

निष्ठा

n i s h t h a

rural health, education & environment centre



Annual
Review
2016/17

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Nishtha's Mission is to work for the benefit and development of society as a whole in the fields of health, education and environment. We work closely alongside the local people encouraging dialogue and learning, focusing particularly on women, children and young people. We extend into the local villages with our child welfare, health education, women's empowerment and environment programs.

For further information please see our website: www.nishtha.ngo
or contact us at: contact@nishtha.ngo

Nishtha Rural Health Education & Environment Centre is a registered charitable Trust.

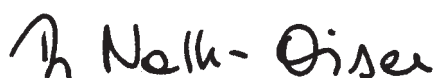
Message from Our Director

I am very pleased to be able to present this detailed account of what has been done by Nishtha Rural, Health, Education and Environment Centre over the last year. Our work, which started from very humble beginnings, has grown over the years with the help of so many sympathetic supporters to encompass a wide range of activities. Our agenda has been to help improve opportunities for some of the least fortunate members of Society. We have made it our aim to respond to the expressed needs of the community and work alongside them to heal and empower.

This year I am planning for the first time to accept my pension. I am now 68 years old and feel it is time to look for a young, preferably female, doctor who is interested to take on our holistic approach to healing. Although I will continue to work as long as I am effectively able to do so, Dr. Kusum and I both agree that we have to look for somebody younger to help in the clinic. When I am out raising funds it is particularly difficult for Dr. Kusum to do the work alone without being able to take a day off. We will advertise this job opportunity on different platforms and see who responds. My principal aim is that we should maintain our approach and the high standard of our work.

I am very happy and satisfied with the achievements of this past year, especially with regard to the improved welfare arrangements we have made for our staff. We have now made sure that each of our employees has health insurance, although this is not compulsory for Non-Governmental Organisations. In addition, we have established a gratuity fund for all employees who have served more than 5 years. This gratuity fund is a form of savings account, which is paid to them when they leave us or to their relatives when they die. These two benefits for our staff are in addition to the compulsory staff welfare payment that we have been providing since the beginning of the Trust.

All this is only possible due to the generosity of our supporters to whom I am very grateful.



Barbara Nath-Wiser MD

Administration

Our work at Nishtha is primarily funded by donations from abroad that we receive through two main Trusts, Nishtha Austria and Nishtha UK. These Trusts monitor our programs and ensure all the donations that they receive from individuals and organizations are used correctly. We are delighted that our German supporters have set up a new organization who will also collect and send us funds for particular projects.

Nishtha India Trustees

Nishtha India Trustees are now **Kamla Bhasin**, renowned feminist activist and director of Sangat South Asia, **Radhika Sharma**, formerly a member of Auroville and an experienced and engaged person whose particular interest is to set up libraries in the area and **Soniya Sebastian**, a young, well-placed local woman, married to Brian who manages our website, and knows everyone in the area. This last year we added **Niyantara Mankotia**, a well-placed local woman who is a fervent educator running her own Montessori school in Tiara village and **Puja Anand**, an IT specialist who recently moved to the area to be with her mother, who is an old friend of Barbara's and is very active teaching schoolchildren in the area voluntarily. They are all dedicated to steering our organisation through the administrative pitfalls we encounter, offering help in approaching government offices where necessary, and give sound advice and practical suggestions on how to ensure our work in the area has the most positive impact on the community.

Project Management

Whilst the overall administration: accounts, planning, budgets and reporting are overseen by **Philippa Russell**, our projects are administered by Project Officer **Mohinder Sharma** who meets the work teams each morning. The accounts and weekly detailed reports are now being very efficiently handled by **Vijay Kumar** with the assistance of a new recruit, **Ankush**.

From April to June we are busy completing the annual accounts the audit of which requires many visits to our chartered accountant's office in Dharamsala. We also employ a consultant CA from Delhi who helps us complete the complicated FC3 forms and makes our submission to the Home Ministry to satisfy FCRA requirements. Last year, all Indian NGOs were required to re-apply for permission to receive funds from abroad (FCRA). We are relieved and encouraged to know that we have been granted this permission for the coming five years.

Publicity

Public relations are important. We feel we need to keep Nishtha's many supporters informed about the work we are doing. We let the public know about our programs and activities through regular facebook posts, which are then re-posted on the Nishtha website to make them available to a greater audience.

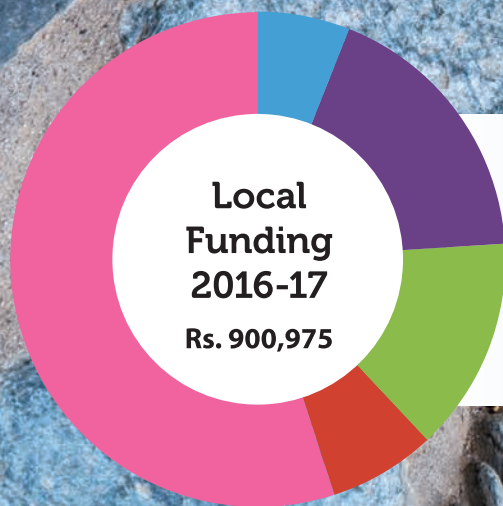
The Nishtha calendar is a major fund raising and publicity tool. Our sponsors and guests really appreciate it and on the walls of most the local shops and restaurants it draws attention to our name and activities.

New Project Office

This year we completed the complicated structure required to add an office above the consultation room at the back of the clinic building. The design was done by **Didi Contractor**, who was the building's original architect. All that remains to be done is to furnish it with blinds, appropriate tables and office chairs. It will be a useful space, larger than the main office, where the staff can meet to plan their work together.

