Table of Contents:  

1. Introduction  

2. 2008-09 Progress Summary  

3. New Projects and New Partnerships  
   - Right to Information Act (RTI) campaign  
   - New partnerships and other outreach efforts:  
     i. Networking with the Indian Alliance for Child Rights  
     ii. Alfa Foundation  
     iii. Chetna Workshop in Agra  
     iv. Collaboration and Activities with Government Agencies:  

4. Ongoing Work  
   ERC/Lisle community engagement project  
   PABAM Magazine:  
   Website  
   Focus on Child Rights and Advocacy:  

5. Discontinued projects:  
   Room to Read Library Program  

6. Fundraising  
   Indians for Collective Action (ICA)  
   Give 2 Asia  

7. Volunteers and Interns  

8. Governing Board  

9. Next Steps  

10. Conclusion  

11. Annex 1 - MCF Partner Organizations  

12. Annex 2 - Board and Governance  

13. Annex 3 - Success stories from the Asha-MCF RTI campaign  

14. Annex 4 – RTI Campaign Concept Note
Introduction:

The Mountain Children’s Foundation (MCF) helps young people improve their lives by giving them a voice and a role in the development of their communities. Our dream is to change the way the world perceives and works with children.

Nowhere is the need for this change more acutely evident than in rural mountain villages. Even as India’s economy surges forward, the people in these mountains continue as they have for hundreds of years, living on the margins with little prospect of improvement or hope for a different future.

But it need not be this way. Though these communities are often isolated by geography, new technologies that can easily bridge far greater distances hover just out of reach. The real forces that hold these people back are long-standing habits of apathy and powerlessness, which keep them from demanding and accessing the services and resources that are their due. As a result, in too many villages teachers skip school with impunity, resources designed for the children’s education and wellbeing are waylaid somewhere in the long chain of bureaucracy, and young people grow up with no idea of their own potential.

But though deeply rooted, these habits are not intractable. They can be changed, and they can be changed most dramatically through the community's children. For these young people have a strong desire to shake up the status quo and better their lives. And they have the idealism to believe they can.

Based in the mountain state of Uttarakhand in Northern India, the MCF, through partnerships with local organizations, is creating a statewide network of children that can harness the power of collective action to make their voices heard and their concerns noted. Perhaps even more importantly, the MCF helps young people start being the change they want to see in their own communities. Since the MCF began, the children have racked up impressive accomplishments and have been winning new respect from the adults in their villages, local leaders, and senior officials in the state government.

The MCF operates through an innovative model that combines the effectiveness of grassroots action by young people with the far-reaching power of a widespread network. It is a uniquely powerful combination: By working with local voluntary organizations and putting the emphasis on community-based action driven by the children themselves—while also providing a network that makes them feel part of a larger movement—the MCF has tapped a remarkably rich source of energy and a powerful catalyst for change.

The MCF currently works in rural villages throughout the state of Uttarakhand and has built a network of more than 11,000 children in nearly 600 villages through some 28 partner organizations. Most MCF members range in age from 13-18, though young people of all ages participate. They work through village-level children's groups (bal sangathans or bal groups).
panchayats) on the issues and problems they have identified as most important to their lives. The MCF’s monthly magazine, PABAM, connects children from all these distant villages to one another, allowing them to share their own experiences and learn from each other.

Because the problems in each community vary widely, the MCF covers a broad swath of issues that the young people can take up depending on their needs. Through workshops and other initiatives, the MCF builds awareness among the young people—and through them, their entire village—about issues such as education, gender equity, disaster preparedness, agriculture, environment, health, governance, and child rights. However the underlying theme of all MCF activities is the need to give children a voice and a meaningful role in the policies that impact them, build their self confidence and leadership skills, and to ensure their safety, health, and opportunities for education and advancement.

The Mountain Children’s Foundation was registered under the Indian Societies Act of 1860, in Dec 2003 in Dehradun, India. This registration was renewed in 2009. The MCF received its 12-A certificate in December 2006 and 80G in October 2008. The MCF established the Mountain Children’s Forum as a platform for children to better their lives and communities by improving education, promoting health, preserving the environment, building networks and sharing resources and information, and instilling confidence and pride in their culture.
2008-09 Progress:

By the end of the 2008-09 program year, the MCF network of children had grown to some 11,000 young people in more than 500 children's groups across the state of Uttarakhand. This year has been one of expansion and independence as the MCF launched a bold new initiative to change the face of local governance by empowering people through the Right to Information Act (RTI), expanded its capacity as an organization, and greatly enhanced its network and outreach activities.

The RTI campaign has occupied much of the MCF team’s time and energy this year. This unprecedented effort involved more than 2,700 children in 91 villages across the state and was conducted with 18 partner organizations. This campaign, which teaches young people how to use the RTI to get information from the government and then use that information to address problems in their community, puts the MCF at the cutting edge of development efforts promoting governance and citizenship.

The MCF also continued its work on child rights and the creation of a comprehensive child policy for Uttarakhand, strengthened existing alliances with entities such as the Mahila Samakya (a program under the Central Ministry of Education) while building new relationships with national organizations such as World Vision and the Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR), and increased its own visibility as a resource on children’s issues.

In addition, the MCF’s network of grassroots voluntary organizations has grown from 25 in the previous year to 28 in 2008-09. As the MCF’s model is becoming more widely accepted as an effective way of reaching out to the community and implementing programs at the village level, more and more organizations are asking to join the network.

At the same time, the MCF completed 5 years as a registered society and went through the process to get renewed as a society for another 5 years, received its 80G certification (making donations to the MCF tax deductible), and made progress in getting through the government’s FCRA requirements that will enable the MCF to receive funding from foreign sources, which is essential to its continued financial viability.

