

Pumpkin House

F A M I L Y N E W S

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East and West come together to meet the needs of orphaned and abandoned children

Inspired by Meher Baba's ideal of selfless service to humanity, two nonprofit organizations—one Indian, the other American—have joined together to establish a residential home for orphaned and abandoned children near Meherabad, India.

In 2002 an organizing committee met in Atlanta, Georgia, at the invitation of Charlie Gard'ner to discuss ideas for creating an orphanage near Meher Baba's home in India. The group's dream was to buy property and build a family-style home for Indian children. Committee members envisioned a facility in which residents would receive food, clothing, shelter, skilled care, an education, and the chance for adoption by a loving family. They wanted an independent trust to operate the home, maintaining respect for the faith traditions of all residents.

The American advisory committee decided to call the project and the proposed orphanage—"Pumpkin House," the name of the home in Pune, India, where Meher Baba lived as a child.

Over the next several years, many



Pumpkin House board member Charlie Gard'ner (top right) visits the residents of Pumpkin House India last February.

planning meetings have taken place in the Atlanta-Athens area, and committee members also have made several fact-finding trips to India. These activities led the Pumpkin House organizing group to two conclusions. The first was that a local organization, run by Indian citizens, would be best suited to the task of creating and operating the envisioned home for children. The second was that Pumpkin House USA's most effective role would be to support the home through fund-raising and management support.

Guided by this perspective, Pumpkin House USA has focused its

energies to find a suitable partner organization in India, raise funds to establish the orphanage, and organize itself as a nonprofit U.S. corporation with a governing board of directors. It has now found an Indian partner organization, which has incorporated as Pumpkin House India and taken in its first 20 children. In addition, an Australian group is also organizing to provide support for the new home (*see article on page 4*).

The board of directors of Pumpkin House USA invites your interest and participation. This newsletter provides background on the project and an update on current activities.

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American and Indian organizations partner to establish Pumpkin House for Children near Meherabad, India

The Pumpkin House for Children project came into being through the work of two cooperating organizations. Pumpkin House for Children USA, is raising funds and providing other support for the residential home, while Pumpkin House for Children India has been established by Indian citizens to create and operate the facility. The following sections present snapshots of their activities to date.

Pumpkin House USA

The original inspiration for the project came from an informal organizing committee that has met in Atlanta and Athens, Georgia, for several years.

The group established itself as a Georgia non-profit corporation in 2004. In early 2005, Pumpkin House USA applied to the Internal Revenue Service for 503(c)(b) status so that contributions to the orphanage project are tax-deductible.

The corporation's bylaws call for it to support the creation and operation in India of a facility for orphaned, abandoned, or homeless children, as well as the establishment and operation of other related services. Another of its purposes is to promote education and outreach in the United States on issues concerning all children in need.

Pumpkin House USA has created a board of directors, whose members and responsibilities are as follows:

- Randy Overdorff, chair
- Mark Hodges, vice chair/communications
- Caran Bryant, secretary
- Charlie Gard'ner, fundraising

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- Linda Kirkpatrick, finance
- Rosemary Hathaway, legal

In addition, an advisory group has been recruited to provide informed advice and consultation to the board on various technical issues.

To raise money for the residential home in India, Pumpkin House USA has sponsored an annual evening of poetry and music in Athens, Georgia, for the past three years. Each of these events has featured Coleman Barks, internationally known for his renderings of Rumi's verse, and Dan Ladinsky, who has published several best-selling books with his versions of the work of the Persian

organizations that might wish to establish a small orphanage. She made contact with Ms. Stella Manuel, an educator and community organizer in the Ahmednagar, India, area who has had a long-term interest in creating a residential home for orphaned children. After extensive discussions with Dr. Schubert and other members of the Pumpkin House USA board, Ms. Manuel decided to move forward with plans to establish a residential home for children. She was able to organize a dedicated board of directors for Pumpkin House India, all of whom are well-connected members of Ahmednagar with strong records of charitable service.

Mr. Nirmal Garewal, chair, is a well-known Ahmednagar businessman and a member of the local Sikh community.