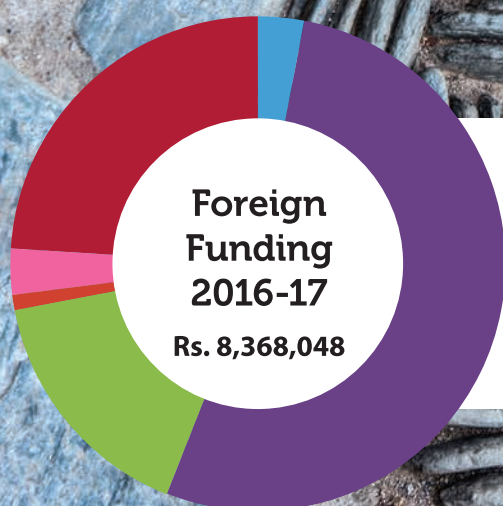
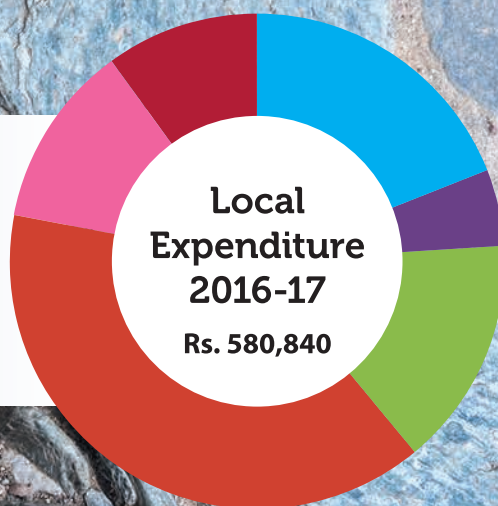
Vehicles

We are now running three vehicles: the Xylo which is used primarily for the outreach clinics and for visitors. The Tata Sumo is used for the school feeding program, collecting and delivering food supplies to local schools and for dropping and collecting disabled children at the Tapovan Ashram physiotherapy clinic. The ambulance which was purchased last year has been very useful for transporting very sick patients to Tanda medical hospital. Temporarily loaned to SHRI Clinic over the winter, Nishtha is now able to use it again. **Ravi** is the principal driver in charge of the maintenance and running of these vehicles, while three more of our staff are able to drive when required.



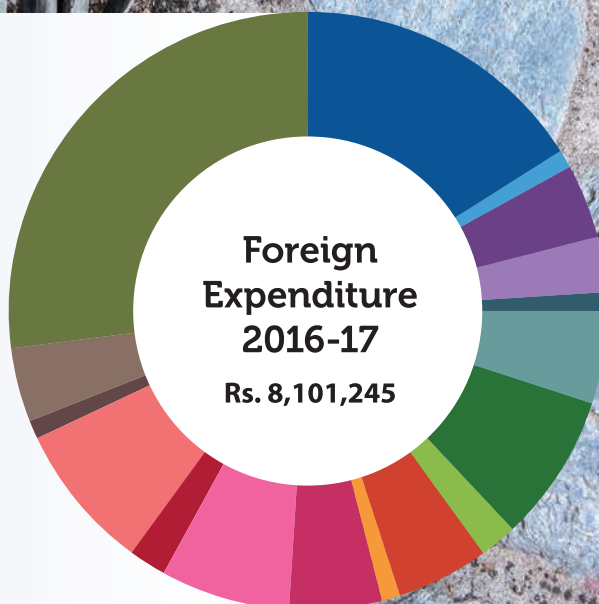
Bank Interest	49,591
Community Centre	163,094
Clinic	129,090
Single Women	59,200
Hope Project	500,000

Admin	112,483
Clinic	29,688
Community Center	85,292
HOPE Project	227,611
Single Women	68,733
Vehicle	57,033



Bank Income	252,426
Austria Funds	4,446,315
Nishtha UK Funds	1,359,660
HOPE Project	99,264
Other Donors	238,217
Carried Forward 2015-16	1,972,166

Health	1,263,118
Health Education	62,000
School Nutrition	325,401
Special Needs Children	224,814
Pre-Primary	96,299
Children & Youth	379,615
Community Center	623,666
Student Sponsorship	173,922
Single Women	410,436
Wenlido	51,323
Organic Agriculture	435,384
Admin	566,559
Clean Rakkar & Clean Water	149,147
Staff Increment	666,500
HOPE Project	74,769
Publicity Projects	360,239
Special Development Projects	2,238,053



Our Staff

Our staff are our most valuable asset—without them it would be impossible to run any of our programs. In an effort to retain their dedication to Nishtha, we try to maintain salaries in line with the minimum wage for each staff member's position and level of skill. However, because the salaries we provide have still not kept up with the actual increase in the cost of living or with what they could earn in similar organisations, we have, since 2012, introduced a staff bonus/cost of living increment, which is paid from a separate fund monthly to each member of staff.

Over the last 20 years Nishtha has implemented Indian statutory staff welfare benefit guidelines, whereby 10% of the basic salary is deducted from the individual's salary and 10% is contributed by Nishtha. Thus, 20% of the value of the salary is deposited in a savings fund each month, which accumulates to create a substantial sum to be paid to the individual when they resign or retire. Under pressing circumstances staff can 'borrow' from these funds on condition that the loan is repaid into their accounts over the following months.

What's more, in accordance with Government regulations, last year we introduced a Staff Gratuity Fund, which amounts to 15 days' salary for each staff member who has served more than 5 years with Nishtha. This is paid into a special savings account under the individual staff member's name, which can only be accessed on their retirement from Nishtha.

Concerned about mounting costs of medical treatment in hospitals these days, to protect not only the staff, but also Nishtha from liabilities should any of our staff fall seriously ill, we have also set up a health insurance scheme for those staff who do not receive such support through any government scheme. Single women are provided for by the government. This payment amounts to Rs. 48,000 a year, which we derive from the interest we receive from our fixed deposits.

Annual Staff Picnic

Nishtha staff and Trustees chose Baba Baroh, a famous white marble Radha Krishna temple situated high in the Kangra hills for their staff picnic this year. Travelling on winding back roads to get there, Vijay Bhardwaj and our female staff filled the bus with their singing. After visiting the magnificent temple all sang and danced and enjoyed a delicious lunch offered by the temple staff. It was a great day on which everyone relaxed together and enjoyed taking trendy selfies with each other!