The MCF team has made a concerted effort to ensure that every new activity enhances and expands our earlier work and that each project can serve as a foundation for the next one. Thus, last year’s Lisle community engagement workshops prepared our newer partners for the RTI campaign by helping them understand how to work with young people and set up children’s groups that were engaged and ready to take on this issue. And the questions the children are

---

1 These included getting a “no news” certification for PABAM magazine (under FCRA requirements organizations receiving foreign funds are not allowed to publish a news magazine) and receiving two “Prior Permission” approvals to receive funds from US-based organizations.
raising in their RTIs frequently have their roots in previous campaigns, such as the Kopal campaign for universal birth registration and our work on child rights and the UNCRC report.²

Our partnerships have been growing in a similarly iterative way: When we took on the Kopal³ program, we brought our MCF partner organizations into it and added some new ones. We then shared these partners with SBMA/Plan when it launched its Umang program to train children in the use of media tools. When Kopal ended and the RTI campaign began, we brought many of those partners with us to this new effort. It is this creativity and synergy that has allowed the MCF to achieve so much with such a small staff and relatively few resources.

New Projects and New Partnerships

Right to Information Act (RTI) campaign

The Silicon Valley chapter of Asha for Education (www.ashanet.org/siliconvalley) and the MCF joined forces to launch an expansive campaign to build awareness and promote the use of India’s powerful Right to Information Act (RTI) by teaching the young people in rural mountain areas how to file and follow up on RTI requests. The project was funded by Asha-SV and uses the MCF’s network of partner organizations and children’s groups to reach deep into the state’s rural communities and teach them how to use the power of the RTI to get information and hold the government accountable. Uttarakhand Chief Information Commissioner Dr. R. S. Tolia, who has been a staunch supporter of the MCF’s attempts to give children a greater voice in governance, also endorsed the campaign. In addition to attending the state-level kick-off workshop and answering the children’s questions in person, he provided us with RTI expert Dr. B.P. Maithani, who helped craft Uttarakhand’s RTI policies, as a facilitator. Having the government’s support is essential to this project as we attempt to take a constructive rather than combative approach to the problems the children are trying to address. Dr. Tolia’s support has enabled our partners and the children to see the government as an ally rather than an adversary.

The RTI project spans two MCF program years. It was kicked off in October 2008 with a state-level workshop for the children and our partner organizations. Dr. Tolia attended as chief guest and personally answered the young people’s questions about the RTI process and

---

² The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires a report on the status of child rights every five years from each signatory to the treaty. Along with the formal country report, which is presented by the Indian government, organizations in the voluntary sector (civil society) are asked to give alternate (or shadow) reports with their perception of the status of child rights in the country. In 2007-08 the MCF provided technical assistance to SBMA/Plan in the creation of this report by providing them access to our network of voluntary organizations and children’s groups, creating the process for gathering the information, and drafting one such shadow report. We are continuing to work with the Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR) to help other organizations that are working on similar shadow reports.

³ A 3-year program to improve birth registration and fight female feticide that was funded by SBMA/Plan, Kopal played an important, synergistic role for the MCF. We housed the program in our office and provided support with activities and communications, access to our network of partner organizations, etc. Kopal paid the salary (as coordinator of the program) of an important member of the MCF team, Sudhir Bhatt. The program was ended in October 2008, though the children continue to carry forward its work for birth registration and ending the practice of female feticide.
assured them that children could indeed file RTIs, dispelling one of the biggest myths in surrounding the RTI in this area.

This workshop was followed by a training workshop for the facilitators from each of our partner organizations who then returned to their communities and are carrying out 5 village-level workshops each. In each of these workshops the children are writing and filing RTI requests, with each village submitting at least 5 RTI applications. Prior to these workshops, our partner organizations carried out a baseline survey to gauge awareness about the RTI and will administer the same survey at the end of the project so we can measure the impact of this campaign.

So far the project has been a resounding success: In some cases, RTIs filed by the children have solved problems the community had been struggling with for years. Our partners, as a direct result of the training we provided, are now using the RTI in many of their other projects as well. And awareness of the RTI has grown not only in the community but also in local government offices, which are, often for the first time, finding themselves accountable to members of the community.

But in the thrill of the success stories emerging out of the campaign, it is important to remember that when the MCF and Asha-SV decided to launch this effort, it was a controversial and risky move. Many organizations and funding agencies are hesitant to encourage children to use the RTI for fear that it will endanger their safety by bringing them into conflict with people who have power and control over them. In the course of this project, we have also heard of a few cases in which attempts were made to intimidate children (and adults) for using the RTI. However, because the children are supported by our partner organizations (and by the MCF), and because we have made a concerted effort to encourage the children (and our partners) to use the RTI in a constructive, not vindictive or gratuitous way, such cases have been limited and we believe this project has demonstrated a model in which children can use the RTI for the betterment of their communities.

For a concept note and some success stories from the RTI project, please see Annex 3 and 4

**New partnerships and other outreach efforts:**

As the MCF’s work gains visibility, members of the MCF staff are often asked to speak at events and participate in discussions on children’s issues. The MCF team’s skills as facilitators, especially in working with young people, and the knowledge we have built on the status of child rights in the state of Uttarakhand and at the national level is becoming more widely appreciated. Individuals both in the voluntary and government sector now turn to the MCF network as a resource when they want to work with young people or hear about their concerns or find more effective tools for community engagement.

These outreach activities are also important for the MCF as an organization because they enable us to learn from the experiences of other organizations, build our own credibility by

---

4 Please see Annex 3 for RTI case studies
becoming better known in the development world, and gain access to new sources of support and funding.

