



Friends of  
AseeMa

2025

# Annual Report



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# Letter from the President

There is no such thing as other people's children.

Thank you for making this one of our best years in raising funds and making connections.



## THE OVERVIEW EFFECT

Astronauts undergo what space philosopher Frank Wright termed “The Overview Effect,” feeling a deep connection to other people and the Earth as a borderless whole. India’s first person in space, Rakesh Sharma said that, initially, an astronaut looks for their own country, “but soon it appears that there is no boundary between the countries and the entire world is one family where our destinies are integrated.”

## MY CONNECTION TO ASEEMA

People ask about my connection to Aseema. In 1993, I met Aseema’s chairperson, who was a human rights lawyer in Geneva, Switzerland, so I had every reason to know of her longstanding commitment to a better world. I later learned about her founding of Aseema.

I have no family ties to India, and many ask: “Why do you care so much?” Stand on an Aseema playground or watch a class of children joyfully pursuing their education, full of hope, and the answer is right there.

Friends of Aseema (FoA) helps support the Aseema Charitable Trust, which has more than 28 years of experience providing secular, high-quality, value-based education and healthcare to thousands of marginalized children in Mumbai and in a remote tribal region around Igatpuri.

## WHAT WORLD DO WE WANT TO LIVE IN?

Aseema’s remarkable children live in multidimensional poverty – without adequate money or healthcare, safe housing, proper nutrition, sufficient water, or safe electricity. Many live in homes that look like misaligned boxes, made of odds and ends like tin or plastic sheets.

In her book *What the Eyes Don’t See*, Pediatrician Mona Hanna-Attisha wrote: “The world shouldn’t be comprised of people in boxes. Minding their own business. It should be full of people raising their voices, using their power and presence, standing up for what’s right. Minding one another’s business. That’s the world I live in. And that’s the world I want to live in.”

I love Aseema, and I am happy to support a wonderful cause wherever it is.

Friends of Aseema offers a way to make high-impact donations to help children in need.

Donations take just a minute at [www.friendsofaseema.org](http://www.friendsofaseema.org).

In this report you’ll see just a few highlights from 2025.

Thank you for joining us in this mission!



*Christine Biancheria*  
President, Friends of Aseema



# Give Where It Helps

## 2025

### Financials at a Glance

**Donations to Friends of Aseema:**

**\$185,000**

**Our Grants to Aseema:**

**\$146,500**



These grants sponsored classrooms and all that goes with them: educational materials, field trips, classroom equipment, teacher salary, etc. We upgraded old furniture and contributed to the building of a corpus or endowment for future sustainability.

**Expenses:**

Approximately 5.56% of our funds raised went toward our own fees and expenses, including purchases of products showing Aseema children's art.

All of our officers and board members serve in a purely volunteer capacity without compensation, and no donor funds are used for their travel to India or elsewhere.

# Donor of the Year!

This year, 6-year-old Paige E. donated \$17 from her accumulated cash allowance.

Our president met with her to thank her and showed her a short presentation about Aseema.

Paige patiently watched and talked about the photos she saw of Aseema homes and schools.



Paige is an example of giving generously, meaning at a level comfortable to each person.

Consider signing up for a recurring monthly donation on our [website](#).

## Connecting the World: Aseema Art Journeys to Mexico City and the Casa Azul

Aseema's Room 13 art program introduces children to artists whose lives reflect struggle and resilience. In one class, students studied Andy Warhol and his use of stencils for portraits of famous people. Huzef, then a 13-year-old Aseema student, created a watercolor portrait of Frida Kahlo of Mexico City. A print of his artwork is available in our [Etsy shop](#).



Frida Kahlo experienced profound physical hardship. She suffered from polio as a child and later survived a transit accident that caused multiple fractures to her spine, pelvis, and leg, leaving her bedridden and in pain for extended periods. As Frida said, "I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best."

Frida lived much of her life in the Blue House, known as the Casa Azul, where she died at age 47 and which is now a museum.

We connected with Frida Kahlo's grand-niece, Cristina Kahlo (in the photo's center) who was excited to receive Huzef's print in Mexico City and decided to take the portrait to the Casa Azul, so that Frida would be "at her home."





# Hooky

## In the U.K. & Belgium

With the help of volunteers, Rio Grande Games, and the late and great James Marshall Miller, Friends of Aseema created the board game Hooky. Some of the art in the game was made by Aseema children.

Hooky is a brainteaser – a word and deduction game combined best with adults or older children. [Hooky](#) is available for purchase at numerous locations.

This year, Hooky got yet another [positive review](#) from a critic in the United Kingdom and one in Dutch from [Belgium](#).

A supporter took the game to Puerto Vallarta and sent us a photo of a game in progress.



# What's Happening at Aseema?

Once again, Aseema students aced their board exams, taken by Indian students after 10 Standard (equivalent to 10 grade) with a 99.3% pass rate!

They still came out ahead of the overall pass rate in their state of Maharashtra.

## ASEEMA CHARITABLE TRUST! CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE!



We proudly celebrate the incredible success of our Standard X Batch of 2024-25!

