your lunch, and the operation will be over. Most of all, you'll be happiest to be seeing each other with both new eyes open!"

## **Family Health** *Continued from page 1*

towards making antiretroviral drugs available to all who need them.

HIV testing along with counseling before and after testing is now available at the new Family Health Center, which opened in late September. Treatment of complications resulting from HIV/AIDS through mainstream medicinal practices at both the Muktananda Mobile Hospital and the Gurudev Siddha Peeth Netra Chikitsa Hospital continues at the center. Homeopathy, Ayurveda, nutritional counseling and instruction in hatha yoga and meditation are also being offered in addition to these allopathic treatments.

HIV workshops will be held at the center as an extension of Prasad Chikitsa's awareness raising campaign. Training workshops for the traditional midwives of India, known as dais, will also begin there. These workshops are currently a part of the Reproductive Child Health Program, which is in the process of moving

its base of woman/infant care to the new Family Health Center.

The opening of this new Family Health Center is a significant forward movement in the progress of the HIV/AIDS program as well as the overall work of Prasad Chikitsa. In this confluence of holistic practice, quality medical care, and health education, Prasad Chikitsa is expanding to meet the healthcare needs of Tansa Valley families in even greater ways.



*Family Health Center*

**Children receive the help from PRASAD with touching simplicity and gratitude.**

**HIV workshops will be held at the center as an extension of Prasad Chikitsa's awareness-raising campaign.**

# PRASAD's Healthy Smiles Program

The impact of PRASAD's Healthy Smiles Program in San Jose, California is seen and felt in the community through the open hearts and shining smiles of thousands of children. In the three years that the program has been running, close to 10,000 dental appointments have been kept. This translates into a whole lot of clean and healthy teeth, healthy bodies, and an abundance of renewed self-esteem!



PRASAD Healthy Smiles children

In California, PRASAD serves students at 25 schools (kindergarten through grade 8) in the Alum Rock School District. PRASAD provides at no cost to these families, bi-lingual education, insurance enrollment assistance (which then opens the door to medical and vision care as well), and restorative dental care on board its Mobile Dental Clinic. Before PRASAD came to San Jose, 75% of the children in the district had never seen a dentist or were in urgent need of dental care.

Recently 2 1/2-year old twins came for their first dental visit. They were filled with curiosity

and wonder. Mom and Dad were an integral part of the visit and held the children gently while the dentist and assistant journeyed through their tiny mouths. Their visit revealed some early childhood cavities and required a second session.

While the American Dental Association recommends that children begin seeing the dentist at one year of age, many dentists recognize the challenges this young population presents and opt to only care for older siblings. It is always amazing to see how comfortable and excited the children are to have their turn on board the mobile clinic.

*In the three years that the program has been running, close to 10,000 dental appointments have been kept.*

## Children's Dental Health Program Reaches Out

### **Tobacco-Free Coalition Broadcasts Healthy Message**

The ambling white PRASAD CDHP mobile dental clinic has become a landmark presence outside The PRASAD Project home office in Hurleyville, NY. No matter what the weather, this clinic-on-wheels heads into the countryside, bringing its caring state-of-the-art dental service to hundreds of children in need each week. It continues to offer treatment to young people with the highest rates of tooth decay in the Hudson Valley region.

Recently the Tobacco-Free Coalition sponsored a 5-minute commercial that has begun to appear on Time/Warner's cable stations. The commercial was produced by PRASAD CDHP,

and filmed by Time/Warner. In it Elliott T. Sparkle, the mascot of the PRASAD Children's Dental Health Program, leads a parade of children dressed as vegetables, fruit, a dentist, and hygienist down a main street, singing "We Love Our Teeth!" The song, set to the music of a Sousa march, is becoming popular in schools, playgrounds and children's homes.

The commercial sends a strong yet playful three-pronged message for children to brush their teeth, see their dentist, and not smoke. This is yet another way that PRASAD's CDHP continues to work toward expanding education and awareness on ever-new fronts about children's dental health.



### **Special Clinic** *continued from page 1*

time. Today the staff has seen a dramatic improvement in Mandara's condition. Her rash has subsided and she's gained three kilograms. She now walks into the clinic with a smile on her face.

To Prasad Chikitsa nurse, Marie Elrington, Mandara is a perfect example of how much can be done for HIV-infected children even before antiretroviral drugs are administered. Marie said,



*HIV-Awareness presentation to Women's Self-Help Group: Ambode*

"In addition to the medical attention they receive, I believe that the love we offer these children truly uplifts them."