The MCF’s outreach this year included:

**Networking with the Indian Alliance for Child Rights**

Through the previous year’s work on the Alternate CRC report, we came into contact with members of the Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR), which invited the MCF to provide inputs on continuing discussions and conversations on the status of child rights in India. This network has been a valuable resource and connected the MCF with other organizations working on children’s issues across the country. As a result, MCF staff participated in a number of national workshops in which they were able to give voice to the perspective and needs of young people in rural mountain communities:

- **World Vision Workshops**
  
  The MCF team, as part of a delegation from the IACR, participated in a state-level and a country-wide workshop for children hosted by World Vision on the topic of child rights and India’s “report card” on child rights. MCF staff helped facilitate the workshop, helping the children understand such “grown up” concepts as budgets in percentage form as well as showing them how to evaluate India’s performance on child rights by understanding and interpreting the data.

- **Action Aid workshop**
  
  On behalf of the Indian Alliance for Child Rights, MCF President Aditi Kaur attended the state consultation on the UNCRC organized by Action Aid India in Bhopal on January 29-30, 2009. She made a presentation on the proposed national shadow report for the UNCRC and why such a report was necessary using the Fact File and Score Card for India and Madhya Pradesh. About 50 participants from 30 organizations, mostly working on issues of child labour, education, and on the problems of children from minority groups attended the workshop.

**Alfa Foundation**

MCF was invited by the ICFAI University to attend the launch of its Corporate Responsibility Scheme, “The Alpha Foundation.” Mr. Prakash Pant, an MLA from Pithoragarh and minister of Culture and Tourism and Parliamentary Affairs, was the chief guest of the program. Prior to the start of the program, the MCF team had given him a copy of PABAM magazine, which he liked so much that he quoted from it during his speech.

As a result of this interaction we have started a dialog to start working with the Alpha Foundation with children in the slums of Dehradun. The MCF team also attended a health fair
organized by Alpha Foundation and provided information to children and their parents about the importance of birth registration.

**Chetna Workshop in Agra**

Chetna is a Delhi-based organization that works with children living on the railway platform. MCF coordinator, Dwarika Prasad Nauni attended a Chetna workshop focused on the Juvenile Justice Act and working with street children. He made a presentation on the MCF and our model of working with children, especially on the RTI. However, our primary purpose in attending this workshop was to learn more about working with urban street children and the Juvenile Justice Act, as this is an area into which the MCF wishes to expand.

**ERA Workshop**

The MCF was invited by ERA, an organization working with CRY, to train its group of 9 NGO partners on Child Rights and Acts pertaining to the children that had been passed by the Uttarakhand legislature including the Juvenile Justice Act and the Pre Conception Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act, which is meant to prevent gender-selective abortions. In addition the MCF team provided training on the birth registration process and helped the participants get a better understanding of child rights.

**Collaboration and Activities with Government Agencies:**

The MCF's collaboration with the Uttarakhand government this year was primarily focused on the RTI campaign and on child rights.

Dr. R.S. Tolia, Uttarakhand Chief Information Commissioner, has been a staunch supporter of our RTI campaign and his support has proved to be a great asset (and confidence booster) for the MCF. In addition to attending our state-level kick-off workshop himself, he provided us with an RTI expert, Dr. B.P. Maithani, who helped craft Uttarakhand's RTI policies, as a facilitator.

Following on last year's efforts to create an alternate UNCRC report and our ongoing advocacy on behalf of a child policy for Uttarakhand, the MCF took on the role of facilitating communications between state government agencies and SBMA/Plan's Umang program. To that end, the MCF arranged for the young people of Umang to meet with the secretaries of the departments of Women and Child Development, Education, Planning, Health, and Welfare.

In addition, we have re-established our relationship with the Bal Vikas Board (Child development board), a political entity in the state government, which is responsible for creating the state's child policy. We met with Ms. Neelam Sehgal, who was recently appointed to fill the long-vacant post of Vice President. (The constant movement of people in the state government is one of our greatest challenges as officials tend to get transferred just when they begin to appreciate the value of working with young people and the power of the MCF's model, and we have to start the entire process again with their replacements.) We urged Ms. Sehgal to represent the children of the state and told her about the Child Policy recommendations that the children had given in May 2007. In response, she once again forwarded the children's recommendations to the Chief Minister. On behalf of
our partner, SBMA/Gairsain we invited her to their Kishori Day\(^5\) on the 8\(^{th}\) of January in Gairsain, which she attended as the chief guest.

Ms. Seghal also asked the MCF to provide expert support and content for a brochure on child rights for the Bal Vikas Board, but elections (and political and bureaucratic posturing) have so far prevented that from happening.

**Ongoing Work:**

**ERC/Lisle community engagement project:**

This project consisted of a series of 10 local workshops designed to build a sense of common cause among the young people and help them get involved in their community. Because we conducted these workshops in areas where we were forming new partnerships with other voluntary organizations, the project served the additional purpose of expanding our base and enabling us to help our newer partners learn the MCF’s way of working with young people.

In addition to the 10 workshops, the MCF had committed to making a follow-up visit to each village where a workshop had been held to see what the children had done and provide another boost of energy to their efforts. These follow-up visits, which were conducted by the MCF team, effectively acted as a second workshop. The MCF also used them to help set the stage for our RTI project, which would not have been able to get off the ground so quickly had the children’s groups not already been so engaged and motivated as a result of the Lisle project.

Although the bulk of the Lisle workshops took place in the 2008-09 program year, the follow-up visits for this project were conducted in July and August of 2008.

**PABAM Magazine:**

It is worth noting that in the 6 years since the MCF has been registered as an organization, we have not missed a single month in publishing our monthly magazine, **PABAM.** This colorful, glossy magazine remains one of the MCF’s most important and effective outreach activities as it connects young people from far flung villages to one another and gives them a place to express themselves and share their views, ideas, and concerns.

