



MSMF Newsletter

# A Ray of Light

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## 1. Coping with COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic made us realize how vulnerable we all are and how important it is to secure Organizations that depend on us for their well-being.

Vikram Sundar, President of MSMF, writes about what we are doing with MSMF.

Pierre Barbeau, who supported MSMF while he was with Help the Aged Canada as its Executive Director and now on the Board of MSMF, shares his experiences and what he sees for MSMF in its future.

While Vikram tells you how the support was to the Canadian Project with Teach for Canada, I am going to give you details of the Eye care and Education Projects in India. Also, we are planning to work with Dr. Indu Gambhir on another Canadian project which prepares Inuit Youth in Health Care Programs and she describes the program to you.

An important note is that as we no longer have an outside bookkeeper and if your donations were returned for any reason, please resend them to the address in the attached Donation Form.

Our donors have sustained us for well over thirty years now. When we lose any one from the group, we lost one from the family. We fondly remember Dr. Prem Bhalla and pay our deepest respects to him.

*Sarma Vishnubhatla, Executive Director*

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## 2. Projects supported in India

### • Education Program

Before it became official as Sarada Vidyalayam in 1992, a few children, who were not tending cattle, came to learn to read and write for a few hours daily. Later it grew year by year to the status of a high school.

It became a very popular high school as it provided free transportation to children from the neighbouring villages along with free lunches, eye care and health checkups. In recent years, the demand from parents was so much that the school started providing instruction in two media, English and Telugu, the local language.

After the recent Pandemic triggered shutdowns, the school was reopened in June for 123 students in the primary school and 68 in the high school for a total of 191 students. During the developing years and recent times, the school received financial support mostly from MSMF.

- **Eye Care Program**

After several years of hard experience performing cataract surgeries in camps and other settings not equipped for performing eye surgeries, it was felt need to have a proper hospital, which led to the construction of Srikirana Institute of Ophthalmology in 1993.

Srikirana got a lot of attention and praise because of visits by expert international surgeons and well qualified resident doctors and support personnel. Just not satisfied doing cataract surgeries only, programs were started for providing care for all eye related ailments. Also access to eye care was provided to rural areas through Vision Centres distributed across the region. Further advancement was provided by starting teaching and training programs in the Eye Institute.

Since the beginning, MSMF played a significant role in developing Srikirana and its Eye Care program financially and otherwise. During the last two years, the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic was, following regulations, from a total close down of the hospital and Vision Centres to a limited work schedule. We heard that *"this sudden and unexpected turn of events will pose many challenges to continue the humanitarian programs and also cause a dent in our drive to attain sustainability of the organization"*. MSMF is continuing with its financial support.

- **Endowment Scholarship Program**

As we saw how difficult it was for those bright students of Sarada Vidyalayam after graduating from grade 10 to pursue higher education, it was apparent that we should come up with a way to support them financially and good mentoring. At that time, in 2010, we started an Endowment Scholarship Program and gave scholarships from the yearly income from Endowment Investments. Also, outside of the endowments, we started receiving yearly donations from individual donors in support of scholarships for postsecondary education. Augmenting further, MSMF started to provide

scholarships from uncommitted funds. In the last ten plus years it became a very successful program.

However, it has become a program which needed a lot of administration from our partner organization in India. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic made it even more difficult to administer the program with students distributed across many colleges and universities and now it seems may not be feasible for them to continue. One alternative we are considering is to pool the proceeds from the endowments to support educational programs for the needy in Canada itself. We are aware of some good programs to support and will inform you about them.

Thanks to generous and caring donors, the Endowments Funds we currently have are:

- (1) Michele Mukerji Memorial Scholarship
- (2) Rajni Saincher Scholarship
- (3) Saraswati Scholarship
- (4) Lynn and Maniben Mehta Memorial Scholarship
- (5) Kishor Mehta Family Memorial Scholarship
- (6) Jagjit and Amrit Khosla Scholarship
- (7) Shri Raj Kumar Gambhir Scholarship

Your views and thoughts on this program will provide us with valuable to guidance.

**Sarma Vishnubhatla, Executive Director**

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### 3. Projects supported in Canada

- **Teach For Canada**

We are happy to inform you that the fundraiser held to support Teach For Canada achieved its funding goal of \$10,000.

This was only possible thanks to the generous donations from our donors, so a big thank you for helping us achieve that goal.

Teach For Canada's mission is to support student success by recruiting and developing committed educators in partnership with First Nations.

**Vikram Sundar, President**

- **Program for Youth from Remote Northern Communities for Employment Opportunities in Healthcare Services.**

The COVID-19 Pandemic made it abundantly clear how vulnerable we all are and how much more the remote communities suffer for the lack of qualified personnel to work with providers of Healthcare Services.

