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Sankalpa: A Resolution To Make A Difference



Sankalpa: A Resolution



Sankalpa: the beginning

Most of us, at some point of time, have looked around and felt that we have been lucky, privileged to have a lot of things – the love and care of our family and friends, support – financial and otherwise, education

and so on. And more often than not, it is when we come across people who haven't been as fortunate as us, that we feel this gratitude – along with an urge to do something for them, to help them. It was this thought and the will to translate it into action that inspired a few students from Ohio State University (OSU) to come together in September 2000 and start 'Sankalpa'.

'Sankalpa' means resolution and it started as an informal group of motivated students who wanted to give back to the people of India. A few months after their first meeting they solidified their vision for the organization - to concentrate on micro-developmental and sustainable projects in areas of sanitation, health, education, and agriculture. The OSU chapter was formally established in 2002. Sankalpa's first fund-

raising event was called "Chaat for Charity" wherein funds were raised by selling chaat at a campus festival. Thereafter members of Sankalpa helped raise funds through various voluntary activities and occasionally through small yet important personal contributions. These funds were used to sponsor various grass-root level and sustainable projects in India. Sankalpa also extended a helping hand during national disasters like the earthquake in Bhuj, Gujarat.

From the first donation of 250\$ to the Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund, Sankalpa has grown as an organization through the sincerity and dedication of its members. For the past few years we have been able to raise 2500-3000\$ every year and sponsor projects requiring in India. The small sapling of Sankalpa planted almost a decade ago has grown over the years, but there is no limit to how large it can grow, there's no limit to the number of people it can reach out to. It all depends on how many enthusiastic members we have, and this newsletter aims to spread the word – of what Sankalpa is all about and how YOU can contribute.

What's Different about Sankalpa:

Sankalpa is a voluntary organization run by the students of Ohio State University. All- year round we, the members of Sankalpa, volunteer in various fund raising activities on and around campus to raise money and once a significant amount is raised we identify and fund projects which fit in our vision and scope. What makes Sankalpa a little different from other organizations is our focus on *micro-scale, grass-roots level and sustainable* developmental projects. Unlike big Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), independent social workers and small non-profit groups working at a

local level are faced with frequent paucity of resources for their work. However, the local knowledge, experience, and community links within such groups mean that large developmental benefits can often be seen from relatively small investments. Hence, Sankalpa deems supporting these 'actors' of grassroots development important. Further, instead of funding projects which have short term benefits (these projects also have their due importance), Sankalpa believes in funding those projects which have the capacity to become *self-sustaining* in the long term.

Fund-raising activities: It's also about having fun!

Most of the funds are raised through voluntary work at various events. The college football season “kicks off” fund raising activities for Sankalpa. We work at food stalls at the OSU stadium on game days and an amount proportional to the sales is credited to Sankalpa's account. Working to raise money for a worthy cause, in the amazing stadium atmosphere is a unique experience! We also manage food stalls at commencement ceremonies at the end of each quarter.



Working at stalls in the OSU stadium

A very different activity we participate in every year is the United Nations festival organized in Columbus. We manage a stall at the festival and sell various items made in India ranging from greeting cards and purses to wall hangings and rugs. Beautiful mehendis (Henna tattoos) drawn at the Sankalpa stall are always a huge success.



Sankalpa's stall at the UN festival

The next big event is the international food festival called the ‘Taste of OSU’. In this we *prepare* food in the college kitchens and sell it at our stall in the food festival. This year, we laid out a lavish spread of paneer tikka masala, butter chicken, gajar halwa, mutter (peas) puffs and mango milk shake and sold 700 food tickets at the stall! It took us hours to make all of this and in such large quantities (we made 20 gallons of mango milk shake!), but we enjoyed every bit of it. Cooking (and experimenting) in HUGE utensils, with a constant friendly banter all around and the overwhelming feeling of accomplishment at the end of it all - is how I would describe those hours spent in the kitchens. This is what volunteering with Sankalpa is all about - having fun with friends while you contribute to a truly noble cause.



Cooking for the Taste of OSU



Sankalpa's stall at the Taste of OSU

These fund-raising activities have been the main source of funds for Sankalpa, though individual donations from members and individuals have also helped. There are ways YOU can donate: either online or by post and we will elaborate on that in the last section of this newsletter.