The magazine is primarily distributed to the children through our partner organizations, which distribute them among the children’s groups in their working area. In 2008-09 we printed 1,500 copies of the magazine that

---

\(^5\) SBMA/Plan created a “Nanda” program for teenage girls (or *kishoris*) that is based on the MCF’s model of creating a network of children’s groups. The MCF has assisted SBMA/Plan with this program, but we have not adopted it because it divides the children’s groups and undermines the gender equality we are working to achieve.
were distributed among our 28 partners to share with the children in their working area. Although our number of partners has increased and our network of children is now more than 11,000 strong, the number of copies of PABAM has remained the same. Ideally, we would increase the size of our print run so that more children can access the magazine.

The magazine is one of the MCF's largest expenses and maintaining a funding stream for it has been difficult. We have been able to reduce the costs of postage by getting PABAM registered with the office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) office and with the Dehradun post office but it still costs Rs. 25,000 per month to get the magazine written, designed, printed and mailed.

We have continued offering reduced-rate subscriptions to individual children to have PABAM sent directly to them, and currently have 22 new children subscribing this year. But while this helps us see how much the children value the magazine, subscriptions at this highly subsidized rate cannot cover the costs of printing and mailing the magazine. (We have not had a successful system in place to persuade the children to renew their subscriptions each year, but we have also not had the heart to cancel their subscriptions, with the result that 297 children now receive their own copy of the magazine, though only 22 of them are actually paying for it this year.)

**Website:**
The MCF website (www.mymountains.org) has long been the MCF's main way of communicating with the outside world. It has been fully supported and run by volunteers, which has often made it difficult to keep the website updated with the MCF’s activities. This year, the MCF was fortunate to find a volunteer who has been actively updating the website, so that the children's activities, especially in the RTI project, are quickly posted online for all to see. However, the website is due for a graphic redesign to make it more user-friendly and easier for the MCF to maintain.

**Focus on Child Rights and Advocacy:**
In the background, the MCF has also continued to push for a coherent, written child policy for Uttarakhand, which had been stalled due to political turnover in the state. Through the Bal Vikas Board, the MCF once more has sent to the Chief Minister's office the request and recommendations for a statewide child policy for Uttarakhand that was crafted by the children of the MCF in 2006-07.

**Discontinued projects:**
**Room to Read Library Program**
In 2006-07 the MCF partnered with the international funding organization, Room to Read (RtR), to establish libraries in Uttarakhand schools. The program established 34 libraries in the district of Tehri during its first year and added another 33 libraries the following year.

---

6 This caused unexpected complications with our FCRA Prior Permission application as the Indian government does not grant FCRA certifications to organizations that publish news. As a result we had to take the extra step of asking the RNI office to review PABAM and certify that it did not contain “news” of the sort that would cause a problem with the FCRA. This was accomplished in May 2008.
Although this program was a partnership between RtR and the MCF, because RtR is a foreign organization and the MCF did not have the FCRA status required to get funds directly, we routed the program through our partner organization SBMA, which already had FCRA status. After playing an active role in the first two years of the program, the MCF has now handed it over to SBMA completely. The program does not appear on the MCF’s balance sheets.

Fundraising
For the MCF to remain viable as an organization, we need to start bringing in more funding. Many of the traditional sources of funding are not compatible with the MCF’s model of broad-based, grassroots change because they tend to support more quantifiable projects such as schools, training of teachers, etc. As a result, the MCF needs to find new sources of support that understand the MCF’s vision.

This year, along with the Asha RTI project, the MCF brought in additional funding from two new sources:

**Indians for Collective Action (ICA)**
The MCF received a grant for $2,900 (Rs 1,36,785) raised by volunteers in the USA through the California-based organizations, Indians for Collective Action (ICA).

This grant, which provided funds for operational expenses, was extremely important for the MCF as, like the RTI project, it nudged the organization to apply for Prior Permission (PP) to get foreign funds. Operational support is difficult to obtain (with most funders wanting to support only tangible “projects”) and these funds helped the MCF cover staff and office expenses.

**Give2Asia**
In February 2009, the MCF won a grant from the international funding agency Give2Asia. This project, which will take place in 2009-10, will focus on creating new bal panchayats and helping the children reach out to the elderly in their community. It consists of nine workshops and will involve five of the MCF’s partner organizations. Since this project also requires FCRA clearance, the MCF has once again started the process of getting Prior Permission from the government.

Volunteers and Interns:
In addition to our long-time, long-distance volunteers who help the MCF with fundraising, developing programs and strategy, writing proposals and reports and maintaining the website, the MCF had two volunteer interns who worked in our Dehradun office:

- Mansi Aggarwal worked with the MCF for one month, primarily on the KOPAL program but also helped translate PABAM into English.
- Pooja Sharma worked on the RTI program for 2 months, collecting data, inputting and analyzing data collected in the baseline survey, translating reports, setting up reporting formats.

Governing Board:
The MCF board consists of 9 unpaid members. The CEO of the MCF also serves as president of the board. The board had remained unchanged since the MCF was established in 2002, but
this year the MCF added two invitation members, thus increasing to four the number of board members from Dehradun (where the MCF is located). In addition, the MCF’s treasurer resigned his post as he was moving across the country. The position was taken over by Sudhir Bhatt, a former MCF staff member and long-time supporter who has joined the Board as an invitation member.

For a list of board members, please see Annex 2

Next Steps

The previous 3 years have seen the MCF make steady progress, building each new effort on the foundation of our previous work. This ability to leverage projects in this way has enabled the MCF to thrive despite its relatively small budget. As we move forward, we plan to maintain this creativity and dynamism, but also hope to develop new sources of funding and new partnerships and alliances so that we can increase our organizational capacity and take our efforts further afield.

