



Sankalp

Fundraisers in 2015-2016

Taste of India	\$12,073.00
Sanskriti	\$3,380.00
Football Games	\$4,391.27
Run for India	\$295.00
Total	\$20,139.27

Projects Supported in 2015-2016

Deepa Academy	\$7,523.53
REFA	\$2,592.10
Unmesh	\$5,208.35
Total	\$15,323.98

Sankalp



Association for India's Development, Penn State Chapter

For Further Information:
Association for India's Development
Hetzel University Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA, 16802
www.aidpennstate.org

Thank you for Sponsorship

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Taste of India Resturant (Lancaster, PA)

Thank you for Ticket Sales

Webster's Cafe/BookStore
Indian Pavillion
International Market
Krishnan

Thank you

State College Borough and Office of Physical Plant for making Taste of India waste-free

United Way for accepting part of our proceeds

Big hugs to the community members, and volun-

Editors: Heley Patel & Athul Krishna
Cover photo by: Mustafa Barbhuiya

Dedicated to the passionate volunteers
who helped rebuild Chennai.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Lounging in a pink, cozy apartment of my friend, I faced a statement. "I don't see the point of getting involved in a club." You are right, what is the point of getting involved with a club when you are a junior? Most of the organizations have a big social aspect to them, and as a junior, you already have an established social life. Sure, you can join a club to pursue a hobby, but what if you are already doing that with the group of your friends? As I was walking home, the statement formed a question, "Why am I involved so much with AID? Is there a point?" People are very quick to point out criticism, and that is okay if it is constructive. However, people do not realize the difference that AID makes in the lives of people back in India. It is hard to see that difference because it does not have immediate gratification factor, nor can you physically see it, but we are making a difference. Isn't that what matters? Sure, the world is filled with enormous problems. Sure, a single person cannot change the world, but should that stop you from trying to make an impact? We tend to forget that we are filled with so much potential because we start to self doubt ourselves. That self-doubt grows, and you start to question as to why you got involved in the first place. So why am I still involved with AID, when, I, too, have my moments of self doubt? Because, deep down, I know that I cannot simply sit by. I would not be able to live with myself if I just sat by and watched the world go around. I know, deep down, that I do have the potential to make a difference, and, at least, I am putting in the effort. I do not hold myself to the expectation to change the world, I am no Mahatma Gandhi. However, I do hold myself to the expectation to at least try to make some form of difference even in one person's life. That is why I volunteered to become a treasurer and also an editor of Sankalp, to try and work for something bigger. That is why Athul and I worked so hard in the creation of Sankalp. With pride and joy, Sankalp team brings you Sankalp edition of 2016. We hope you enjoy it.

Heley Patel & Athul Krishna



Deepa Academy

"We provide education and empowerment to the blind and differently abled. This residential primary and higher primary school aims at helping blind girls, primarily from rural Karnataka, attain self-sufficiency and quality education. The academy provides residential education for grades 8th to 10th."

Donated ₹s 4,67,300 / \$7,923.55



Koodu

"There are people who do not have access to cardinal humane rights such as water, shelter and education, and "KODDU" Trust concentrates on giving individuals an opportunity to have both these and more. We reach out to miscellaneous villages, towns, families and individuals who strive to live their day."

Donated ₹s 2,00,000 / \$3,017.03



Unmesh

Unmesh is an intervention program to support children in Tripura. Established in 2009, with support from AID Boise chapter, we work to protect, implement and eliminate trafficking and violence against children and women.

Donated ₹s 5,25,500 / \$7,408.55



Refa

Rights and Equality for All (REFA) focuses on popularizing the use of RTIs (Right to Information Act) to channelize feedback about various Government schemes. The greatest achievement is that the people are now filing RTIs by themselves.

Donated ₹s 1,61,000 / \$2,592.10

Some projects that A.I.D actively supports

Association for India's Development

www.aidpunstare.org



Taste of India

Our biggest annual fundraiser where our fellow community members cook delicious Indian food.



Bollywood Night

Biennial event promoting Indian culture through dance and music.

Come and join the fun!

Association for India's Development

www.aidpennstate.org



Football Volunteering

With hard work and dedication of the volunteers, we are able to raise about \$4000 to support up to two projects in India.