International Congress of the MWIA

Nishtha was represented by Dr. Barbara at the 30th International Congress of the Medical Women's International Association (MWIA) which took place in Vienna from July 28th to 31st 2016. This colourful and stimulating event was attended by participants from 75 countries who met to discuss challenges facing the next generation of medical practitioners. Our associate, **Dr. Edith Gahleitner**, spoke about "Health Consequences of Violence Against Women in Rural North India", a subject she researched while working with the Nishtha Single Womens' team of activists. We are very proud that she was honoured with the prestigious Lore Antoine prize for her thesis. With her input we aim to establish a mental health program at Nishtha to help survivors of domestic violence. Our poster on holistic health care in rural North India prepared to advertise our work at the Congress attracted a great deal of interest.

The new Project Office at Nishtha Clinic





Nishtha weekly staff meeting – taking place in the garden to make the most of the winter sunshine.



Staff and Trustees enjoying Nishtha annual picnic at Baba Baroh temple.



Dr. Barbara and Edith displaying Nishtha poster at the MWIA Congress in Vienna.

Nishtha Clinic

Nishtha Clinic is open for out-patients 4 days a week, while on most Tuesdays and Thursdays we hold Health Education Camps in the villages. These are organised by our single women activists and run by **Dr. Kusum** who is extremely good at answering health related questions and giving sensible advice to the village women.

Our patients come both from the local village and much further afield. They tend to come from among the chronically ill and very poor who cannot afford to access other facilities and those who have tried all kinds of other treatments with little success. They come to us for holistic and careful assessment and treatment. This kind of patient requires the time consuming consultations and long term follow up care, which we are able to provide.

The primary cost of running the clinic is the salaries of our invaluable staff: **Dr. Kusum**, **Ram** the dispenser, **Suresh** his assistant, **Azad** the night watchman and 2 cleaning staff: **Rasma** and **Guddi**. We also maintain budgets for clinic utilities and maintenance, equipment and the running of our three vehicles, which are also partly funded by other specific projects. Medicines are also a substantial expense, although we buy from the cheapest reliable outlets including a charity called **LOCOST** that provides best quality medicines in a generic format at very reasonable prices.

Dr. Barbara trained in Vienna as an allopathic and homeopathic doctor, whereas **Dr. Kusum's** specialty is Ayurveda. They also employ acupuncture and local herbal remedies. At Nishtha we make our own ointments, cough and gastric remedies. **Dr. Barbara** and **Dr. Kusum** work together to provide patients with the best holistic care possible, personally supervising their treatment, when necessary in consultation with the doctors in Tanda Hospital.

Destitute and Special Services

Our clinic has bed space for acute patients and often accommodates chronically ill destitute patients. This year we gave special care to chronically ill elderly patients including **Mehri Devi** who was suffering from heart failure, **Brahmo**, an 80-year-old from this village who was suffering from pulmonary obstruction and skin problems and **Raghu**, another local 80-year-old with gastro intestinal problems and high blood pressure. They were all treated with a combination of natural products that we make ourselves and standard allopathic medicines.

In the second half of the year we looked after a Nepali slate labourer, **Tulsi Ram**, who suffered a stroke and lived with us for three months receiving regular food and care, while **Ram** and **Suresh** supervised his rehabilitatory exercises. When he was able to get out and about he found he could sell the clothes we had given him to buy liquor and when he had finished the proceeds he would return to his bed in the clinic to sleep it off. After his third "outing" we sent him back to his village from where his Nepali community contacted relatives in Nepal and, with help from Nishtha, escorted him back there.

Most recently we have been looking after **Govinder**, the seriously ill nine-year-old son of a poor family of labourers. Although he is receiving treatment at Tanda Government Hospital, he is staying in the clinic so his treatment is supervised by our doctors. Our staff and volunteers take it in turns to keep him company—**Ravinder** comes for some time in the mornings to go over his school work with him so he does not fall too far behind. **Vijay** and **Arvind** keep a friendly eye on him, giving him computer lessons and letting him play games on a laptop. Austrian volunteer **Simon** sits with him in the evenings watching movies and nature programs with him which he enjoys.

Mental Health Therapy

Because some of our single women suffer repressed trauma as a result of their experiences of domestic violence, for example, we were advised to try a therapy called 'Sand Play' with them. **Dr. Kishwar Shirali**, who has been working with these patients was introduced to this technique by **Jacque Kilty**. The project is also currently being used successfully with some of the local school children as a technique to stimulate imagination and to encourage concentration.

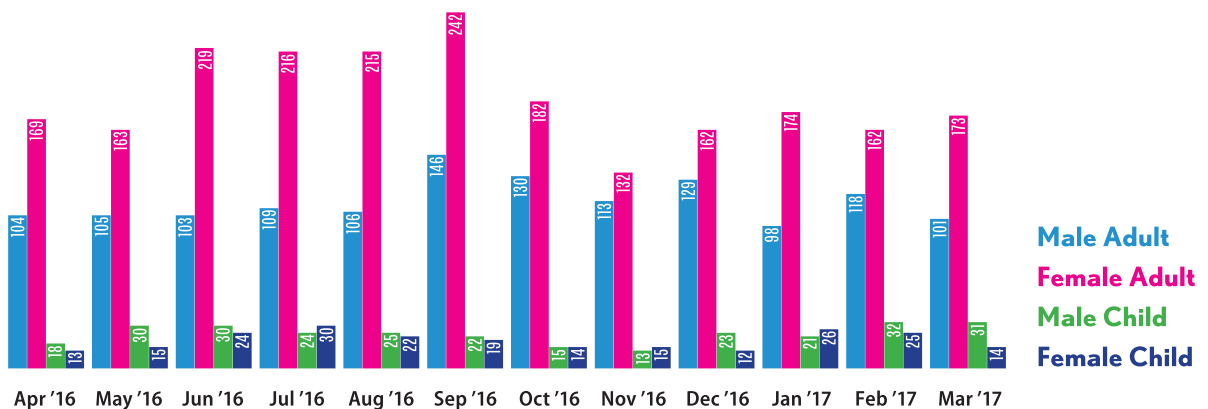


Dr. Barbara and Dr. Kusum seeing patients in Nishtha clinic.



Sanjoli with her attendant, Alka, with a therapist at CORD.