RTI Campaign

The Asha-MCF RTI project, because it is taking a new approach to an issue that is already generating a great deal of attention and activity, provides new opportunities to draw attention to the MCF’s work and win over new support for our model. In 2009-10, in addition to continuing its efforts to expand the use of the RTI in rural mountain communities, the MCF must leverage the success of this project to strengthen its network and expand the organization’s recognition within the development field and with the government.

The MCF has also generated valuable data about the level of awareness before and after this campaign and has created a model that can be emulated by others wishing to promote the use of the RTI. In this next year, the MCF must make an effort to share this information with other organizations.

PABAM Magazine

One of the highest priorities for the upcoming year is to find a new source of funding for PABAM magazine. Currently the costs of putting out the magazine are underwritten by SBMA/Plan, however this support has always been uncertain from year-to-year as that organization’s internal priorities change. Since PABAM is so central to the MCF’s ability to reach out to all the children in its vast network, we believe it is now necessary to seek out other, more reliable sources of funding to cover the costs of producing and disseminating the magazine.

Website:

Another major initiative for the 2009-10 year is the redesign of the MCF website, which was first designed in 2004. The Internet has undergone significant change since then and conventions of website design have also evolved. Though the current site does an adequate job of providing a web presence and enabling people to learn about our work, a new, more modern design will better communicate the MCF’s work and mission to the larger world.

Organizational Capacity:

The MCF is still largely powered by volunteers. (Our CEO, who works full-time in the MCF office, has not drawn a salary since the organization was launched.) But if we wish to continue
to grow as an organization, we will need to be able to attract and retain skilled, committed staff and compensate them adequately.

In addition to the CEO, the MCF office currently has two full-time and one part time paid staff. These include:

- A program manager who coordinates MCF activities as well as provides editorial support for *PABAM* magazine. His current salary, at Rs. 5,000 per month, is well below the market rate for the type of work he has been doing. The RTI program, which he is coordinating, enabled us to raise his salary to this level, but as he settles down and starts a family, we need to be able to pay him a fair wage in order to retain him.7
- An office assistant who is responsible for day-to-day office upkeep, mailing of *PABAM*, paying of bills, etc. His salary, at Rs. 2,300 is borderline in terms of being a living wage, but is presently commensurate with his level of skill and experience.
- An editor and production manger for *PABAM* magazine who is a part-time employee and is paid Rs. 5,500 per month, which is slightly below the market rate for the time and skills he brings to the work. However, he has been handling the magazine since the MCF's early days and has continued to work at this salary because of his commitment to the organization.

MCF accounts are handled by an outside contractor.

For the past three years, we had been able to maintain another staff member, Sudhir Bhatt, by running SBMA/Plan's Kopal program from the MCF office. Under this arrangement, Kopal paid Sudhir's salary, but the MCF provided rent-free office space and support with program activities. There was sufficient synergy between Kopal and the MCF that we were able to successfully manage both programs and Sudhir has been one of the MCF's most effective and committed workers. However, the Kopal program ended in September 2008 and because the MCF was not in a position to pay Sudhir the salary he had been receiving (and needed to be able to support his family), we reluctantly had to let him go to SBMA/Gairsain.

When the MCF was operating in "start-up" mode, all the people involved made great sacrifices to help the program succeed. Now, as we enter our 7th year, the MCF needs to look to its long-term capacity, which includes building a strong, sustainable team. The ICA organizational support grant and the RTI grant, which had a provision for the state coordinator's salary, are two models we hope to pursue in the coming year as a way to achieve this.

**Fundraising**

Much of our support until now has come other local organizations, either in the form of synergistic partnerships (such as the Kopal program) or direct support such as SBMA/Plan's funding of our *PABAM* magazine. The MCF could not have survived without this support and we are grateful to the organizations, especially SBMA, that have nurtured us thus far. However, if the MCF wants to continue blazing its own trail, we need to design our own projects and raise the funds to support them (as we did with the Asha RTI campaign). As a result, we are looking outward for new sources of support:

---

7 By “fair wage” we do not mean the salaries commanded in corporate India. But we believe MCF employees should earn enough to be able to live in Dehradun and support a family. This would require a salary ranging from Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 17,000 per month for senior program staff.
- Many in India’s rapidly growing class of young professionals who have found success in the corporate world are now looking for ways to give something back and the MCF is making an effort to reach out to them.

- There are also a great many groups abroad who are interested in supporting development efforts in India and for whom the MCF’s youth-driven model holds a strong appeal. However, in order to access foreign funds it is becoming increasingly urgent that the MCF get its FCRA clearance from the government to receive foreign contributions as applying for permission for each grant is a difficult and time-consuming process. Nonetheless, we are continuing to build relationships with other organizations that might, in the future, either fund or partner with the MCF.

**FCRA registration and other government requirements**

One of our highest priorities this year and in the coming year is to get our “FCRA.” The Indian government requires all non-profits to be registered under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act before they can accept donations from abroad.

Unfortunately, that requires intensive interactions with the Indian bureaucracy and, since the MCF avoids paying bribes to grease the wheels, has proved to be an uphill task. It has taken us this whole last year to get our “no news certificate,” because organizations cannot get FCRA clearance if they disseminate “news;” get registered with the Post Office to be able to mail PABAM at a lower rate; get the Prior Permission (temporary FCRA approval for individual grants for the Asha and ICA funds); and get our 80 G certificate. For the next year we must focus on getting our FCRA so we can raise funds abroad.