✓ Overall pass percentage- 99.3%

Distinction - 45 Students First Class - 61 Students

A special shout-out to Nandini Yadav and Ritika Gupta for securing 2nd and 5th rank respectively across all MCGM schools in Mumbai!

**YOU HAVE MADE US ALL IMMENSELY PROUD.**

**HERE'S TO DREAMING BIG AND ACHIEVING MORE!**

## What's Happening at Aseema?

One student, Nandini Yadav, ranked second across Mumbai's Municipal Schools! She has gone on to junior college at the prestigious St. Xavier's. Junior College in India is equivalent to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade and is a precursor to university attendance. She hopes to study law. Meet Nandini [here](#). Her path illustrates what Aseema and its students achieve.

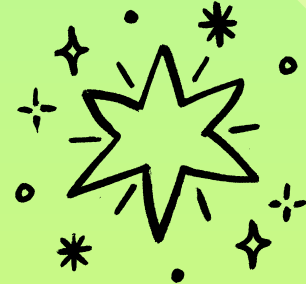


Nandini's older sister Anjali is currently working toward her bachelor's degree in banking and insurance with a goal of obtaining an MBA. We met Anjali in 2020, when she was head girl of Aseema's Pali Chimbai Municipal School. Even then, she was so focused and mature! [See for yourself.](#)

Nandini's journey is part of Aseema's Alumni Association, which now boasts more than 1,200 members. With Santosh Panigrahi at the helm, the program is growing, and Aseema has a pilot program underway to provide intensive guidance in seeking college admissions and job hunting.

The Aseema journey does not stop after students complete their years of direct Aseema schooling. This is what your donations support!

# More Brunches, More Awareness, More Friends of Aseema



Last year, we had a wonderful in-person brunch to introduce new people to our organization. We met old friends and new. One guest volunteered to hold an event at her house. Thank you, Christine Kennedy!

At that event, another guest, Amanda Palo, said she wanted to do the same thing. Thank you, Amanda Palo! A chain of generosity.



*Christine Kennedy*



*Amanda Palo*



If anyone would like to do the same,  
please let us know!



# New Board Members

Madhuri Murlikrishnan once lived in Mumbai and has visited Aseema schools. She now lives in Silicon Valley, the land of tech, and is a wonderful singer, composer, choreographer, and writer.

She made this [beautiful video](#) of an original song with Aseema children during a visit. Welcome!



Later in 2025, we were really enthused to have two others join the board. Brittany Green has volunteered her array of talents, experience, and advice. Now, she ★ brings all of that along with her warm personality to the board. Here she is at our first art event two years ago. Welcome!

Jamini Davies, born in India, turned up to help with a brunch party to introduce people to Friends of Aseema, and she never stopped helping! She rolled up her sleeves for this year's brunches and worked to spread the word to new donors and supporters about Friends of Aseema. Welcome!



# Permission Granted

*“All Children Are Our Children. All of them. Everywhere. No Exceptions.”*  
– Singer-Songwriter Allison Russell

When we began in 2019, we made a photo tour of Aseema schools. Rather than seek public-domain music, we sought permission to use “You’re Not Alone” by Our Native Daughters. Band member Allison Russell wrote the song, and the lyrics fit perfectly.

We secured permission to use the song for free for five years even though their album had just come out, and naturally, they would want sales.

This year, permission was renewed, and we updated our video to include some more recent photos of children in their new uniforms.

We hope you enjoy this tour of Aseema schools over the recent years! Click on the image or follow [this link](#) to watch.



# THANK YOU DONORS!

## For Extraordinary Generosity of Gifts in Excess of \$10,000

Anson Advisors & Moez Kassam

S&P Global

Rio Grande Games

Thomas Family Foundation



## COUNT ON ME, \$2,500 to \$10,000

Nancy Bernstein & Rocky Schoen

Rohit Vaidya

Christine Biancheria

Neetu Watumull Family Fund

Jamini Davies

Patricia Garber

Susan Frietsche

Anonymous (2)

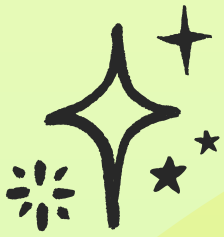
Tony & Celia Soltis

Aruna Ravi & the Aruna Ravi Sundarum Fund

The Grambrindi Davies Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation  
in honor of Christine Biancheria

Ranga Narasimham & the Ranga Family Fund





# THANK YOU DONORS!

## BEST FRIENDS, \$1,000 to \$2,499

Robert Levin & Kerry Bron  
Lupetin & Unatin, LLC  
Erin & Seana Miller  
Rachel Myers

Claiborne Newlin  
Steven & Linda Pedlow  
Colleen Sari  
Richard & Sandy Waters  
Anonymous (2)



Sarah Homitsky & Michael Nemer  
John J. O'Reilly in memory of Deborah S. Maliver  
Ms. Dena Willmore & Ms. Martha Thurber in honor of Mary Ashton  
Anonymous (1) in honor of Venkatraman Iyer