Sanskriti

A night filled with breath-taking performances by Penn State clubs and community members, and delicious food.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The transition from India to America is exciting and many ways is an eye opener. It gave me a different perspective to look at social problems back in India and to appreciate the efforts taken by those who are trying hard to make a difference. Association for India's Development aims at helping organizations in India who strive to bring a positive change in the society at grass root levels. We at the Penn State Chapter are doing our bit to extend support to them. We organize events around the year that are absolute fun great social mixers for everyone. The events this year began with Mr. Srinivasan's visit to State College. He has been the pioneer of SLRM project (solid and liquid resource management) which is gaining momentum with its proven results in many villages and townships in India. His ideology of treating waste as a resource, and using its available potential in a timely manner has not only helped keep the surrounding clean and free of dumping grounds but also generated employment and revenue! He took a tour of State College Burrows and Penn State sustainability and waste management sites during his visit and inspired us all to share his ideas and implement them to the best of our capacities.

The first two events in fall were the Indian Independence day and the fresher's picnic. We were glad to see a new batch of enthusiastic students who showcased their talents at the event and happy to see new people who became a part of AID soon after!

The next big thing was the football season, a matter of pride at Penn State and watching at least one football game at the beaver stadium is on everyone new students' wish list! AID PSU has managed a food concession stand at the Beaver stadium for years and this time, we thought of giving a boost to our volunteers and had a raffle after every game to give a free ticket to the next game! Thanks to our enthusiastic volunteers, we raised around \$4500 this season! It was great to hear that our volunteers thoroughly enjoyed the experience! I would like to mention a special kudos to Latha who has been the manager for the AID PSU concession stand for the past 4 years. Her presence and guidance has been instrumental in training the next generation of managers Rijul and Kshitij. To celebrate the spirit of our rich culture, we hosted Sanskriti, an evening full of music, dance performances, and authentic Indian cuisine. I am grateful to our co-hosts, Infusion a team of fiercely professional undergrads from Penn State who managed the show excellently!

This year, we celebrate the 18th annual food festival Taste of India in a sustainable way as always! The founding family of this event and AID PSU, Mr. & Mrs. Sonti moved to Florida a few months ago. The dosa had always been on the TOI menu and Mrs. Sonti's absence in the TOI kitchen crew has definitely influenced the change in the menu this year! This year we have tried to get a wholesome mix of different Indian cuisines and we are hoping you all loved it!

This year we are proud to sponsor three projects. In West Bengal, the volunteers of REFA spread awareness about the rights and educate people about the government schemes that would help them live a better life. The Unmesh Child protection center in Tripura is providing basic health care, education, vocational training to orphans and underprivileged children. Deepa academy is a residential school for visually disabled girls from rural areas of Karnataka. They provide a safe environment for the girls to learn and prepare them for a better self-sufficient future. The PSU faculty advisor for AID PSU, Nivedita Acharya visited a few of the projects in her visit to India. I would like to thank Athul Krishna, our Overall Project Coordinator, who took an initiative to keep a constant dialogue with the organizations. He went much beyond his designated duties to find information about available grants for our benefactor NGOs and helped them compile necessary paperwork!

I am contemplating the goals we achieved and the challenges to come. This year we wanted to revamp our website and start streamlining all AID PSU operations from one single location. Thanks to our webmasters Rijul Dhaner and Siddharth Advani who did a splendid job with the new swanky website! Speaking of challenges, getting students interested and actively involved in AID is very crucial to keep a steady flux. Siddharth Advani and Nilay Shah, our go-to troubleshooters will soon be graduating and we can only try to collectively match the knowledge bank of information that they are! I thank Manasi Kamat, Neela and Hemant Yennawar for believing that a novice like me could handle this! I have been extremely fortunate to have found amazing friends at AID. They have been good counsels, creative minds, great chefs, motivated and very dependable individuals. I would sincerely like to thank my AID family, the students, alumni and community at State College for supporting, participating, donating and volunteering for events!

Manasi Biwalkar, President of AID Penn State, 2015-2016



Children at Unmesh Child Protection Center, Tripura



Ghammdyas performing Garba during Sanskriti, 2015

MEMOIRS OF THE AID VETERAN, DR. SATINDAR MOHAN BHAGAT



Each one of us is excited about the possibilities that are open to AID as she grows further in service to the people of India. To envision where we are headed, it is important to look at where we have come from. I am taking the liberty of sharing my personal perspective from the high points of the past:

1991

Five graduate students (Meenal, Ramani, Venugopal, Riyaz, Ravi) led by Ravi file at the Articles of Association

I start participating on my return from a sabbatical in India. The facts are, until '92 when my younger son graduated from Cornell most of my efforts were directed toward getting my children to a point where they could take off on their own so I decided that was the time when I must start doing something for the other CHILDREN of India. I spent time in all four corners and to my delight when I got back AID had taken root in University of Maryland, College Park.