Mrs. Dil Meher, treasurer, has a master's degree in social work and will be the primary liaison with the board's legal advisor in Pune. She has been active in handling financial issues for Pumpkin House India.

Mrs. Stella Manuel, secretary, is an experienced Montessori teacher and has conducted research in child education in rural areas of the Maharashtra State of

India. She has organized schools and women's groups and worked closely with government officials in villages. She is principal of Meher English School in Meherabad.

Dr. Manoj Kothule, trustee, is a physician specializing in the care of children and is currently assisting with the medical follow-up on the residents on Pumpkin House.

Ms. Fiona Manuel, trustee, has



Pumpkin House India residents pose for a photograph in their school clothes.

poet Hafiz. The board of directors has received other financial contributions from individuals and will soon begin to explore the prospects for grant funding.

Pumpkin House India

Several years ago, former board member, Dr. Nina Schubert, visited India for several months and during that time actively searched for

worked in poor neighborhoods of Ahmednagar for two years and in the Meher English School for three years. She has a master's degree in social work, and one of her roles will be to establish strong links with legal offices and nongovernmental organizations.

Mrs. Cecelia Edwin, trustee, has a master's degree in sociology and works at the Meher English School as a computer teacher. She is in charge of monitoring the medical status of the children.

In October 2004, Ms. Stella Manuel and Dr. Schubert organized a successful public meeting in October 2004 at the Yash Palace Hotel to present the project to the community of Ahmednagar and facilitate connections with other charitable organizations in town. Invited speakers were Bhau Kalchuri, chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Trust, and the presiding priest at the nearby Catholic church. The local newspaper covered the event, and information about the project spread widely throughout the community.

In November 2004, Pumpkin House India held an inauguration ceremony for the residential home, with Mr. Kalchuri cutting the ribbon for the new facility. Pumpkin House India also kicked off a campaign to raise funds locally for the residential home.



Stella Manuel, the organizer of Pumpkin House India, tours a park with several of the children.

The legal registration process successfully concluded in January 2005, and Pumpkin House India is now an incorporated charitable trust. Pumpkin House USA has contracted with Ms. Manuel to support her efforts to establish a working orphanage, and since spring 2006 she has taken in 20 children as residents. Most of the children are from the Meherabad area, but several came from Mumbai and Pune. All have been either orphaned, abandoned or mistreated by their parents.

The residents of Pumpkin House India are receiving regular medical care from a local physician and are enrolled in the nearby Meher English School. For the last part of April and the whole month of May, the children were on holiday. During this time, the orphanage staff provided crash courses for them in arts, crafts, and English language.

A new session of school began on June 13. The orphanage bought white and purple uniforms for children above grade five and red and white uniforms for the smaller children.

Each of the children was given two pairs of shoes and white socks, as well as a variety of school materials, including books, pens, pencils, a compass box, lunch box, bags, craft material, drawing books, and coloring pens. Pumpkin House has hired a vehicle to take the children to school because the school bus is already too full to accommodate them.

Pumpkin House India is currently located in Mrs. Manuel's home. Purchase of land and construction of a permanent home is a major priority of fund-raising activities. In the



Top left, Bhau Kalchuri, chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, stands with a local child at the inauguration of the project in 2004.

near term, the Pumpkin House India board is seeking cupboards, a water cooler, and twin beds.

Individuals interested in learning more about Pumpkin House India should contact Mrs. Cecilia Edwin of the Pumpkin House India board at ceciliaed@yahoo.com.

Pumpkin House India has not been the only beneficiary of Pumpkin House USA's help. The American group has provided assistance to several India-based organizations that are serving children, including:

- A small grant designated for medical care to BSSK Pune, an orphanage in Pune that is home for approximately 120 children; and
- A small grant designated for a computer, a refrigerator, medicine, and food to Snehalaya, an Ahmednagar orphanage serving children born in the city's brothels.

For more information about Pumpkin House USA's scope of activities, contact Randy Overdorff at roverdorff@cadet.com.