# In the Spirit of Giving

## **Tomas Sanchez**

One of Latin America's foremost painters, Tomas Sanchez, generously donates the money he makes from the sale of one of his paintings each year to The PRASAD Project. His most recent donation of \$72,000 came from the sale of "*Worshipping the Tree*," a beautiful expression of the profound relationship between man and nature. Tomas has turned giving into an art form, and just like his paintings, Tomas's acts of giving are imbued with spiritual significance.

For Tomas, a long-time practitioner of Siddha Yoga meditation, giving has created an inner space for new inspiration to enter. This new inspiration has greatly enhanced the inner vision from which he paints.

Tomas said, "Through giving I have even experienced a miracle!" He goes on to explain that in the last three years, there has been a depression in the global art market. In the midst of this trend, Tomas has continued to sell and the value of his work has continued to increase. He feels this stroke of good fortune to be a natural part of a giving/receiving cycle.



*Worshipping the Tree*

by  
**Tomas Sanchez**

When he heard that Prasad Chikitsa was developing wells and small dams to retain surface water for the ultimate purpose of conserving land and bringing prosperity to the Tansa Region, he fell in love with the Water Harvesting Project. Next year, in October of 2005, he will hold an exhibition of his work in the Marlborough Gallery in New York City. Many of his paintings will go on display there, and he plans to donate a good portion

of what he receives from the sale of this collection to the Water Harvesting Project.

## **Daraius & Bhavani Jaikaria**

Ten-year-old Daraius Jaikaria and his eight-year-old sister, Bhavani, each receive \$10 allowance every month from their parents. They also get birthday money and do chores like "clean up our room" or "clean up the shoe closet" to make an extra dollar or two. They distribute all the money they make into three jars - one is for immediate spending, one is for saving, and one is for giving to charity.



*Daraius & Bhavani Jaikaria*

The children started keeping their jars last year, and after quite a while, Bhavani's "giving jar" was filled with \$75. The time to give had come but it was hard for her to decide who and where to give her money at first. Finally she chose The PRASAD Project. "I felt like helping PRASAD," she said. "It's because they help kid's eyes feel better and stuff like that." Bhavani's grandfather kicked in an extra \$25 to bring her donation up to \$100.

Bhavani's brother, Daraius, was with his father when he attended PRASAD's silent auction where he bought a beautiful amethyst crystal geode for \$230 by agreeing to give up his full \$120 allowance for the entire year; his dad offered the other \$110. For Daraius, the experience of buying the crystal was different from that of buying anything he ever has at the local mall. "Buying it felt really good because I knew I was giving money to help kids when I did," he said.

Daraius and Bhavani's habit of placing their allowance in three different jars came about because their parents wanted to teach them the value of money, and not just how to spend and save but how to give. Daraius's \$120 will pay for one teenager to go to college for a whole year in India and Bhavani's \$100 will pay for 3 people to have cataract surgery.

## **Sight-Restoring Surgeon**



*Dr. Tulika Kar*

The ground-breaking eye programs of Prasad Chikitsa have expanded over the years due to the sterling work of hundreds of skilled doctors and nurses.

We would like to cite one outstanding woman's contribution - Dr. Tulika Kar. Dr. Kar has been the resident surgeon and chief ophthalmologist in Prasad Chikitsa for the past 4 years, making year-round eye surgery a reality for Tansa Valley residents.

Dr. Kar received extra training in high volume cataract surgery at the Aravind Eye Hospital through a Training Grant from Prasad Chikitsa. She put her finely tuned skills to use on a daily basis, opening the year-round Netraprakash Eye Clinic in 2 small rooms in Akloli and personally training a permanent staff for this facility. Dr. Kar was able to perform 60 cataract surgeries in a single day. Her dedication and enthusiasm led to the development of the Gurudev Siddha Peeth Netra Chikitsa Hospital. This permanent eye facility offers cataract surgery as well as diagnosis and

treatment of many other eye conditions.

Dr. Tulika Kar has recently moved on from her commendable work with Prasad Chikitsa leaving two full-time ophthalmologists and a team of assistants in the new GSP Netra Chikitsa Hospital Eye Clinic. We thank Dr. Kar for her years of persistent and innovative work that helped thousands of people see the world through new eyes.