1993-96

AID establishes contacts with groups in India - Dr. Parmeshwar Rao & Dr. Parameshwaran, Tamil Nadu Science Forum

Chapters begin in Pittsburgh and Princeton

1997

All chapters meet in College Park

AID adopts a working model for projects in India - Focus Villages and Seed Villages

EB - BOD start operating

Taking a cue from what happened when Gandhiji returned from South Africa, I, among others, initiate the concept of AID - Fellow for those who want to get involved on a long term basis right away and Pilot Fellow for those who are not yet ready for a long term commitment. Balaji decides to return to India to work full time. Balaji is our first fellow and started work in Tamil Nadu; Ravi follows soon after.

1998

First concert by Dr. L. Subramanian

Conference in Chennai - AID+BCT+TNSF

1999

AID gets involved in providing help to the people of Odisha in the aftermath of a Super Cyclone. We raise INR 150,000.

2000

AID conference in Boston

We enable Balaji's Hundred Block Plan

The concept of a Saathi is established. On being challenged by Sri Lakshmi, I change Fellow to Jeevan Sathi and Pilot fellow to Associate JS.

2002

Earth Quake in Gujarat -> now people know that AID is organized to help, we raise INR 500k for both immediate and long term relief.

10th Anniversary conference in College Park. Sainath's keynote talk lasts for 6+ hours and is attended by 350+; Medha's visit has a big audience.

2004 - 05

Tsunami super disaster

We raise about INR 300,000. Balaji and group organize a huge effort in Chennai

2006 - 08

AID expands, more chapters, larger amounts raised, project numbers increase. First retreat in College Park

2009

JS program reviewed. Major changes

2010

AIRF established.

Apart from ongoing projects AID gets deeply involved in providing relief to victims of major disasters

2011

Second retreat, Development Coordinator comes on board in November and AID gets award.

To think of next steps, in our conference call a few evenings ago Rashim talked about having a metric of how effective AID had been in promoting “development” in India. Obviously this is an essential exercise. However, before we get too deeply into it I would like us to keep the following caveat in mind. Although there is no doubt that AID volunteers, JS’s Sathis and DC have worked very hard and done an excellent job, looked at from the macroscopic point of view our footprint in India has been quite small both financially and in woman/man-hours. We can justly feel good that in the projects that we have undertaken our collaborations have led to positive outcomes. However, the reality is that on the scale of the entire country.

AID is quite tiny so in working toward establishing a metric we should keep this in mind. The analogy to an intrinsic semi-conductor (dictatorship) and a metal (democracy) come to mind. In the former a few impurities are very effective in the latter not so. The challenges that need to be addressed require thinking of how to scale our efforts to make overarching changes.

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SKYPE SESSION WITH DEEPA ACADEMY

Latha Bhushan, Manasi Biwalker, Athul Krishna, Janak Jethva

In 2006, Mr. Shantharam established Deepa Academy in Bengaluru, Karnataka. The Academy provides free education, lodging, boarding, medical services and supportive services for students (grades 8-10) who are blind and differently abled. In 2011, the Association for India Development (AID) funded Deepa Academy. A significant portion of the funding was allocated towards buying a braille, braille paper, and walking canes. In 2013, the Academy started a residential school for the visually challenged students (grades 1-7) near Chamarajnagar, a rural area in Karnataka. In 2015, AID funded the development of this new residential school.



Mrs. Latha Bhushan had the opportunity to visit Deepa Academy in January 2016 and was able to see the institution's accomplishments firsthand. She was given a tour of the new computer teaching center for students with visual impairment. This computer center was recently created by Deepa Academy in collaboration with the EnAble India organization and the Smileys India foundation. The computer center is about 15 minutes' driving distance from Deepa Academy and houses three computers. EnAble India trains, counsels, and prepares persons with disabilities to join the mainstream workforce as confident and empowered individuals. Smileys India is a NGO that is focused on integrating persons with disabilities into mainstream society through inclusive volunteering that focuses on art, culture, technology, sports, and education.