Nishtha Clinic Attendance



Health Education

Dr. Kusum and her team have carried out 76 health education camps in the surrounding villages this year. Organised by our single women activists, 2,742 villagers have attended these camps and taken advantage of the help offered. 692 have come for specific medical consultation associated with blood pressure and weight problems. Many seek advice from Dr. Kusum about their personal health problems. Although, since August 2016 we have stopped dispensing any kind of medication, there has been a less than 8% drop in attendance revealing that rather than coming for free medicines, people really value the information our team are able to provide.

The topics covered this year include detailed information about the female reproductive system, explained using videos and charts. Questions often focus on leucorrhoea, fertility and family planning. Nutrition, hygiene and water born diseases are very important topics since very many women suffer from anaemia and calcium deficiency made worse by poor nutrition and frequent bouts of diarrhoea. New lifestyle problems such as diabetes, hypertension, hyperacidity and constipation exacerbated by the availability of packaged sweets, snacks, sodas and processed foods to the neglect of valuable old practices such as using iron cooking pots and home produced natural foods including unpolished rice, wholewheat flour and unprocessed brown sugar instead of white sugar. Asthma and allergies are also problems which seem to be on the increase though the reduction of cooking on cow dung fires has reduced the incidence of pulmonary problems. Older women suffer very much from arthritis, joint pain and back ache, for which we have very good massage oils and Dr. Kusum gives simple demonstrations of simple effective exercises.

Medical Students

Nishtha welcomes medical students who wish to spend 4-6 weeks of their medical elective with us. One of our British students says:

“Nishtha is essentially a GP surgery with very little equipment and medication options are limited. Despite this, it does an excellent job with the resources available. Dr. Barbara welcomed me openly not only into her clinical work, but also her social life and day to day activities. I was isolated from the western world and my friends/other medical students, but I was in no way lonely. I had the opportunity to be involved in lots of new techniques and clinical skills, experienced a completely different type of medicine in a completely different culture and was asked for my medical opinion from another doctor for the first time!”

Special Children

Some of the patients in our area who require the greatest support are children with special needs. We take special care of them, providing them with mobility aids and transport to and from Tapovan Physiotherapy Clinic. A total of 16 Children have benefited from this provision. Some of the children only come to stay in the area for a short time, but others live here permanently and regularly attend the CORD centre at Tapovan. Sometimes there are so many we have to make two trips in each direction each day.

Arushi & Sanjoli

This year our long term wards Arushi and Sanjoli have been provided with new calipers. Their wheelchairs are regularly checked and when necessary repaired. Because of their severe disability Nishtha has found individual sponsors, who provide salaries for their helpers, enabling their mothers to go out to work as Kindergarten teachers—valued Government jobs. The children come to Nishtha Community Centre when the Tapovan facility is closed in order to keep them active and so we are able to monitor their health and well-being. These carers are supervised in our clinic by Dr. Kusum, who trains them in how to look after these children, ensuring that they move sufficiently, are fed properly and are handled kindly and gently.

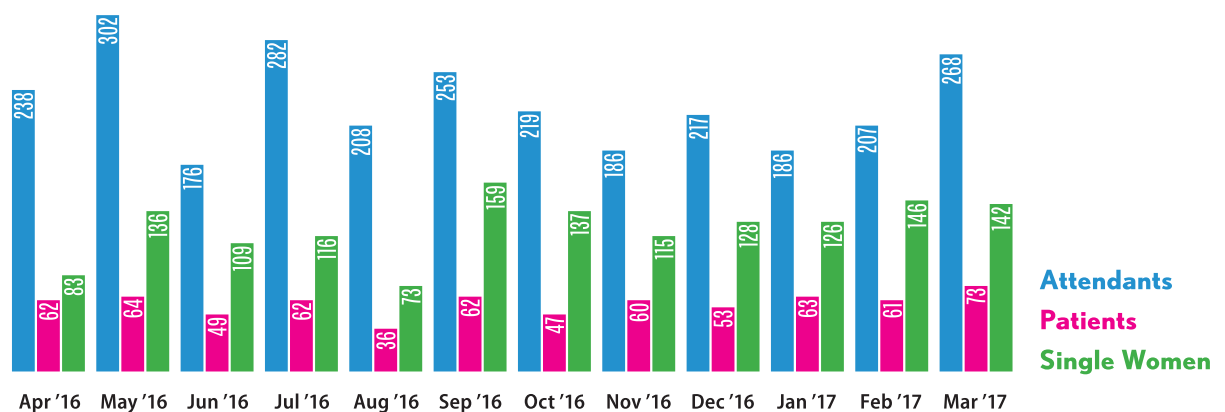


Dr. Kusum illustrating the process of development of a child in the womb during a village health education session.



Tim Robinson, a student doctor gaining hands on experience during his 6 week elective at Nishtha.

Health Education Clinics Attendance



Community Centre

Nishtha Community Centre has developed in to response local children's and young people's need for a space in which they can come to play and learn, develop skills and join programs and creative activities especially designed for them. Between 16 and 40 children come after school each day to play games—to learn to cycle, read and work with computers—and to attend tuition classes as well as craft, theatre or environmental activities that may be taking place on any particular day.

Facility Improvements

This year we added a curved blue roof to the open area in the Community Centre, covering part of the upper veranda and steps so as to allow dry access between the ground and upper floor, the computer room and workshop room which is a great advantage during the monsoon.

Our Team of Activists

Ravindra manages the children's programs, visits the anganwaris (baby crèches) and looks after the library. Vijay and Ankush run the computer centre. Ravi is responsible for the purchasing and delivery of fruit and vegetables for the school children's nutrition, assisted by Arvind. **Vandhana** is the community centre assistant, who also works with the Clean Village Program and on the farm. **Salochana** is the community centre cleaner. We also have a welcome stream of volunteers, who include Austrian Civil Servants, who make an invaluable contribution.

Nishtha Library

Our library this year has been restocked with books from Eklavia, Children's Book Trust and Pratham, as well as magazines. We also received a donation of more than 200 books from the Tibetan community, 100 of which were incorporated into the library, the remainder being distributed to the schools and anganwaris. We bought a new book box and dividers for the outreach library for Andara primary school, bringing our outreach school book boxes to five.