# The Gift That Changes Lives

To My Dear Friends of PRASAD,



This year we have had many inspirational gatherings in the homes of great-hearted PRASAD friends, and some spectacular events as well. In May was

a Manhattan premier of Harry Potter, "The Prisoner of Azkaban" followed by a reception with the film's director Alfonso Cuarón, and Phylicia Rashad speaking about their love and support of PRASAD worldwide.

June featured the first of hopefully many elegant, sold-out Community Benefit Galas at Lake Kiamesha, NY, honoring Dyan Campbell and PRASAD's Children's Dental Health Clinic (CDHP), with talented musicians, dancing, a silent auction and lovely dinner.

Our autumn Gala Event, "Celebrate on a High Note" in East Hampton, NY, is with Ann Hampton Callaway, a well-known singer/song-writer, accompanied by jazz pianist, Kenny Werner. This dinner/concert event takes place on a beautiful estate, generously donated by Philip Baloun.

Scattered throughout the year were other unique PRASAD Project benefits:

- an all-day Yoga Workshop in Brooklyn
- a flea market sale in Connecticut that made the front page of their local newspaper
- "Chairs for Charity" a project by a 14-year old aspiring Eagle Scout, Eric Hansen, whose chairs will be painted by local artists and auctioned off next year.

What's Next!!! I'm off to southern California from November 4th-15th to speak about PRASAD and then onto northern California from Nov 15th-23rd. After that I'll be in Seattle, Washington until Nov 30th. If you are in these areas and would like to host a gathering or join one and bring a friend, please contact me at [marilynherst@prasadproject.org](mailto:marilynherst@prasadproject.org). I'll be giving updates about our programs, showing slides, and getting to know more new people while raising awareness and inviting financial support for our programs.

I'm looking forward to meeting you! Together we are much more.

With Love and Blessings

Marilyn Herst

## A Simple Way to Support PRASAD

### Auction Drop

If you have new or used AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT, JEWELRY, COMPUTERS, ANTIQUES OR COLLECTIBLES, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OR CAMERAS that you would like to sell and donate the proceeds to PRASAD, Auction Drop and UPS have made it simple.

You can drop items off at 3,500 locations throughout the USA at any UPS Auction Drop site. The steps are: (1) Just drop the items off (2) fill out a short form (3) and enter PRASAD's charitable organization code which is #111. Auction Drop will do the rest, and send the proceeds directly to PRASAD.

For more information, visit [www.prasad.org](http://www.prasad.org) (click on 'donate now'), email [prasad@prasad.org](mailto:prasad@prasad.org) or call us at (845) 434 - 0376 x 108.

### Mission Fish

If you are already selling items on eBay, you can select PRASAD to receive part or all of the proceeds by choosing us as your charity of choice on [www.missionfish.org](http://www.missionfish.org). Mission Fish has teamed up with eBay to offer buyers and sellers the opportunity to support their favorite causes through trading on eBay Giving Works.

Donate online at [www.prasad.org](http://www.prasad.org)

Cut here



I would like to make a donation to support the ongoing humanitarian work of The PRASAD Project worldwide (If outside the US, please specify currency)

One-Time donation of:

- \$50    \$100    \$500    \$1000    \$5000    Other \_\_\_\_\_
- By Credit Card
- Check enclosed

Monthly donation as a PRASAD Partner (details on back):

- \$25    \$50    \$100    \$500    \$1000    Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Automatically from my Credit Card
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- I will send in a check each month (please mail me 12 envelopes)
- Please increase my existing monthly donation to \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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## PRASAD Responds to Natural Disaster



At 6 am on the 4th of July, the Tansa River broke through its banks after days of heavy rain. Several nearby villages were flooded -- Akloli being the hardest hit area. Villages lay under several feet of water for

an entire day until the flood began to subside. Especially affected were the towns of Ganeshpuri and Bal Bhojan. Scores of local homes near the river were totally submerged by the rising waters.

Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram and Prasad Chikitsa worked together to aid thousands of people who were directly affected by this crisis. The ashram cooked for 1000 people on the worst day of the flooding and distributed clean water and food to residents in Ganeshpuri and Akloli.

The next day, Prasad Chikitsa's highly trained medical team traveled to Akloli to examine and offer treatment to the villagers who needed care and attention due to the extreme conditions.

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### Sign Up for PRASAD's Email Newsletters

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### The PRASAD Project Staff Directory

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