## FAST FRIENDS, \$250 to \$999

Suzanne Badoux  
Mark Belz & Lori Lee Larson  
Anna Boettcher  
Sharon DiPaolo  
Josiah & Erin Fiscus  
John Gillett  
Monish Gangwani  
Leon Ginn  
Ryan Hopkins  
Nancy A. Hubley  
Ankur Mallick

Jay Mardia  
Leila J. Richards  
Hetal Sanghvi  
Colleen Sari  
Seraly Dermatology  
Kunal Sharma  
Alan & Jennifer Shuckrow  
Charles Singer III  
Chris Tandlmayer  
Rhonda Wasserman  
Anonymous (9)

Shenu Lawrence-Gupta in memory of Rama Rani Gupta and Satish Gupta  
Ginny Hildebrand in memory of Jan Neffke  
Law Offices of Kathleen Schneider  
John Paul MacDuffie in memory of Marilyn Goldsmith MacDuffie





# FRIENDS IN NEED UP TO \$250




Susan Abramowich  
Rosemary Alley  
Erik & Beth Arneson  
Madhubanti Basu  
Vivi Bestemen  
Meryl Butters  
Erica Cahill  
Amanda Cheng  
Man-Su Chiang  
Stephanie Cooper  
Andrew Culbertson  
Jagruti Desai  
Matthew Diaddigo  
Ken M. Drake  
Paige E.  
Karen Engro & Jules Lobel  
Karen A. Eriksen  
Michelle Figlar  
Francois Furstenberg

Rohan & Mary Ganguli  
Barbara Ginn  
Brittany Green  
Alexandra Gruskos  
Debra Hamilton  
Beverly Harris-Schenz  
Emilee Lawson Hatch  
John Jacobs  
Felizitas Jauch  
Casey Johnson  
Louise Kaczmarek  
Kathryn & William Karns  
Rebecca Kaufman  
Michael Khoury  
Anne Kirchmier  
Gabriele Kirsch  
Ena Lebel  
Warren & Sharon Madden  
Holly Maurer-Klein

Nikita Mehta  
Madhuri Murlikrishnan  
Kathleen Nelson  
Natasha Patel  
Plummer Slade, Inc.  
Diana & James Porcelli  
Rene Quinlan  
Cathy Raphael  
Charvi Rastogi  
Jayshree Ranka  
Manasa Ravi  
Mona D. Rush  
Sharon Semenza  
Prachi Sethi  
Janet Simon  
Gerald Stubenhofer  
Robin Tom  
Anonymous (65)

John Biancheria in memory of Anteo “Drops” Biancheria  
Margaret Cassidy & Paul Amato  
Vana Tran in memory of Satish K. Gupta  
Dennis Clagett in memory of Margarita Rosenthal Clagett  
Amish Dalal in memory of Satish Gupta  
Kipp Dawson & Eileen Yacknin  
Ljiljana Duraskovic & Sadrija Kalezic  
Rachel Gay in honor of Veejay Gay  
Andrea London & Kenneth Boas  
David & Karen Pavlik  
Rosemarie Perla in honor of Jamini Davies & Rekha Shukla



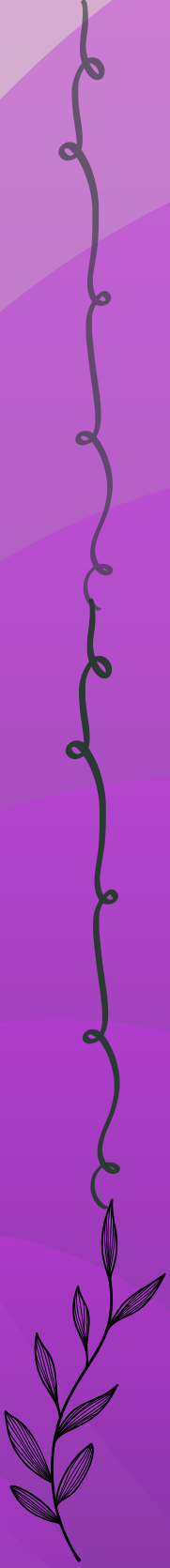
Friends of Aseema wishes to extend a special thanks to the many **Microsoft Employees** who participated in a matching campaign, most of whom are listed anonymously in this report.

Our president would like to give an **Above-and-Beyond** shoutout to **Dena Willmore** for supporting our organization as a generous donor. But beyond that, she connected us with **Mary Ashton**, an early and staunch supporter of Aseema. Dena made a gift in Mary Ashton's honor.

At Dena's request, our president wrote to Mary Ashton, who then called our president directly and expressed delight with the gift and with the existence of our organization.

Dena, you are wonderful.

At Aseema, there is a placard in honor of **Mary Ashton**, who once said: "Aseema will have my lifelong support. A small charity that already has made a huge change in the lives of so many."



We are grateful to all of you. **We could write a tribute to each of you.** Thank you all so much for caring about this wonderful cause, a tremendous positive in difficult times.