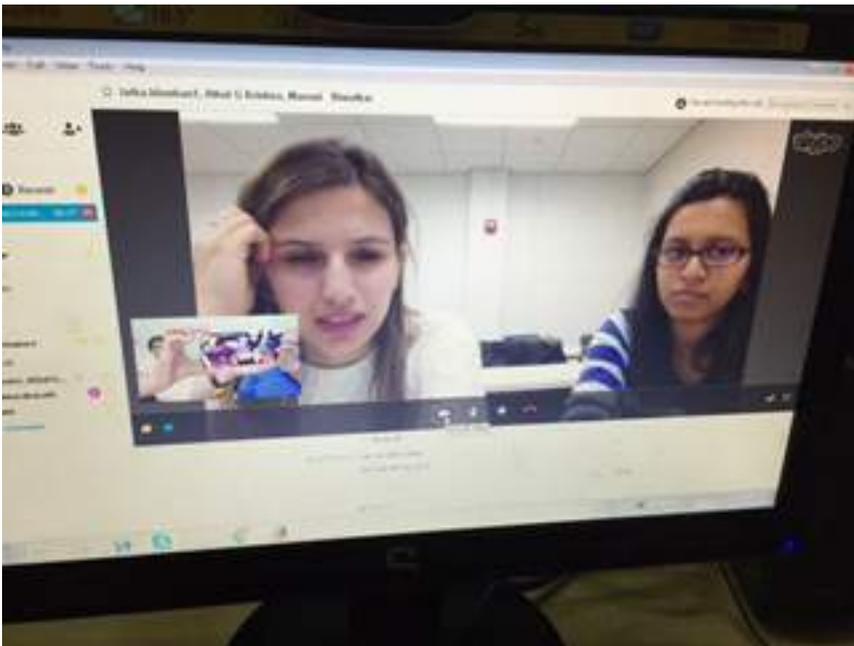
Mr. Shantharam, is keen on creating opportunities for Deepa Academy students to interact with other students who face similar challenges or have similar experiences. To facilitate this interaction, Manasi Biwalker, Athul Krishna & Latha Bhushan organized a Skype-based interactive session for Deepa Academy students with Ms. Deniz Doke, a graduate student from Penn State. Ms. Doke, a native of Turkey, is a student with visual impairment in the Penn State College of Education. This was an effort of our AID Penn State chapter to go beyond supporting their benefactors with financial support. Deniz has an exceptionally inspiring career. She has a Master's degree in Psychology with a specialization in counseling. Upon completing her PhD she wants to be a dedicated teacher and would train students in educational counseling.



The interactive Skype session, coordinated by Athul Krishna became a reality on January 12, 2016. Latha Bhushan brought together Deepa Academy students and staff in Bangalore and served as a facilitator during the discussion. Manasi Biwalker and Janak Jethva served as liaison for Deniz Doke at Penn State campus. The students at Deepa Academy gathered around the computer with great enthusiasm to connect on Skype with Ms. Deniz Doke. Deniz spoke frankly about her struggles during schooling and through college and how she was determined to pursue her dreams while ignoring people who tried to discourage her and discriminate against her. Deepa Academy students said they were inspired by Deniz's talk and they found her to be an excellent role model. Deniz answered questions related to her career and also connected with the girls telling them about her personal life, teenage crushes, and hobbies! She gave the girls valuable advice to never let anyone discourage them and to never give up on their dreams.

Deniz also told the girls about JAWS software and the mobility cane have remained as her best friends throughout her life and the girls couldn't agree with her more. (JAWS - a software program that reads information from a computer display and provides voice output). The students at Deepa Academy are very eager to continue these types of interaction sessions with Ms. Doke and our chapter is continuing the efforts to provide more opportunities for the students of Deepa Academy to have such conversations with Deniz as well as other individuals.

Deniz's story was inspirational and heart-touching not only for Deepa Academy students, but AID members also. Manasi, Athul and Janak got to learn about her struggles ranging from difficulties in accomplishing daily tasks to societal stigma towards differently abled people. We learned how simple solutions such as canes and brailers, as well as technological solutions such as JAWS software are empowering visually impaired people to become more and more independent. It is wonderful to see how well Deniz has adapted her life to enable her to perform even complex tasks herself. For instance, she enjoys swimming as a hobby! In the beginning, it was hard for her to keep sense of direction in the pool. Her swimming teacher came up with an ingenious solution. He tied her to a straight rope that ran across the pool so she was able to feel the rope tugging when she went off course. We all also need to learn to adapt to changing life situations, and always try to focus on staying optimistic and finding solutions to the challenges rather than becoming depressed or disheartened.



