

Green Friends

Pacific Northwest Litter Pick-up Project

Everything in nature is a wonderful miracle. Isn't a little bird flying through the vast sky a miracle? Isn't a tiny fish swimming through the depths of the ocean a miracle?

Unfortunately, people think that only if a fish flies through the sky can it be called a miracle!

Amma



February Greetings

As I was picking up litter towards the end of January, I reflected on the fact that this project has now passed through three different seasons

During the summer, we picked up litter on sunny, warm days. In the fall, the leaves turned gold, orange and red. We sometimes sifted through the leaves looking for cigarette butts and trash. Now the trees are bare and at times there is snow and ice on the ground. We bundle up to stay warm as we head off to pick up litter.

What is constant is the litter, always calling us to participate in this never ending seva opportunity!

Karuna

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Green Friends is a global grassroots environmental movement which promotes environmental awareness and local participation in conservation efforts throughout the world. Green Friends is one of the projects of Embracing the World, a not-for-profit international collective of charities founded by internationally known spiritual and humanitarian leader, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma). For more info go to: www.embracingtheworld.org

To join the Pacific Northwest Green Friends Litter Pickup Project write Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net. To learn more about the project go to: www.seattlesatsang.amma.org/litterproject.html

Litter Project Membership

As of January 31, 2012, we had 205 members.
12 new members in January!

Litter Project Hours

In January, 61 members reported picking up 115.7 hours of litter. (The statistics below relate to members who report having picked up litter. They do not include those who do not report or who reported 0.)

Members Average : 1.9 hours
Range 2 minutes to 15 hours
Median : 1 hour

The group has picked up 1198 hours of litter since the project began in July 2011!



New Year's Day Port Townsend Litter Pick Up

The day started with several members of the Olypen and Tacoma satsangs going for a New Year's dip in the Puget Sound. After a warm breakfast we went downtown to the bus transportation park to pick up litter.

We had been told that the area just north of the parking lot was always in need of a litter pick up as homeless folks use this area to camp out. This area is also part of a very beautiful habitat next to Kai Thai Lake.

We picked up 8-10 garbage bags worth of litter in about two hours. We then separated out the recyclable items, which was about 60% of the trash. It is amazing how much garbage can be recycled.

I think we were all were ready for a rest by the end of the two hours but it was a nice experience to begin the new year cleaning up an area that is used so much by the community and is a major wildlife habitat in the city.

Eswar



Martin Luther King Birthday Celebration

Litter Project members from the Seattle area had decided to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday by picking up litter on Martin Luther King Way between S Massachusetts St. and S Yesler St. Twelve members had committed to participate. Our plans came to an abrupt halt, however, when there was a big snow storm that day. Even if we had braved the storm, we wouldn't have been able to see the litter!

The work party was rescheduled for January 28. A small but enthusiastic group picked up litter between S Massachusetts St. and S Jackson St. During the last portion of the work party we picked up so much litter that we had trouble carrying it back to the park where we had started. It was very noticeable that there were no garbage cans along that route. Where are people supposed to put their litter? No wonder so much ends upon the ground.

(Nirmala was also there. She took the picture!)





Email from Anugha and Raj in Chennai (January 4)



Raj and I had a wonderful time helping you with the litter project. You have opened our eyes more to the litter crisis and have got us thinking about what we can do in our area to make a difference. We have just arrived back home to our apartment in Chennai. We are blessed to have a beautiful third floor apartment that overlooks the ocean, we can literally see the ocean from all of the windows from our house (except the kitchen window that overlooks a wall). Unfortunately a lot of people come to the beach and they throw their garbage on the beach or in the green plant area leading towards the beach. In the past we have seen the occasional group of volunteers picking up trash, but it soon becomes a big dump. How to change people's minds? How to make them aware that their carelessness is making the whole area unpleasant for everyone? Perhaps the people who live here have become used to seeing trash everywhere and don't think about the fact that if they drop trash on the beach, it is not going to magically disappear; eventually someone is going to have to pick it up!

So, just in this morning I was thinking, what can we do? There is the big dilemma that near the beach are two big trash cans that are so full of trash that trash is littering out of them. So if we were to pick up trash, where could we put it? And then I thought of how by washing and drying the trash it could be given or sold to someone who could sell it to a place that will recycle it. But that could be tricky (I don't really want to bring bags of trash to my house and clean it/dry it here.) At least if we could salvage plastic bottles and save them to sell, that might be good. I noticed that the ABC has a clean the last Sunday of the month campaign. I thought that Raj and I could start collecting trash around our beach on the last Sunday of the month that could be good, but better than just the two of us, couldn't we get more hands involved? There are a lot of other teachers from my school that live near this beach; maybe if I send out a mass email for volunteers, people will come to help?