Computer Training

Vijay, together with his new assistant Ankush, has been holding two training sessions a day in the computer room. The first session is full of girls who are new to working with computers. They have been doing introductory exercises, learning to type and use Paint and Word. The second group comprises mostly boys, who already have some experience. They have been doing advanced typing, Paint and Word, and are now becoming familiar with Excel. During the last 15 minutes of each class the children enjoy playing games on the computers.

School Tuition

From September to February each year we provide help specifically for the children from the local school whose parents are unable to afford to pay for their children to receive private tuition, which is essential for them to do well in their exams. This year we had the invaluable assistance of **Mrs. Ravindra Kaur**, a retired teacher from Delhi who spent several months with us developing our staff's teaching and class management skills. She showed how the tuition class need not be just like school but rather a time to enjoy learning. She often starts with games or story-telling and ends with songs and a tasty snack. On Saturdays there were games with prizes. A total of 20 boys and 21 girls benefitted from this 5 month long program.

Remedial Classes

Having discovered that up to 30% of the children in classes 6, 7 and 8 were having difficulty reading, **Francoise**, a visiting Swiss teacher, suggested taking two or three children at a time out of class to the library for one hour each morning from the beginning of May until the end of June. There they could receive one to one help to develop basic literacy with **Ravindra Kaka**, who Francoise trained to help them. The children involved improved remarkably with this special help. Therefore, we restarted the program in October under the guidance of Mrs. Kaur, tracking the children's progress. This showed that between October and January the 10 students who regularly attended these classes, all improved their literacy and numerical skills significantly and are now better able to keep up with their class work.

Stitching Group

The Community Centre is also used by the Rakkar Women's Stitching Group. They have been doing very well this year with orders from Europe for their 22 varieties of practical and fancy bags.



The new roof over the stairs and terraces at Nishtha community Centre.



Children enjoying the books in Nishtha library after school.



Learning to use the computer is a popular and important part of Nishtha after school program.

Children's Sports

Diwali Childrens Sports

A Diwali sports program was held on October 28th, which was the first day of a week long school holiday. Three local government schools and one private school took part. About 100 children enjoyed the free style event in which anyone could try their hand at any sport or game. The boys naturally gravitated towards the cricket pitch, the girls enjoyed skipping and hula hoop, while they all loved athletics. Our community centre staff prepared the ground, clearing bushes and removing stones. They also purchased sports equipment and refreshments and enthusiastically took part in an enjoyable day.

Children's Playground

The children's playground is heavily used and has been enhanced this year by the addition of parallel bars and balancing bars. We have ordered a new climbing frame for the smaller children and a set of swings with seats suitable for toddlers. The playground has been greatly improved by the addition of a proper boundary wall at the bottom and on one side where it was being encroached on by a neighbour.

Cycling

Cycling has been a big hit with the children this year. We now have 7 functional cycles and our staff accompany the children onto the ground two or three times a week, when it is dry to teach them how to ride.

School Nutrition

Providing supplementary nutrition for the local school children has been one of Nishtha's long term undertakings, sponsored each year by the German group KinderHilfe. Clinical observation revealed that local children's poor health was due to the very basic diet available to poor village families. Lack of fruit and vegetables, as well as protein rich foods restricts children's development and chances to do well in life. Initially we ran a full midday meal program, which was scaled back to providing daily fruit, vegetables and other such supplements as tofu when the government introduced a basic midday meal in the schools. As the number of children attending our local Rakkar school declined, we extended our program to three smaller schools on the hillside above us, providing fruit and supplementary vegetables etc. to more than 200 children from the poorest families at an average cost of Rs.1,500 per child per year.

Including the Babies

We also provide fruit for children in the six anganwaris (baby crèches) we look after, as part of our outreach program. We try to improve the infrastructure of the very poor buildings, provide sitting mats and cooking equipment and we provide support for the teachers, making sure they have well stocked toy boxes and regular visits from Ravindra and our volunteers.

Children in the anganwaris



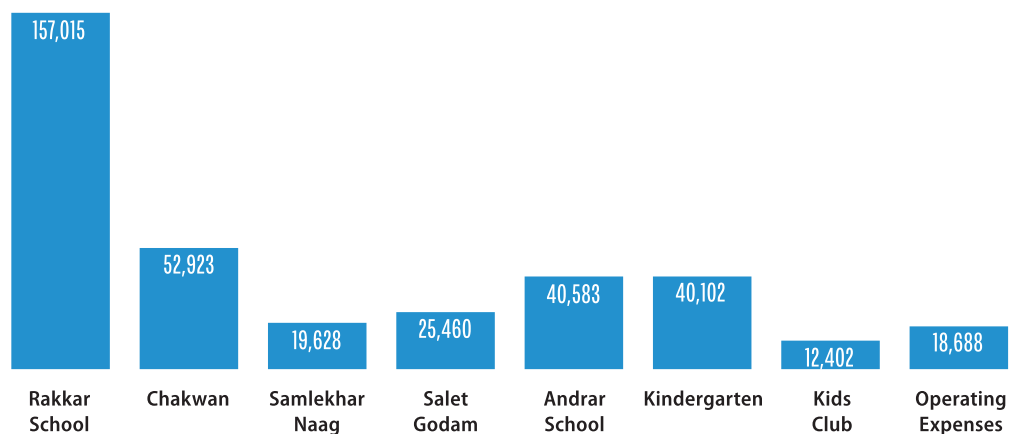


Girls as well as boys love the athletics competitions during sports programs.



Children enjoying bananas provided by Nishtha school childrens nutrition program.

School Nutrition Expenses



April 2016 -
March 2017

Health & Environment

We work towards raising awareness of public health and environmental issues among the local people. We provide clean water for the local schools and the village, encourage people to plant and care for trees, and train them in how to segregate garbage. We collect plastic waste, which is otherwise unusable, and make it into plastic bricks – a unique and innovative initiative. We are rejuvenating a plot of land we purchased as a model of how to use marginal land, which will become a focus of training for local women to learn sustainable organic farming techniques.

Water Filters

We now maintain five water purification units and are planning a sixth on the playground. Suresh, does a great job of cleaning the filters regularly and makes sure the systems are working properly. People in the village rely on this source of clean water and respect them, so they remain undamaged.