**Partner Organizations:**

The MCF partners with grassroots organizations to reach into remote rural communities without creating a massive infrastructure of its own. Many of these are very small organizations struggling to find their feet and working with the MCF network helps them build their own internal capacity and provides an influx of ideas and energy.

The number of organizations partnering with the MCF has grown steadily from the 13 organizations that helped launch the Mountain Children’s Forum to 28 voluntary organizations across the state of Uttarakhand this year. And more organizations are asking to join the network. However, the MCF’s ability to accept all these new partners has been constrained by our limited resources. Working effectively with young people requires a significant amount of training for the voluntary organization staff, who tend to see children in the traditionally passive roles of “help recipients” and have to learn how to treat the young people as active partners and communicate with them at that level. And small organizations that are struggling for funding need resources to implement programs. No matter how much they intrinsically value the energy working with children has brought to their organization, when the MCF asks them to participate in a project such as the RTI campaign, we still need to help provide them with funds to cover their staffing and overhead costs.

The partners who have been with the MCF since its inception have demonstrated their commitment to working with children in this way. But we have also had partners who create children’s groups just to participate in an MCF project, only to abandon them once the project is complete. In cases where we feel a partner is not keeping to the spirit of the MCF’s vision of child-focused development or not performing activities with the level of integrity we
demand, we stop including that organization in our projects, but continue to invite them to send children to our workshops and send them the PABAM magazine so that the young people in their working area can remain part of the MCF network.

**Conclusion:**
The 2008-09 program year has been a pivotal one for the MCF. We have launched an unprecedented, statewide campaign to promote the use of RTI by rural youth, we have built on the momentum of the previous year to continue our work on child rights and have greatly expanded our network and outreach efforts, and we have grown and matured as an organization. The MCF's network of children and partner organizations has grown to more than 11,000 children in some 500 children's groups supported by 28 local voluntary organizations.

To a great extent, this year has been a culmination of the momentum generated over the previous two years:

- Finally having a permanent office address enabled us to move forward with the government paperwork required to accept foreign donations, without which we would not have been able to carry out the Asha RTI project or receive the ICA grant funding.
- The discussion and fundraising work that led to the MCF receiving the Asha RTI grant and the ICA funds have been taking place over the last two years.
- The MCF's capacity to implement a program as large as the RTI campaign, which involves 18 voluntary organizations and more than 2,700 children across 91 villages, is a direct result of our ongoing efforts to build and sustain a strong and active network of voluntary organization partners.
- Our inclusion into networks such as the Indian Alliance for Child Rights is a direct result of the MCF's unceasing efforts to keep a focus on child rights and on our willingness to cooperate with other organizations to achieve our common goals.

But while this has been one of our "best" years in terms of funding and the visibility and the reach of our projects, it is no time for the MCF to rest on its laurels. We must now act quickly to seize the opportunities provided by the greater visibility and effectiveness of the MCF this year and use this momentum to fuel further efforts both in the areas of RTI and child rights as well as our mission of helping young people in mountain communities find their own voice and way to changing their world.
**MCF Partner Organizations:**

Each of these organizations has devoted a great deal of time and energy to teaching the young people as well as their communities about the rights of the child and the importance of safeguarding them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Almora</td>
<td>Society for Uttarakhand and Himalayan Action (SUDHA)*^8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Almora</td>
<td>Udai Kairola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chamoli</td>
<td>Society for Integrated Management of all Resources (SIMAR)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chamoli</td>
<td>SBMA*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Champawat</td>
<td>KAGAS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Udhamsingh Nagar</td>
<td>KAGAS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tehri Garhwal</td>
<td>Gramin Kshetra Vikas Samiti (RADS)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tehri Garhwal</td>
<td>Mount Valley*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pithoragarh</td>
<td>ARPAN*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nainital</td>
<td>VIMARSH*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nainital</td>
<td>CHIRAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nainital</td>
<td>SARAL*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nainital</td>
<td>Everyouth for living Planet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rudraprayag</td>
<td>GRASS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Uttarkashi</td>
<td>SBMA*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Rajkiya Inter College*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>ADP Jagriti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Uttarkashi</td>
<td>Gramin Mahila Vikas Samiti*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Samta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Adopt Management Society*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Alpha Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Nainital / Jeolikote</td>
<td>Chestha Vikas Kalyan Samiti*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Dehradun / Chakrata</td>
<td>Society For Environment and Development*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pauri</td>
<td>Jan Chetana Kendra Pauri*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Rudraprayag</td>
<td>Mandakini ki Aawaj (Bhanaj)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Karanprayag</td>
<td>Lok Jagriti Vikas Sanstha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Nainital</td>
<td>Chahat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Alpha Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bageshwar</td>
<td>SIMAR*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^8 Organization with an * are partnering in the MCF’s RTI campaign.
## Annex 2

### Board and Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ms Aditi P Kaur</td>
<td>63- A Vom Prasth, G.M.S Road Dehradun Uttarakhand</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gender Specialist/ Social Worker</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Mr. Satish D. Patel</td>
<td>N-25C, Saket, New Delhi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hr Specialist &amp; Mgt. Consultant.</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ms. Khila Bisht</td>
<td>R-11/187, New Rajindernagar Ghaziabad, U.P.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Writer/ Social Worker</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Mr. Sudhir Bhatt</td>
<td>63- A Vom Prasth, G.M.S Road Dehradun Uttarakhand</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ms Kiran Ghosh</td>
<td>24 Rajender Nagar Kaulagark Road Uttarakhand</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Mr. Sajikumar, S. R.</td>
<td>Sajibhawan P.O. Maravanthuruthu Dist. Kottayam, Kerala</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Accountant / Social worker / Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Mr. Cyril R. Raphael</td>
<td>201 Indra Nagar Dehradun Uttarakhand</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ex Secretary SBMA; Social Worker</td>
<td>Patron/ Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Mr. Mathew Cherian</td>
<td>Y- 57 Haus Khas New Delhi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Executive Director Helpage India</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Rev. Dr. John Chakkanatt, CMI</td>
<td>Naipalapur, Sitapur - 261001 (U. P.)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Director Sadharmayam Research &amp; Dialogue Centre</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3

Success stories from the Asha-MCF RTI campaign.

