

## Community Service Hour (CSH)

### *The Vision.....*

*Let's work for one hour every week at a fixed time in a public place.*

The CSH started with this vision.

Though it was only Ramani and I, both housemates, we decided to do some AID-work at the University of Maryland, for one hour every Saturday from 11 AM to noon. Who else would be interested in spending this kind of time? We didn't know but we wanted to find out!

### *Ride Please....*

It was the first Saturday and I was on my way to the CSH! Near my apartment complex I saw three Indian students who were waving at me. It was obvious that they needed a ride and I was not about to give them one. "Look at these guys," I told myself, very disappointed, "When they need another person's help, they don't hesitate to ask. Yet ask them to help others, and no one comes forward." But deciding that I might as well give them a ride, I stopped and they came, beaming and happy. "Where are you going?" I asked. "To the AID Community Service Hour," they said smiling. They were planning to walk 45 minutes to get there!! In the very first CSH I found out that there were people more dedicated than me. These were Sudhakar, Sandeep and Shrinaath. Next week brought their housemate Balaji.

**No Lose Philosophy:** If the CSH didn't catch on, what would Ramani and I have lost? If no one else came, we still could do our one hour's worth of work, and that therefore was not a waste of time. By doing the work in a public place we were keeping the door open for a whole nation of people.

**Maryland-CSH:** Every Saturday 11am-1pm. Rm 1219, Physics Building, Univ. of MD, College Park.

### *Initial Months.....*

We made sure that the emphasis was on work rather than only talk. In the CSH we'd make posters depicting the work of AID. Those of us who had no artistic skills would go around the university putting flyers. Some of us went to the computer rooms to make the web page or e-mail lists of AID members. Whenever we received a project proposal, we'd boldly present it to the entire group, no matter how good or bad the proposal. Because there were people from different backgrounds, suggestions to improve projects were made, and questions on even subtler aspects were carefully examined.

### *It worked!!....*

Having the CSH at a given time and a given place, proved to be a great idea. Any volunteer could invite anyone to the CSH, without having to confirm with anyone else. What started as a group of science and engineering students soon transformed into a group of 30. A psychiatrist, a doctor, a professor of physics, World Bank employees, economics students, a minister from the Embassy, a priest, a car mechanic, social workers visiting from India; began to frequent the CSH. Many became regular attendees. Two years after the first CSH, today as I drag myself from bed at 7AM on Saturday to drive 2 hours from Virginia, I know that someone new would come to the CSH, say hi, and not leave until there is no more work to be done.

**Pittsburgh-CSH:** Every Sunday afternoon. Contact PremVadapalli at (412) 421-1725.

## CSH is Self-Driven

In a few months the initial work gets done. What then? Who is to give work to the people attending the CSH? In the broad fields of projects, funds and awareness, the people in the CSH began to figure out what to do themselves.

For example, last week someone said they could give us 400 newspapers from all over India. That's work - to get them and send a write-up on AID, requesting project proposals from all of India. As responses are received, more work gets generated. Someone wanted to study the problem of water contamination in bore-wells, as AID was receiving many projects due to this. Someone suggested that they could help us get credit-card facility and now more than a 100 people contribute to AID via their credit cards. Then there are discussions: Should there be a guiding vision which will allow us to focus our efforts with time such that one projects builds on another?

Thus combining work, plans, vision and talks, moving from detailed project presentations to one minute spots where each person speaks briefly on what concrete thing they did during the week for AID, people begin to volunteer for various tasks. Their responsibility increases, and after set-backs every now and then, people actually do the tasks they volunteer for. Trust and confidence rapidly builds. The CSH automatically generates both the people and the work that they need to do.

- Ravi Kuchimanchi

## Volunteering for other Chapters of AID ?

**Try starting a CSH.**