Tree Planting

In early September 75 trees were purchased to be planted in the forest around the burning ghat on the other side of the river. The trees selected provide cattle fodder so people will value and take care of them. Timber from them will eventually be available to be used as fuel for cremations.

Advertising our Clean Village Program

In an effort to drive home the message that waste must be segregated and that we are only collecting clean plastic waste, we have put up a large billboard designed by **Tenzin Chokey**, a Tibetan artist, in front of our plastic waste management shed. We made and distributed bumper stickers asking people to collect plastic waste instead of burning it. We also have printed plastic waste collection sacks.

Clean-up Drives

We bought rubber gloves and masks, as well as refreshments, for those engaging in our regular waste collection and clean village programs which take place at least once a month involving the children and our staff.

Plastic Brick Making

Vijay Bhadwaj is in charge of the plastic collection, segregation and brick making project, helped by Arvind. The job is demanding, but he is enthusiastic and good at relating to people and encouraging them to segregate their waste. The community centre staff along with **Sujata** help by stuffing the collected soft plastic waste into bags which Vandhana stitches to the correct size. Vijay and Arvind then spend the afternoons using our improvised machine to make compressed plastic bricks.

Our shed and garage now have plastic block walls and serve as a visible successful example of how they can be used. They have also been used in berms and underground filling.

Plastic Catching Grills

In order to keep drains and irrigation channels, so important in this area for watering the fields, clear, we have introduced grills into the water channels to catch plastic waste: These have been installed in places where they can be observed by a responsible local resident. Fixing the grating was not easy, but they seem to be working effectively and the channels are now less clogged with plastic downstream.

Rakkar Mela

Nishtha's stall at Rakkar Mela at the beginning of June is always a great opportunity for us to showcase our environmental and public health concerns. This year we focused on how to reuse plastic. We displayed study cards and picture stories made from tetrapacks, cushions from cement bags stuffed with soft plastic, our compressed plastic building blocks and 3 dustbins showing how to segregate garbage. In order to raise awareness of managing plastic in the safest way, visitors to the stall were asked to write down their views on environmental problems important to them. Lots of people visited us and enjoyed participating in our activities.

HOPE Project

Our Homeopathic outreach clinic in Bir run by volunteer doctor **Spero Lachis** helped many local patients last year using funds raised by themselves. Over the winter they made use of the Nishtha ambulance to reach into the more remote villages in their area. From this year they will be functioning independently.



Don't burn plastic, segregate your waste and don't throw unhygienic waste are well illustrated slogans in front of the re-cycling centre.



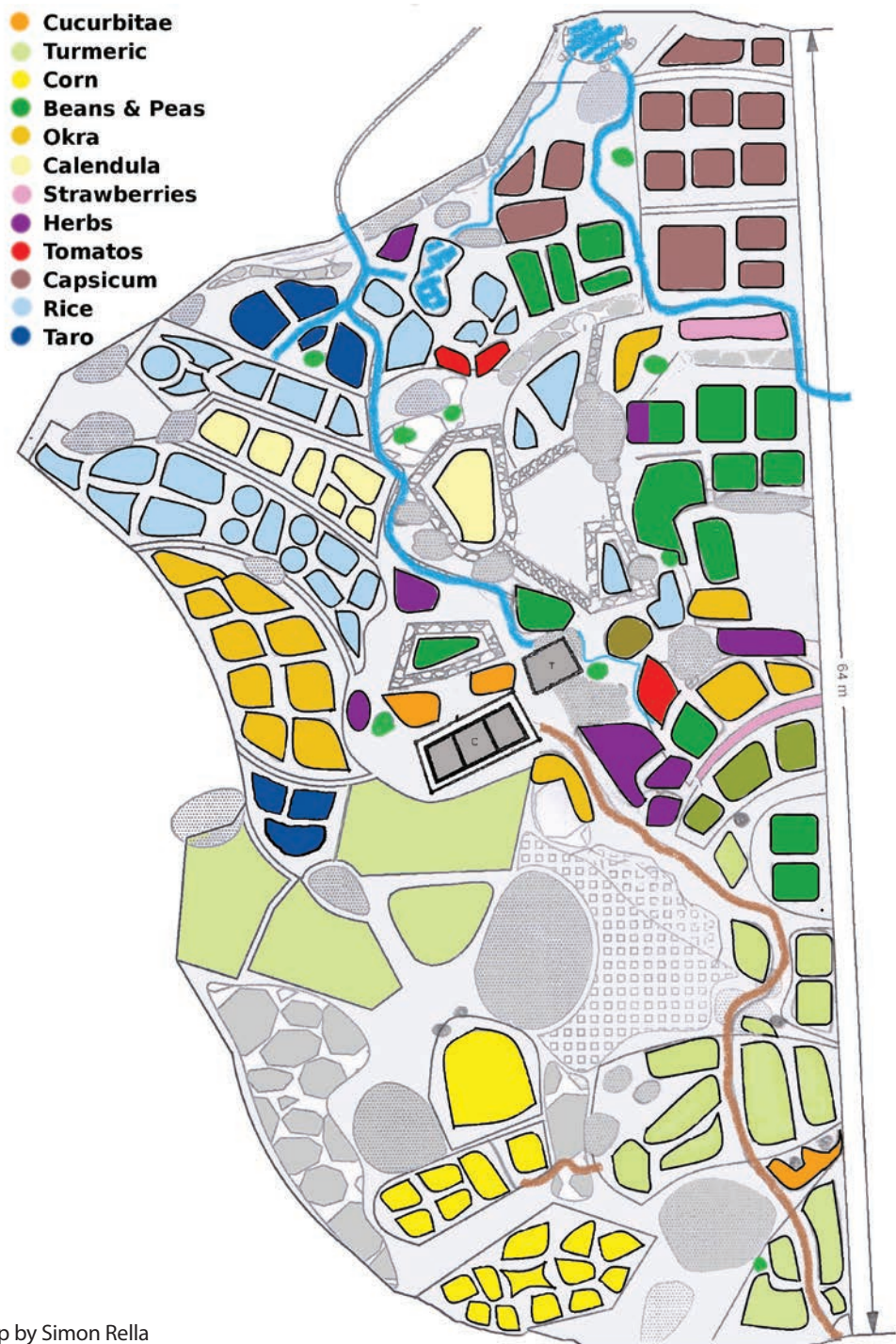
Turning clean waste plastic into blocks that can be used for building walls.