The following reports were submitted by children of the MCF for publication in PABAM magazine. Translated from Hindi, these reports describe the children’s experiences with the Right to Information act in their own words.

The RTI really works !!!

Greetings to all members of PABAM.

I am a member of the Thati Baal Panchayat and my village comes under the Bilangana Development Area, District Tehri. Our 25 members Baal Panchayat works in the areas of Health, Education and cleanliness of the village and we are helped in out endeavor by the NGO, Mount Valley Development Association (MVDA), who from time to time gives us training on various issues. In Jan 2009, our Baal Panchayat received training from the Mountain Children's Forum and MVDA on the “Right to Information Act” and how to file an application.

We attended a 2-day intensive workshop which culminated, after great discussions, in the filing of a number of RTI applications. The applications have to be filed by an individual and not a group so I decided to file an application asking the Block Education Dept to give me information regarding the attendance requirements of a primary school teacher. Our village has a primary school and there are 46 children who attend this school. In the last 3 years the teacher has been present for only 10 days in a month.

On receipt of the application, the Block Education Officer along with an 11 member team visited our village. The teacher was absent on that day as well and had to be called from his residence. During the course of the questioning it was learnt that the not only had the teacher not been attending school but he had not been distributing the scholarship to the children. The Block Education Officer was extremely annoyed with the teacher and issued a warning - that the teacher was to distribute the pending scholarship money to the children in the month of March and must attend school every day. Information regarding attendance of the teacher and amount of scholarship to be distributed was handed over in writing to us.

Since then the teacher has been attending school every day, classes are being held regularly and finally we are all now learning something new every day.

On behalf of the members of the Thati Baal Panchayat I would like to take this opportunity to thank the MCF for not only making us aware of the RTI but also empowering us to use the RTI to our advantage.

Mahavir
Village Thati
Bilangana Dev. Area
Dist. Tehri Gahrwal
Uttarakhand
**We Solved a Problem Using the Right to Information Act.**

With the support of the Mountain Children’s Foundation, I took part in a workshop on the Right to Information Act that was organized by the Horrawala Bal Panchayat. In this workshop, we learned a great deal of important information about the RTI. We learned what types of information we could request from the government and how we should write our RTI requests, and that each government department was required to have an information officer, to whom we could address our inquiries, and what that officer's responsibilities were.

This workshop generated greater awareness about government works that were being carried out in our area and inspired us to use the RTI to address our community's needs.

A few months ago, several huge cement pipes were delivered to my village. They were to be used to divert water from a canal along the road and move it underground. These cement pipes were placed haphazardly on both sides of the main road. This was causing a great deal of trouble for anyone using the road and greatly increased the risk of accidents and injuries.

I filed an RTI request about this problem at the irrigation department and asked when these pipes would be removed from the road. Within a few days of my request, the pipes were removed from the road. I am very pleased with my success and when I told my family about this, my mother and father didn't believe me! They only believed me when a Junior Engineer from the irrigation department came looking for me at my house. He told my mother, "Your son wrote to my department asking about the pipes and it was only because of him that they were removed. I hope that now no one will be inconvenienced because of the pipes." A few days later, I also received an official response to my original RTI request.

For me, this is a completely new experience. I used to think that government work could only be influenced by big people. If we ever had a problem with the government we could only get it addressed by going through a politician or government official. But this experience has shown me that with a little attentiveness and awareness, and the proper use of the government’s RTI law, we can solve many of our own problems.

Devrat Varma  
Bal Panchayat Horrawala  
Dehra Dun

---

**The Use of the Right to Information Act (RTI)**

The children of our village bal panchayat participated in a workshop on the Right to Information Act sponsored by the Mountain Children’s Foundation and Asha SV. In this workshop, we discussed our village’s problems and how the RTI could be used to solve those problems.
For two months, the lights in our village were very dim due to the extremely low voltage electricity. The children of our village decided to ask the electricity department about this so we wrote an RTI request. Our application had a great impact on the officers in the electricity department and they immediately improved the voltage to our village. In this way, our village’s electricity problem was solved. And respect for our bal panchayat among the villagers greatly increased.

Our village also has a severe water problem. We have submitted an RTI request for this as well and are hoping to hear back soon. I want to ask all my PABAM colleagues to make better use of the RTI so that you can all be part of the development of your village.

Vimla Baseda, Class 12
Rani Laxmi Bai Bal Panchayat
Askote, Pithoragarh

Partner Mount Valley
Bal Panchayat Khal, District Tehri

Pranaam to our PABAM companions:
Mount Valley Development Association held a workshop on the Right to Information (RTI) in our village with the support of the Mountain Children’s Foundation. As part of this workshop, some members of our bal panchayat filed RTI inquiries with the relevant government organizations to address problems in our village. We also helped adults in the village, who could not read or write, file applications of their own. Here are two cases in which the RTI helped us find the truth and help members of our community.

Case Study I:
In our village, Ms. Sulochana Devi, wife of the late Buddhi Lal, is a widow living in poverty. We wanted to find out if she was entitled to a widow’s pension. Some people of the village had taken money from her and promised that they would file the papers for her widow’s pension, but none of these people actually sent her papers to the Social Welfare Department. We got to know this when we filed an RTI request asking “Why is Sulochana Devi not getting her widow’s pension?“

In just a few days, we received a written response saying that her papers had not reached the Social Welfare department. They also said that if we sent the papers to the office, they would release her pension as soon as possible. In addition, they gave us a list of the people in our village who are currently receiving a pension from the department.

