

pumpkin House Family News

East and West come together to meet the needs of children

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

The project began in 2002 when an organizing committee met in Atlanta, Georgia, at the invitation of Charlie Gardner, and discussed 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 past three years, many planning meetings have taken place in the Atlanta-Athens area, and committee members also have made several fact-finding trips to India. These activities have 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 roles would be to raise funds for the home and provide its management with business and technical 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. This preparatory work is now well underway. Pumpkin House USA has organized itself as a nonprofit corporation and raised significant funding. Equally important, an Indian partner organization has been found, a house has been acquired for the residential home, and the first children are set to move into the facility.

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

Bhau Kalchuri, chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Trust, greets a child at the inauguration of Pumpkin House India November 2004. →

The Ahmednagar area has a significant number of orphaned and abandoned children. ↓



American and Indian organizations partner to establish Pumpkin House

The Pumpkin House for Children project has come into being through the work of two cooperating organizations. *Pumpkin House USA*, is raising funds and providing other support for the residential home, while *Pumpkin House India* has been established by Indian citizens to create and operate the facility. Both organizations have been working hard on their various responsibilities. The following sections present snapshots of these recent activities.

Pumpkin House USA The original inspiration for the project came from 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, which includes the following members:

Randy Overdorff, chair, is director of Cadet Counseling Services at Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia and chairman of the Hall/Dawson County Domestic Violence Taskforce.

Caran Bryant, secretary, is an eighth grade science teacher at Trickum Middle School in Lilburn, Georgia with 15 years teaching experience in middle and elementary public schools.

Sky Campbell, one of the board's two financial specialists, is a certified public accountant in Athens, Georgia.

Charlie Gardner, the coordinator of fund-raising activities,

owns Darshan Graphics, a company specializing in Islamic calligraphy and pen and ink drawings of Meher Baba. and is president of Creative Carpentry, a custom-design building company.

Mark Hodges, vice chair and coordinator of public relations, is a senior research associate at the Georgia Tech Research Institute and co-chair of community outreach at Church of the Good Shepherd Episcopal in Covington, Georgia.

Rosemary Hathaway, the board's legal advisor, is a resident of Athens, Georgia, & an attorney at the University of Georgia.

Linda Kirkpatrick is program administrator for the Gainesville-Hall County Community Service Center. She has 12 years experience in non-profit program development and administration as well as 15 years experience in finance and accounting



Shown here are three employees of Pumpkin House India with the two initial residents. The residents are Takle Akshay, 7, and Kamble Shakya, 12. The workers, from left, are Bhingardive Shashi, Bhingardive Meena, and Shinde Yiyabai, the cook and housemother.

Nina Schubert of Atlanta, Georgia, has visited India twice in the last several years as the board's India representative and was instrumental in bringing together Pumpkin House USA and its counterpart organization in India. She holds a medical degree from the University of Tuebingen in Germany and has also provided pediatric care at an orphanage and juvenile detention center in Peru.

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 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 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 During Dr. Schubert's last visit in India, 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. Kailash Bonekar, the board president, has lived in Ahmednagar, India, for 45 years. He has served in a Salvation Army orphanage school with 125 students and has been a part-time math teacher in the Meher English School for the past six years.

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

Mrs. Dil Meher, trustee, 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.

Mr. Udai Bhanudas, trustee, is an engineer, landlord and contractor with extensive experience in land issues. He will be active in every phase of this project.

Mrs. Shweta Kaigaonkar, trustee, is one of the leading charitable donors in the Ahmednagar area. She is a businesswoman, has a degree in arts and crafts, and is organizing fund-raising events for Pumpkin House.

Ms. Fiona Manuel, trustee, has 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.

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 prospect spread widely throughout the community.

Since then, Ms. Manuel and her associates have located and rented a home to house Pumpkin House India and began to search for children to be the first residents. In November 2004, Pumpkin House India held an inauguration ceremony for the building, 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.

The legal registration process successfully concluded in January 2005, and Pumpkin House India is now an incorporated charitable trust. The house underwent renovations and has passed the required inspections. Ms. Manuel and her helpers have been securing funding and working in close collaboration with Pumpkin House USA to ensure that the home provides a safe environment and stable structure for its residents. A small group of children is expected to move into Pumpkin House in the late spring of this year.

After Dr. Schubert's return to the United States in March, Gabrielle Gibson became the new India representative for Pumpkin House USA. Ms. Gibson has been a full-time resident in India for four years, living between Meherabad and the location of the home in Vidyanagar. Her main job will be to facilitate communications and joint working relationships with the American & Indian organizations.



↑ These two Indian girls, wearing Rajasthani dresses, are shown during a visit to Meherabad.



This young boy lives at the boys' orphanage behind Akhbar Press in Ahmednagar. →

India update by *Gabrielle Gibson*
Pumpkin House USA India representative

With exterior walls of brownish orange color and dark stripes, the house that will become Pumpkin House India is appropriately named. The home has two bedrooms, a kitchen, a sitting room, and a bathing/toilet area. It is located in Vidyanagar, a community near Meherabad whose people have diverse religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and educational experience. Many residents of Vidyanagar are business owners, and the surrounding community supports the idea of an orphanage.

When Pumpkin House opens, it will have two initial residents, two boys who are twelve and seven years old. Both of them will attend classes at the nearby Meher English School.

The process (called "scanning") that will allow these children to move into Pumpkin House has been completed, and a doctor must now give each child a clean bill of health.

Pumpkin House is nearly ready for its first residents. Caring for them will be four paid employees, including a full-time cook who will live at the home and act as housemother, a night watchman, a maid servant, and an admissions clerk.

The kitchen is equipped with a newly purchased stove, utensils for cooking and eating, and a variety of food staples. The bedrooms have mattresses with linens for the first children, and the process of fencing the property will begin soon.

Efforts are underway to acquire addition appliances and equipment for Pumpkin House. The management is now looking for a refrigerator, washing machine, water heater, power inverter, television set with VCR/DVD player, and playground equipment.



This young girl sits on the swing on the women's side of the Meherazad estate near Ahmednagar.

For more information about the Pumpkin House for Children, contact Randy Overdorff at roverdorff@cadet.com.

Contributions for Pumpkin House now tax-deductible

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

Those interested in donating money can do so by writing a check to Pumpkin House USA and sending it to: Mr. Charlie Gardner, 473 Oak Tree Square, Athens, GA 30606.

Address questions about the current status of the project to Mr. Randy Overdorff, board chair of Pumpkin House USA, at roverdorff@cadet.com.



Pumpkin House India will begin operations in this rented home in Vidyanagar, a community near Meherabad, India.

Evening of poetry & song raises funds

For the third consecutive year, two renowned poets read from their work in April at a benefit for the Pumpkin House for Children project.

The evening of poetry and music, entitled "The Eternal Beloved," featured Coleman Barks, internationally known for his renderings of Rumi's verse, and Dan Ladinsky, who has published several very well received books with his versions of the work of the Persian poet Hafiz.

The program also featured readings from the poetry of mystical poets Saint Therese, Mirabai, Rabia, and Lala by Jenna Hencinski, Gaelyn Hurd, and Maya Brammer. Perry Flinn, Jenna Hencinski, Gaelyn Hurd, Maya Brammer and Glenn Sheffield provided music, with juggler Basil Campbell performing to one of their songs.

Jonathan Burroughs and Mark Riney captured the program on video and audiotape, and recordings of the event may be available soon. For further information, contact Charlie Gardner at Arangaon@aol.com.