Children helping clear the drain on the Rakkar playground after school with Mohinder who encourages them to think about environmental issues.

Organic Farm

Our farm is now well established and is being taken care of by Sujata with the help of our clinic and community staff, as well as the single women team. During the summer an enthusiastic Italian volunteer put in many hours of heavy work shifting stones and digging new plots. Since September, we have had Simon from Austria, who has dedicated himself to understanding the science of compost and applying it on our farm. With his help the farm is now hugely more developed and soil quality is improving. In order to increase our understanding of organic agriculture, we purchased a small microscope with which to examine the quality of our compost.



Map by Simon Rella



Volunteers Simon and Spero advising Sujata and Vandhana on using innovative organic farming techniques to improve the quality of the soil.



Learning how to check the micro-bacterial and fungal content of the compost produced in Nishtha compost units.



Nishtha staff helping Sujata chop green manure to mulch the fields.

Single Women's Program

Since 2006, Nishtha has been building and supporting a forum for single women to share their concerns and address legal problems, domestic violence and health issues. Single women are the most downtrodden and depressed members of the village, as they are not accorded respect by the rest of the community and frequently have to put up with humiliating comments and dismissive treatment even from among their closest family. This program therefore sets out to encourage and empower these women by forming a support group and a forum through which to address their problems.

In 2016-17, our program contacted 3,339 women among whom 2,789 are registered members in the four blocks we work in. Of these, the great majority are widows, but they also include abandoned and divorced women, as well as a few who are unmarried. Our single women's activists hold meetings in each of the 98 village areas (Panchayats) they embrace. In each of the four blocks meetings are held every six months and the women are encouraged to join in rallies and programs to make their cause better known to officials and the community in general.

Nishtha provides health education and clinics in the villages the single women access. These clinics are organised by our six activists, who tirelessly venture out into the most remote villages by bus and on foot to reach as many communities as possible so women in need are not left out.

Our oldest activist, **Gyani Devi** retired this year (she was 78) and her place has been filled by **Ranjana** from Shahpur village. Ranjana was abandoned by her husband and has one child. She has been helping the program for some time and is enthusiastic about the work so we are glad to have her join our team.

Through an impressive series of events and program both in Nishtha, and in connection with SUTRA, huge gains in the position of single women have been achieved this year.

Achievements

- Ekal Nari Sangathan became registered as an organization at central level.
- Single women persuaded the Indian government to give pensions to all senior citizens.
- Our team attended a 10 day theatre workshop and engaged in communication skills training.
- Eighty women who work the land attended an organic agricultural meeting.
- Several health and legal cases have been addressed through the intervention of our activists and through public hearings with local officials.
- 2,100 women got Smart Cards enabling them to get free medical insurance.
- The movement "Define Separate Women" – "Swayat Nayay Panchyat" was launched and explained to Panchayat level officials in two meetings held at Nishtha.
- The women participated in the One Billion Rising campaign against violence.

WOMEN WHO OWN PROPERTY ARE OWNED BY NO MAN

Kamla Bhasin



Women speaking during a Himachal Pradesh State level meeting.



Gyani Devi, our oldest Single Women's activist who is retiring after years of valuable service to the project.



Single Women's block level meeting held in the village to discuss legal issues with a consultant lawyer.

Women's Events

International Widows Day

Two hundred women marked International Widow's Day by organising a rally and march in Dharamsala to alert officials and the public to the needs of Single Women. Their forthright songs and slogans echoed around the hills as they marched through the streets and ADC Rakesh Sharma met them and accepted their list of demands, assuring them that the Government is ready to listen to them and offer help.

Residential Seminar for Senior Single Women

A two day residential seminar was organized in Nishtha Community Centre for 46 senior single women, sixty percent of whom have been members since the program began in Himachal Pradesh in 2006. They are our most committed and valued members and are therefore the best people to ask their thoughts and feelings about the forum and how we can steer it to cater for their needs and make it relevant to them.

The lively program was led by activist **Radha Raghwal**, and Dr. Kishwar Shirali. The slogan for the meeting was "Maan Ki Awaz Ka Agaj" which means, "Begin to listen to the voice of the heart". They talked about the economic status of single women, and what steps could be taken to improve it. Even now, after so many appeals to the Government, only 90% of our group attending the meeting receive the widow's pension. The women appreciate the single women's forum for assisting them in accessing government schemes such as accessing financial aid for a daughter's marriage, to start a small business, to build a home, for medical help or to get their widow's pension. They engaged in lively and meaningful discussions about domestic violence, landless women, court cases, and again the importance of the single women's group in all these issues, enjoying the once in a lifetime experience of belonging to a group with no pressure or hindrances.

Communication Skills

Maya Narayan, an experienced single women's activist and psychologist held a 3 day Communications Skills session for our activists in November. Maya explained the value and importance of communication skills in their daily work, when meeting people, by opening to them, listening and understanding their problems. She emphasised the importance of first impressions and the need to follow the rule: No judgment No blame.

Maya continued to hold follow up sessions each month until March during the activists meeting at Nishtha to review the points raised and relate them to experience in the field. We are very grateful to Maya for these valuable training sessions.

Wenlido Program

Our Community Centre workshop room is used for the Wenlido Trainings run by Ravindra with the help of visiting trainers. This year, we have conducted two sets of workshops, although Ravindra and **Divvy** also held a training for 14 girls in August at a nearby organisation called Sambhavana.

In May, 19 girls attended a three day training with Divvy and Ravindra and in November **Priti** came from Bangalore to help Ravindra give a two day specialised training to 15 very young girls between the ages of 10 and 13, a time of their lives when they are most vulnerable. They were all very enthusiastic to realise their own strength and their potential to deflect dangerous situations. This gives them confidence when they go out to school and college. However, it is not easy to convince parents to let young girls attend such a training and the follow-up sessions we had planned were poorly attended. We need to work more on improving awareness in the community of the need for girls to be truly empowered to stand up for themselves.