We immediately sent her papers to the department and they have accepted her application.

Thanks to the Right to Information Act, we were able to learn the truth and found a solution to our problem.

Case Study II:
Mr. Sohan Lal also lives in our village. After his wife’s death, all the responsibility of caring for their two children has fallen on him. He has no cultivatable land and has been working as
a day laborer to make ends meet. In December of 2008, he received an electricity bill of Rs. 5000/-. He has a BPL (Below Poverty Line) meter and appealed to the electricity board that he had not used so much electricity. But the workers at the electricity board refused to listen to him and threatened to cut off his electricity and take other punitive actions against him. Because of his current financial situation, Rs. 5000/- is an unmanageable amount of money and as a result he was extremely worried.

The members of our bal panchayat inspired Mr. Sohan Lal to file an RTI request. We helped him write the application as we had learned in our RTI workshop. In his application, Mr. Sohan Lal asked the electricity department why his bill was so outrageously high. Within a month, a Junior Engineer came from the electricity department and, along with some other people of the village, went to Mr. Sohan Lal’s house to check his meter. The meter was found to be faulty and the Rs. 5000/- charge was subsequently waived. Mr. Sohan Lal thanked our entire bal panchayat for helping him.

In this way, by getting training on the RTI Act, we were able to solve several problems in our village. We all thank the Mountain Children’s Foundation for their support.

With thanks,
The Members of Bal Panchayat Khal
Tehri, Garhwal
India's 2005 Right to Information Act (RTI) is one of the most ambitious and proactive sunshine laws in the world. It provides Indian citizens with unprecedented power to ask questions of their government at every level.

But no sooner was this act passed than efforts were underway to amend and weaken it. There is a powerful motivation among those who would like to see RTI become ineffective and marginalized and unless the citizenry of India finds an equally strong motivation to stand up and fight to preserve RTI, its ability to withstand this onslaught is in doubt.

The Mountain Children's Forum has been working in rural mountain communities in the Indian state of Uttarakhand since 2002. In the past 5 years we have built an extensive network of children within their villages and voluntary organizations deeply rooted in those communities. At the same time the MCF has worked to build bridges based on trust and shared purpose between the young people, voluntary organizations, and various government entities.

We believe the surest way to strengthen and preserve the RTI is to spread it broadly and deeply into the villages, to make it such a basic and important part of local communities that the people will staunchly resist any effort to destroy it. It is also necessary to do this without creating needless animosity (such as between the villagers and their pradhan) but rather encouraging people to use the RTI for the benefit of all. But as yet, many people in rural India barely know what the RTI is. Few have used it or would even know how to go about filing an RTI application.

The MCF has found that children are a powerful force for spreading information and awareness into local communities. With the support of our partner organizations, the young people can be empowered to teach the people in their villages about RTI and how to use it to improve their communities and discourage waste and corruption, and do so in a way that furthers interaction and cooperation between the community and the government.

Proposal:

While the essentials of the RTI can probably be conveyed in a few hours, integrating RTI into the civic life of the community will take considerably more training and effort. This can best be achieved by first training a facilitator from each of our partner organizations. These facilitators can then mobilize and work with the children's groups to start identifying areas in which they can apply the RTI to their community. One of the first tasks will be to take inventory of their local schools. With the aid of their local facilitator, the children will make a record of their local schools, e.g. the nature of the buildings, the number of teachers (and how often they show up), etc. This will provide a baseline so that when the children/ villagers file an RTI inquiry about funds allocated for their school, they will be able to compare what exists in their village with what the government says it is providing.
Once the children have started thinking about the RTI, a statewide workshop will bring children from each of these communities together with RTI advocates and representatives from the Uttarakhand government. During this interaction, they will learn about the power of the RTI but also how to use it in responsible way (as opposed to just as a tool to harass their panchayat). During the workshop, the children can also prepare RTI applications on behalf of their community. An MCF facilitator will track and provide support on these applications to the children’s groups in each community.

A state-level follow-up workshop one year later would then allow the children to report whether the RTI was able to make a difference for their community and provide an opportunity to compare the original baseline reports with the conditions of their schools one year later.

The individual pieces of this campaign are:

1. **Partners training:** To train one facilitator from each of our partner organization. Though the primary purpose of this training is to help these partners work with the children, this training will have a much greater impact as our partner organizations, which currently know little about RTI, will gain the ability to use the RTI in all their work and will spread this knowledge to the community.

2. **Village-level workshops:** These local, 2-day workshops, will enable our partner organizations to mobilize the children to talk about RTI to the adults within their community, gather data, and identify areas in which their community could use the RTI.

3. **State-level workshop:** This workshop will bring some young people from each community to Dehradun where they can meet with RTI experts as well as government representatives. During this workshop, the children will learn more about the power of the RTI and how they can use it to improve their communities. They will also learn of the need to be responsible about their use of RTI and the importance of building positive relationships with their local government officials (at least, as far as possible).

4. **A dedicated MCF facilitator:** We have found that showing an ongoing interest in their work is one of the most powerful motivators for the young people. Unfortunately, because of the MCF’s small staff, we end up relying heavily on our partner organizations to provide ongoing support and follow up. However, for this campaign, a facilitator is essential. The facilitator will be based at the MCF but will travel for 15 days of each month, meeting with the young people, helping troubleshoot problems they encounter and following up on RTI applications.

5. **Printed materials:** In the past we have found that having a well-designed brochure or poster is very useful in getting people’s attention and providing an ongoing reminder of the project.