We plan to work with Nunavut Arctic College, Algonquin College, University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and Nunavut Sivuniksavut, for developing study opportunities to youth in areas such as Nursing, Medical Care, Diagnostic Laboratory Services, Social Workers, etc.

We believe this to be a very useful program to provide opportunities to vulnerable youth and help marginalized communities.

Please give us your thoughts and support.

*Dr. Indu Gambhir*

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#### **4. Enough to Fill a Large Football Stadium**

I was hired as Executive Director of Help the Aged (Canada) in 1989, the same year that MSMF was established. A few years later, I met Sarma Vishnubhatla who was directing - and continues to direct - MSMF as a volunteer.

I was very impressed with the eye care program in Kakinada from the very beginning but saddened by the fact that Chandra Sankurathri's loss of his family in the 1985 Air India crash was the primary reason for the introduction of the program, which was set up in memory of his wife and two children. What a heartfelt tragedy.

The primary objective of Help the Aged was to assist poor and destitute elderly persons in developing countries and the cataract removal program seemed to be the perfect match for us. Sarma, Chandra and I agreed to submit a three-year funding proposal to

the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) following my first visit to Kakinada.

Incredibly, a cataract removal at the Kakinada hospital could be completed for \$35(Canadian) including the eye drops and the intraocular lens.

When I returned to Ottawa with the completed proposal for 3,500 surgeries per year for a three year period, I was very hopeful that it would be approved by CIDA and that MSMF and Help the Aged could begin raising funds from our Canadian donors to support this project. CIDA grants required that we raise \$1 for every \$3 contributed by the government. We waited anxiously and were elated to hear that our application was approved!

This project led to 15 years of cataract surgeries sponsored by CIDA, MSMF and Help the Aged; in other words, 52,500 surgeries completed, enough to fill a large football stadium.

When I retired in 2009, I continued to volunteer on MSMF's Board of Directors, help with the annual picnic in Ottawa, etc. Looking back at all of the projects to help the poor that I was involved with during my career, this one stands out as being the most cost efficient and the most rewarding.

I am very grateful for my involvement with Chandra, Sarma and so many other volunteers in Canada and India!

In terms of the future of MSMF, we hope to not only continue our support for programs in India but to also assist projects in Canada which will support needy Canadians (e.g., Inuit and various native organizations) as well as new refugees such as needy families from war-torn countries.

MSMF donors – through their contributions - will determine their preference for programs in India or Canada.

We thank you for your invaluable support!

*Pierre Barbeau, Director*

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**5. MSMF Trust with Ottawa Community Foundation**

“Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation Trust” (“MSMF Trust”) has been established as a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) at the Ottawa Community Foundation (OCF), one of Ottawa’s most highly regarded philanthropic organizations.

OCF works with donors and the community at large to bring about positive, systemic and sustainable change in our city and beyond, and has built an enviable reputation for astute financial management, high quality donor services, strategic grant making and innovative partnerships across the city.

**MSMF Trust** will be held in perpetuity at OCF, making it a permanent legacy for Manjari, Sarada and Sri Kiran. Every year, as the fund grows and yields a return that becomes available for disbursement, OCF will disburse the funds as per the advice from MSMF (the fund advisor).

**Vikram Sundar, President**



**6. Remembering Donor Dr. Prem Bhalla, Winnipeg, Manitoba.**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Prem Nath Bhalla (85), of Winnipeg, Manitoba. He passed away peacefully in the early morning of Sunday, June 13, 2021.

Dr. Bhalla was born in Punjab, India, grew up in Uganda, studied Engineering in England and after working for 10 years moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1975.

He became a strong and dependable community member, who took an active role in the Hindu Society of Manitoba, the Intercultural Council of Manitoba, the Folk Arts Council of Manitoba, just to name a few. He strongly believed in giving back to his community and volunteered countless hours throughout his life and instilled those beliefs in his family.

MSMF being a charity close to his heart, the Bhalla family requested donations to MSMF's Eye Care Program in lieu of flowers, and we thank all donors.

From all of us at MSMF, we send our heartfelt condolences to Dr. Bhalla's family and friends.

**Sarma Vishnubhatla, Executive Director**

**Thank You for Caring**

We hope that you are all well during these difficult times due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We pledge that with your donations, we continue to support programs in Education, Healthcare and Disaster Relief, as we have been doing over the past thirty years.

With your donation, please give the information requested in the attached Donation Form so that we can send you a receipt promptly.

If you have any questions or comments, please email them to: [info@msmf.ca](mailto:info@msmf.ca), or write to: MSMF, 23 Mary Drive, Gloucester, ON K1V 1G9.