Wenlido Feedback

- "Three days seems finished in three seconds; I enjoyed every single minute of the training and wish to do this again to build my internal capacity" – **Shabnam**
- "This is my second training and I feel more confident than last time. I would like to inspire more and more girls in my village to do Wenlido Training" – **Dipti**



International Widows Day rally in Dharamsala organised by Nishtha single Women.



Village level meetings with single women to inform and empower them.



Wenido self defence for girls training held in Nishtha Community Centre.

Student Sponsorship

Twelve students were sponsored to continue their studies through college this year. Nishtha pays for their tuition, transport, books and stationery and a small amount of pocket money. Most of the students are the children of single women who would otherwise be unable to continue their studies. The students get together at Nishtha each Sunday, where they study English, work with computers and practise local cultural dances and music—activities which encourage the students to become involved with Nishtha as a group.

Skills Enhancement

This year we have been able to host a vibrant and interesting English class run by our new Trustee Puja Anand. Although it was quite a struggle to get some of the girls to actually speak, they eventually presented skits and a cultural performance in the school for our staff and a group of visitors in March. This challenge to open up resulted in a delightful show.

Vijay continues to teach them computer skills after the English class, while Vijay Bhadwaj runs the song and dance practice sessions.

Our Top Student

Shakshi Sharma is 21 years old, and has been sponsored by Nishtha since 2012 to get through her college courses. Her outstanding performance in academic and other activities made her the leader of the sponsorship program. She graduated in the first division and is now studying for an M.A. in Economics through ICDEOL, Himachal Pradesh University. In 2016-17, we have been proud that she gave her services to the children in Nishtha's tuition program as a tutor and did a great job. She wants to be a teacher able to help children secure a better future.

Students Mountain Hike

Ravindra and Vijay, members of our Nishtha staff, accompanied eight of the college students we support on a three day outing into the mountains. They enjoyed the beauty of Kareri village and trekked up to the spectacular Kareri Lake at around 3,000 meters. It was the first time most of the students had trekked so far in the glorious Dhauladhar Mountains that form the backdrop to their daily lives. Despite getting very tired they had a wonderful time and say they will never forget the sight of the beautiful natural lake in the lap of green mountains and the glaciers. They were very grateful to Raju, a former Nishtha employee who is now a forest officer and helped arrange accommodation in the Forest Rest House.

Youth Sports

The Rakkar sports ground by the school has been fully utilised this year and is the focus of activity for the young people of the village every evening. The cricket pitch was restored after the monsoon and was the venue for a lively and exciting cricket tournament, which lasted from December 15th to mid-February.

Winter Cricket Tournament

Twenty-eight teams from all the surrounding villages took part in the tournament which, for the first time this year, was organized and run by a group of young people in the village who took the responsibility seriously and managed very well. The Sidhbari team were the final winners. This year no prizes were given, instead Nishtha provided the necessary equipment for the whole tournament and at the end this was presented to the winning and runner up teams. Refreshments were also provided from the quarter finals stage through to the final match.

Basketball Court

We have just set up a new basketball court on the Rakkar sports ground and look forward to holding a new kind of tournament for the village youth.



Sponsored students performing a cultural program for guests in Rakkar school.



Nishtha Trustee Puja Anand teaching our students to speak English on Sunday afternoons.



Boys enjoying playing cricket on Rakkar ground during Nishtha winter tournament.

Special Events

Theatre Workshops

Several volunteers came and held interesting and useful workshops and community centre events. In April **Farid Azad**, a former student of our friend Kishwar Shirali, held an eight day theatre workshop which was attended by our staff, the single women and local children and young people. Together they worked on methods to become more expressive within the community. In May we held a shorter but effective theatre performance highlighting local garbage problems.

Children's Summer Holiday Program

During the summer holidays in July, Mrs. Kaur, a retired teacher joined us and held a daily class that attracted a steady group of 20-25 children each morning. Most stayed on and were joined by others who came to the play sessions and computer classes in the afternoon. In the afternoons the community centre has been abuzz with children playing.

Monsoon Party

On Saturday 30th June, the last day before the schools re-open, Mrs. Kaur decided to hold a party for all the children who had been coming to her classes. She organized puris and kheer for lunch and we bought pencil cases and diaries to be given to each child. The day was filled with games and other activities. Everyone had a great time despite feeling sad that their kind teacher and mentor was going home to her family in Delhi. We hope she will return and spend more time with us!

Science Exposure

In a joint venture, Nishtha and Aaviskar, an educational NGO from Palampur organised a two day science fair at the Government School in Rakkar. The Aaviskar team arrived on day one with brilliantly prepared materials and taught the 7th and 8th class children basic science concepts using clear, practical illustrations. The following day the two classes split into smaller groups that worked eagerly together to demonstrate models and concepts to the other students and visitors who came to see what was going on. What a wonderful event! Thank you Aaviskar for your input.

First Aid Training

The Welsh St John's Ambulance Team of First Aid Trainers spent a very helpful and productive day at Nishtha in October teaching 25 local young people the basics of first aid, particularly for use in case of a natural disaster like an earthquake. They learned the ABC of First Aid, how to apply simple dressings and slings, how to treat burns, how to put injured or shocked patients into the rescue position and how to shift those with serious injuries. We thank **Des Kitto** and all his team!

Support Nishtha

Nishtha depends on the kindness of individual donors to continue our health and community work. If you would like to become a part of our work please donate through one of our Trusts:

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Nishtha Rural Health, Education & Environment Centre is a registered charitable Trust.
Registration No: 51 1/4/98, Tax Exemption No: N26 (Shimla) 80G/10G applied for; FCRA No: 182450048.
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Farid Azad holding a riviting theatre workshop session in Nishtha Community Centre.



Mrs. Ravinder Kaur with the enthusiastic group of children who benefited hugely from her monsoon fun learning program.



The Nishtha team manning the stall at Rakkar Mela — spreading awareness of womens and environmental issues.



Contact Us

Nishtha Rural Health,
Education & Environment Centre

Rakkar Village, Sidhbari,
Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh,
176057 India

phone: +91-98828-95838

e-mail: contact@nishtha.ngo

website: www.nishtha.ngo

Find us on Facebook