How Pumpkin House USA is supporting Children in India

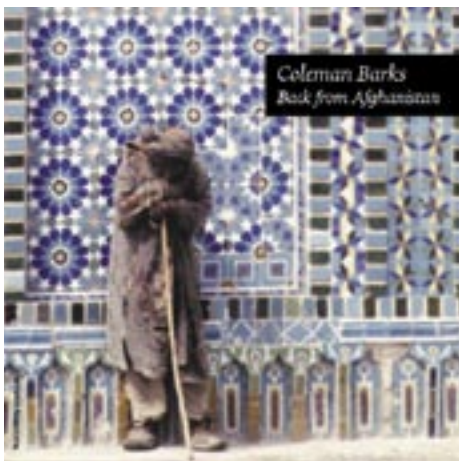
Pumpkin House USA is providing regular financial support to help defray the operational expenses of the residential home for children in India. These grants come from several sources, including special fundraising events and the regular or one-time donations of individuals and organizations.

The major fundraising event has been an evening of poetry and music held in Athens once a year for the past three consecutive years. Each program featured Coleman Barks, internationally known for his renderings of Rumi's verse, and Dan Ladinsky, who has published several very well received books with versions of the work of the poet Hafiz.

The 2006 program was captured on video and audiotape, and recordings of the event are now available to purchase for \$12, including shipping and handling. For further information, contact Charlie Gardner at Arangaon@aol.com.

Contributions to Pumpkin House USA are now tax-deductible since the organization applied to the Internal Revenue Service for 503(c)(b) status.

To make the contribution or get more information, please contact: Charlie Gardner, 473 Oak Tree Square, Athens, GA 30606 (by e-mail at arangaon@aol.com or by telephone at 706-546-6492).



Shown above is the cover for Coleman Barks' CD "Back from Afghanistan." Proceeds of the recording are benefitting Pumpkin House India.



Here is the current residence for children at Pumpkin House India. Efforts are underway to raise funds for a new home.

Australian Group Supports Pumpkin House

Pumpkin House Australia came into being after Garfield Wells visited Meherabad and met Pumpkin House USA board member Nina Schubert. He became excited about the project and recruited Lucy Buxton in March 2006 after returning home. Both are Sydney Baba Lovers, and they each hold a passionate belief that helping the street kids of India is an appropriate "seva" (selfless service) for Baba.

Lucy writes: "We may be small in number but we are big in enthusiasm." Garfield and Lucy have been busy laying the foundations for an organisation that will provide ongoing resources (volunteers and financial backing) and support to the Ahmednagar Pumpkin House and will also help Stella Manuel Pillai to enable Pumpkin House affiliates to be opened in other places in India.

"Although we are well aware that there would be no Pumpkin House without the original inspiration and work as well as the ongoing financial and logistical support of PH USA, it was necessary for us to form a separate charitable association in Australia to enable donations to be tax-deductible," Lucy writes. "A decision has been made to partner the U.S. body but to make ourselves independent of them - while still, of course sharing information and projects and seeking their advice whenever necessary. Pumpkin House Australia will provide support

by direct funding, direct sponsorship of kids, and the provision of Australian volunteers for 'seva on site'."

Over \$5,000 dollars has been raised since the Australian group came into existence in March, both from Australian donations and a sizeable gift from UK Baba Lovers. The group's two main current fundraising projects are:

1. A series of "50/50" events, from which 50% of the proceeds will go to Pumpkin House and 50% to either one or several other Baba projects such as the Avatar's Abode Trust at Kiel Mountain near Nambour in Queensland, or the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Trust in India; and
2. A Sydney performance of a concert-length musical work based on Lewis Carroll's poem "The Hunting of the Snark", about which we are in discussions with the composer.

Garfield feels that all Baba communities worldwide should be encouraged to support these three causes—Pumpkin House, their local Baba trust and the Avatar Meher Baba Trust in India—by forming local not-for-profit associations or bodies and following our 50/50 scheme. Lucy and Garfield see a logical extension of this Baba world community work as a Baba outreach program with legs!