Although there is always demand of improved assistive technologies, what is more needed is a shift of our mindset towards differently abled people. Deniz demonstrated a vibrant personality infused with tenacity, candidness and radiant smile. Differently abled people are not desperate for our pity or sympathy. They are already much more strong-willed than many of us. What they need is our empathy, support and opportunities to flourish. For example, Deniz's math teacher wasn't willing to help her because he didn't believe that Deniz would be able to learn the visual concepts of Math. But when he saw her impressive performance in the first exam, he offered to help her himself. We need to learn from the struggles of differently able people to always be grateful for everything we have, and to persevere in the face of adversities. In Deniz's words, "If someone tells me I can't do something, it increases my determination to do it that much."

"We are all born with a divine fire in us. Our efforts should be to give wings to this fire and fill the world with the glow of its goodness."

- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire



Assam Floods, 2015



8+ YEARS OF AID CAMARADERIE

Siddarth Advani

“So, you folks cook for 500 people in one evening?”, I asked in disbelief. “Well, by ‘we’, I really meant the Indian community here in State College”, my host for that evening replied. It was my first year at Penn State and I was at “yet-another” potluck party. On a separate note, I have come to believe that the number of potluck parties you attend is inversely proportional to the number of years you spend as a student – true story.

Coming back to the topic of discussion, the idea of a food-festival to raise funds for supporting socio-economic projects in India was not only novel but also exciting. Aptly named the Taste of India (ToI), the day-long festival involved intricate planning and a collective effort from the local community and the students of Penn State. Being ‘fresh-of-the-boat’, I was more than eager to get involved with the event and with the AID Penn State chapter. And year after year, the ToI juggernaut has marched along, steadily improving and adapting to the changing circumstances. As an AID volunteer, I have tried my hand at various activities, and in the bargain, have learnt more than I ever thought possible. From helping out with decorations, to writing/editing articles for this very magazine, to being one of the designated drivers driving around State College on the day of the event, to having sumptuous meals at the homes of our endearing community members or just attending the weekly Community Service Hour (CSH) and learning about the various projects that our chapter supports, AID Penn State has been like family here in State College - a home away from home.

While ToI, with a legacy of 18 years, is and will probably remain the *crème de la crème* of all events organized by our chapter, it is in fact just the tip of the iceberg. The chapter is busy all around the year planning a variety of activities like the annual Welcome Picnic for the freshers, or organizing the Independence Day celebrations. Also, as a tradition, during Football season in the Fall, the chapter manages a concession stand at Beaver Stadium.



Every home game, AID volunteers set up the stand, handle sales and manage inventory throughout the day. Given the rigor of studies at Penn State, the daylong travails may seem too exhausting for students to handle every week, but this team effort not only hones one's management skills but also is an ideal opportunity to network with seniors. And the chance to watch parts of the game from the vantage point of our concession stand is all worth the effort. As one of my mentors at AID once put it, the whole Football season is Fun-raising rather than Fund-raising.

To conclude, as an AID volunteer, the opportunities to excel are immense. One week you may be asked to help organize a workshop on social entrepreneurship; another week you may have the opportunity to interview a journalist working at the grass roots; and at another time, you may have the privilege of meeting a celebrity who is coming to participate in a global program. And so while AID is altruistic in its ventures, these small perks do add up over time and there is always the added incentive of making new friends who can add more meaning to one's life.



Ben's site visit to Koodu's Sanitation Project, Tamil Nadu



Classical Dance Performance by Community Children at Sanskriti, 2015

THE LEGACY OF TASTE OF INDIA

Siddarth Advani

Every Spring semester, the AID Penn State chapter gears up for its annual food festival, Taste of India - a fundraiser where the Indian community in State College displays its fine culinary skills by offering to cook for 500 guests and the student volunteers help plan and organize the day-long event. In its 18th consecutive year, the festival is a sublime blend of various cultures coming together to make it a day to remember.

I have been a part of the volunteering team for a few years now, and I often wonder how someone could have conjured up this idea back then - to cook food for over 500 people. That too, Indian food; for the culinary complexities differ depending on which part of the country one comes from. To someone from Gujarat, Kadak would be an evening snack, while to someone from Maharashtra, it would rather refer to a special kind of tea. I remember once being a witness to a conversation between two friends who were arguing as to how Dosas should be made; for both were from different states. I ended up having a sandwich for dinner that night. But I digress.