Projects:

Whether you volunteered for raising funds or made individual donations, a very valid concern is whether the funds are being dispensed to deserving projects and whether they are being utilized fully and correctly. Sankalpa has a systematic procedure (as described below) to ensure this.

Step 1: Identify and verify dedicated partners (independent social workers, small non-profit groups)

Step 2: Request for project proposal, joint assessment and decision making (during regularly-held meetings)

Step 3: Remit funds to India following proposal approval.

Step 4: Oversee project implementation, ensure 100% fund utilization

Step 5: Establish a reliable feedback mechanism including an interim and final report and visit by a Sankalpa member.

Step 6: Assessment with the help of academics and dissemination of results.

In this newsletter, we introduce you to some of our past and present projects. For details of all the projects we have done so far, please visit <http://www.sankalpaindia.org/>

Sanitation:

Project: Field trial of household management system (May 2005-June 2006)

Sankalpa partnered with Nirmal Gram Nirman Kendra (NGNK), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to the cause of environmental sanitation, for this project. The aim of the project was to test various waste management techniques developed by NGNK and to spread awareness about the health, economic and environmental benefits of these technologies. Sankalpa funding was used to provide subsidies to households in the installation of waste management technologies (vermitank, leach pit, vermibox).



Leach Pit Construction

Health:

Sankalpa donated 150\$ to the charitable NGO Cancer Patients Aid Association (CPAA) towards supplying medicines to cancer patients. CPAA works towards the Total Management of Cancer as a disease, which includes :

- Spreading awareness on the dangers of chewing tobacco, early marriage, multiple pregnancies, etc which are the main causes of cancer in India.
- Initiating steps for the early detection of cancer
- To provide complete assistance to cancer patients beyond that given by the medical profession, that is, taking a holistic approach, not attacking the malignancy in isolation.

Education:

Prabhudhha Bharat: A Village Library project for children in Lakhsaur, Bihar

Sankalpa partnered with Dr. Parag Bhargav (Assistant Professor at IIT Kharagpur and Founder of Prabhuddha Bharat; www.youhelpindia.org) in establishing a village library at Lakhsaur in Madhubani district. It is planned that the village library will be developed in to a library cum activity centre for underprivileged children in that area.



Three librarians with Dr. Bhargav

How can YOU contribute?

Every bit of your help can make a huge difference in someone's life. There are lots of ways you can contribute:

Volunteer: Most people agree that they gain more when volunteering than when they just donate. Main source of funds for Sankalpa is the fund raising activities around Columbus, OH. We need volunteers in organizing and implementing our fundraising events. Volunteering for events is not just doing good work but a good way to make friends, a lot of fun and most importantly, a nice learning experience. Please join us in our upcoming fundraiser and make a difference not just in someone else's life but in your life too.

Donate Money: If you are not in or around Columbus OH, and would like to contribute, donate to our 'Friends of Sankalpa' initiative. Please make your cheques/money orders payable to "Sankalpa"

For Contributions from within India mail your cheques to:

Sankalpa
C/O Sandip Bapat
B/8 Jestaram Baug,
Dadar TT, Mumbai - 400 014

Residents of US, Canada or Mexico mail your checks to:

Sankalpa
1448 Highland St, Apt B
Columbus, OH 43201

Donate Online: You can make an online donation using your credit/debit card. It is safe to make an online donation using Paypal - one of the most reliable online money transaction services.

Share your Ideas: If you have any ideas for fundraising, or a project or anything that could help us, please let us know. You may also send articles to Sankalpa newsletter.

Donate: You may also donate books, educational magazines, microfilms that you do not use any more.

Contact Information:

The best way to contact us is through email. Here's the contact information for Sankalpa:

Office Address:

Sankalpa
1448 Highland St, Apt B
Columbus, OH 43201

E-mail: sankalpa.osu@gmail.com

Current Office bearers of Sankalpa:

President: Gayatri Natu
Treasurer: Neha Dixit
Secretary: Vinayak Shedekar
Webmaster: Rohit Belapurkar