Even if we were to leave the inherent complications involved in cooking for a large gathering aside, just expecting that people would show up seemed extremely ambitious. But while this idea was bold and out of the box back in the day, it clicked because it was a good idea. Indian food is tasty, there are no two ways about it. And once a recipe is finalized, then the quantity can be more-or-less scaled to cater to a large audience. And when you have a strong student-community bonding to top it off, then making such an event to work is like teaching a fish to swim.

However, planning an event at such a large scale is not short of confusions and chaotic moments. And as new students get involved, new logistics are thrown in, new ideas attempted. Some stick, some are forgotten. Needless to say, since its conception, the people of State College have embraced Taste of India; and invariably the event has gone house-full. And it is really endearing to see a lot of alumni too who make it a point to come for this festival.



Rights and Equality for All (REFA) Community Meeting, West Bengal



Kids' Fashion Show at Bollywood Night, 2014

CONNECTION WITH COMMUNITY

Janak Jethva



When I moved to State College, I was pleasantly surprised by friendly and welcoming environment of the close-knit Indian community. The community organizes many events throughout the year ranging from Navratri celebration to outings at local parks where everyone participates and enjoys the event! Association for India's Development is grateful to have such a generous Indian community helping us in all of our endeavors such as the Taste of India (TOI) and Sanskriti.

Taste of India could not have been possible without the kind support of Indian community that provides us with delicious home-cooked food. As students living far away from home, we often miss “mamma ke hath ki roti” but the food cooked by the Indian community members reminds us of that taste. When I went as a driver for TOI to collect food from the community members, I was always greeted with great warmth and respect. I felt the same affection when I went to sell Sanskriti tickets at story hour at Mr. Nagesh Sonti's house. I got to hear stories from the life of Krishna told passionately by Mr. Krishna Jayakar. His style of story-telling captivated children and adults alike. After the story hour, I was given some time to address the people gathered there about Sanskriti. Everyone in the community was eager to celebrate Diwali with us at Sanskriti. In the end, we were served delicious Idlis and tomato chutney, thinking of which still triggers my salivary glands. The community not only came to Sanskriti but also participated in the program.

On behalf of AID Penn State, I would like to thank everyone in the Happy Valley Indian community, or more appropriately Happy Valley family, for your ever growing support in our endeavors. It is your help and love that empowers us to support a variety of developmental efforts in India.

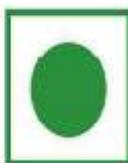


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Education Program run by Mandra Lion's Club, West Bengal



Society for Indian Music and Arts (SIMA) at Sanskriti, 2015

FOOTBALL VOLUNTEERING

Rijul Dhanker



During the fall semester Penn State football is usually in full swing with six to seven home games in the season. Beaver stadium is one of the few stadiums where all the concession stands inside the stadium are staffed by local organizations that support nonprofit activities, ranging from fraternities or clubs raising funds for THON to church groups supporting the local food bank.

AID is in charge of running one such stand where we usually raise around \$4500 as commission helping us support one or two additional developmental projects in India. A stand usually consists of a manager, an assistant manager and a host of volunteers. Based on the number of volunteers a group is able to field, stands are assigned in order to maximize profitability. In other words, if a group has 20+ volunteers they would work at a large stand in a profitable location. The more a stand earns the greater the commission awarded to a group. Football at Penn State is famous in itself - we have people from far away driving in to State College, tailgating, enjoying the game and then driving back. Watching a game is, thus, on the must-do lists of most visitors and students in the area. The next best thing is volunteering at a concession stand - helping raise funds for a charity while watching parts of the game. This is especially true during games against big teams where ticket prices are significantly higher making it harder for most students to attend the game. Volunteering can effectively take up an entire day – as stand manager I have fond memories of each game, which more than make up for the abbreviated weekend.



I remember another day, the one I call ‘The day we ran out of everything’. As the game progresses it is the manager’s responsibility to figure out how much fresh food is to be prepared. This is done based on the conditions of the game, the weather and the number of people in attendance. Cooking too much food may lead to too many items unsold causing a loss in AID’s commissions. I was advised to take it slow and have volunteers cook in small batches - sales usually tank after the third quarter so we begin cleaning the stand around that time. The home game against Michigan had me at war with these ‘guidelines’. The game was like any other until the end of half time – I had begun to perform the closing inventory. This day the crowds did not return to their seats – we sold out our soft pretzels, hot dogs, chicken sandwiches, nachos, walking tacos, cheesesteaks and were nearly out of water! We shattered all our previous sales records! Our volunteers were kept on their toes the whole game – most of them had not eaten in 8 hours, though they had a huge smile on the faces. I guess there is just something inherently pleasing looking at long, never ending lines of people, who want to buy something from you.

For the 2015-2016 season, AID raised \$4391.27 spread out across seven games. We would like to thank all the people who volunteered with us – it would not have been possible without you! See you next Fall!



Viswa Yoga Divas at Unmesh Child Protection Center, Tripura



Football Volunteering, 2015

VOLUNTEER MANAGMENT MADE EASY

Varun Ravikumar



The first time I heard about AID was when they hosted a picnic for new incoming students in Fall 2015 (the year I joined Penn State), which I attended out of curiosity. While the picnic had delicious food and fun activities along with other new students, the members themselves emanated a positive energy and commitment towards the organization which motivated me to inquire about getting involved on a regular basis. Through the weekly meetings, which I started attending, I slowly started to know my peers better and understand specific details of projects involved and how the organization is structured in general.

For me, understanding my team is a very important yet subtle process, having been the captain of my high-school and undergraduate university table-tennis teams as well as the captain of the PSU Table Tennis Club. I have come to realize the importance of team dynamics in facilitating an efficient workplace. It is easier to function and create an aura of positivity and enthusiasm, which I try to bring to any workplace, once we understand the characters of our teammates - what makes them tick, what they are good at, who does what, etc.

I was handed my first major role to coordinate volunteers for Sanskriti: A Cultural Night, an event to showcase Indian cultural performances, coupled with an Indian dinner. While the show was a smooth sailing, there was a lot of activity behind the scenes. Some of our volunteers from the local Indian frat were running late, so in the cafeteria before dinner, I was pulling down and arranging chairs like the Flash (the chairs were stacked on the tables). The other members of the AID committee were each handed their respective roles which they carried out with great aplomb, I have to give it to them. However, one thing which I learned from this experience, aka volunteer coordination, is to make sure that the volunteers aren't bored with the seemingly menial tasks they are allotted. As a volunteer coordinator, we need to keep a constant eye to ensure that at the end of the day, everyone goes home happy and in a state of mind that they have contributed in some way to the cause they had volunteered for. I hope to carry this experience into organizing and coordinating AID's annual fundraiser during the Spring semester, the event titled Taste Of India (TOI), which I hope will be a greater success than Sanskriti.



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WHAT AID EVENTS MEAN TO ME

Salman Arif

I joined AID in Fall of 2014. My first volunteering event was Bollywood Night followed by Taste Of India (TOI) in the Spring of 2015. After gaining much experience with volunteering, I was eager to volunteer Sanskriti, 2015, as well. This time I wasn't just a volunteer, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to be a stall manager. This was exciting because, since I have a set of volunteers who work with me, it was a great a way to meet new people. Furthermore, we had performances, so it was exciting to watch the professional dancing and singing acts by the clubs.

By doing so many events, I have realized that it is not just all about the work, you get to socialize as well. The fun part about Sanskriti is not just the event itself, it is all the months of work that precede it. All the meetings we had where we were preparing food for hundreds of people. I wouldn't have ever thought I would be doing this in university, but now that I have, I don't regret it.

Lastly, the phrase 'two birds, one stone' applies when volunteering for AID. You get to host exciting events, like Sanskriti, TOI etc at the same time raise money to fund grass-root projects in India. We have seen these projects grow, and gotten feedback as to how the money raise is being utilized. It is extremely rewarding because volunteering gives you an opportunity to change people's lives. It gives you the satisfaction of playing a role in someone else's life, helping people who may not be able to help themselves. It is a way of giving back to your community while developing important social skills, and gaining valuable work experience all at the same time.



SANSKRITI - A PIECE OF HOME



“As a classical singer and an avid music enthusiast, Sanskriti made me feel like I was back home. I felt a wave of fond nostalgia sweep over me as I experienced all the colors, music, dances and performances. As I got up on the stage to perform, I felt a familiar sensation in my stomach, a mix of nerves and excitement. But the nerves didn’t stay long. As I looked up at all the friendly faces in the audience and reminded myself of all the support the volunteers of Sanskriti had given us performers, giving my 100% became all too easy.”

- Shravya Mukka

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