Also, I am thinking a lot about what I can do at school. At least in my own classroom I can start collecting plastic bottles and used paper separately and bring them home to give to my "paper guy." I am going to talk to the "Roots and Shoots" coordinator about seeing how we can change the way we recycle in the school and if we could perhaps be doing more.

As you can see, you've got the wheels in my brain turning, you've lit the fire in me that says, "I can't just sit idle, I need to do something!" You and Amma of course. Her New Year's message hit me like a ton of bricks, I need to change myself, stop giving in to lazy behaviors and start being active and making an effort to stick to something, to persevere, to be strong in my endeavors to do good, to stick to good habits. "I am in charge of writing the story of my life on the blank pages God has given." So I am going to see what I can do and I will be sure to keep in touch and keep you posted of our progress and hours.

We hope you enjoy your last week at the ashram, blow Amma a big kiss for us!

Sincerely,
Anagha and Raj

p.s. I just had an aha moment...Raj and I could at least go out, when possible, with gloves and one plastic bag and fill it and take it to our apartments trash bins which get collected regularly. Something is better than nothing!

Stories and Reflections

From Sri Lalitha (Olympic Peninsula) after returning from Amritapuri:

The phrase "Open your heart and drink" crossed my path today. And I can apply it to my first trip to Amritapuri. A trip which has only recently ended. The after effects of this trip I know will continue to manifest. I'm sitting in Washington State in our small trailer -- hibernating actually. It's cold outside... and there is seven inches of snow on the ground!! Gratefully, I found that I can tolerate the Indian heat in the months of December and January.

I had no idea I'd be picking up litter along the majestic Indian Ocean during the 2011 December holiday season. My litter of choice turned out to be the orange striped plastic candy wrappers from Amma's prasad candies. True prasad!! Each one of these wrappers has been in Amma's left hand! It became my privilege to pick them up and Mother kept having them manifest at my feet as I walked around the ashram grounds, sometimes alone, sometimes with other devotees, sometimes during morning trash seva with Karuna.

I then soaked and rinsed the wrappers. After drying they were taken to the Plastic Project people for use in their projects. The last batch I soaked was not usable for the plastic people, as the orange ink came off the plastic wrappers in soaking. Guess it was time to come home!!

The work being done at Amritapuri with recycled materials is so very clever, creative, useful and certainly inspired. See the January issue of the Litter Project Newsletter for details. Amma keeps giving us so many ideas and suggestions as to how to help our Mother Earth in Her healing process. How fortunate we are to have Amma guiding our lives.



From StanleydelMundo in Seattle:

I have three more members of my Amma Pick Up Team.....Christian Colvin (6yrs) Kate Colvin (3yrs) and her twin sister McKenna (also 3yrs)..... they wish to report 3 hours each for December that is another 9 hours to the total.....

All three are very excited about being on Stanley's Litter Team.....Christian is the lead and quite often RUNS to the litter and then allows his sisters to pick it up.....they live in Portland and spent the holidays in San Diego with their grandparents.....Christian has been excited about this for a couple of months.....

From Kirtana (Seattle) after returning from Brazil:

I was able to manage 3.5 hours of litter pick-up while I was in Brazil, including 3,300 cigarette butts! I think the taxi drivers there were a little embarrassed. They didn't have much to say when I smiled and showed them the bag of butts. I think it's because they probably do most of the smoking! :)

There were an awful lot of cigarette butts in a relatively small area, and I spent most of the time crawling around in the rain on my hands and knees. It made me wish I had more time and energy. I picked the most popular smoking area to collect butts and if I had continued, I would have likely found 10,000 more. Well, most likely they'll wait until the next time I'm there. Maybe I can bring a crew then! :)

From Dee Hall in Eugene:

Based on the information about the need to get cigarette butts off the ground and out of our ground water, I have convinced my workplace to invest in three outdoor ashtrays in order to collect the butts from our homeless clients who smoke outside our buildings. If successful, we will be getting more receptacles. I promised to empty these for the first year and already folks are offering to share that task. Thank you!

From Nigama S. in Seattle:

Noah (age 3) has started picking up pieces of litter he finds at the playground, then bringing it to me saying, "Mom, here's some garbage to throw away."

More Stories

From Anugha and Raj in Chennai (Feb 2)

I have been meaning to write an update, so here it is. Unfortunately neither Raj or I have done any litter pick up since Amritapuri. However I have made a more conscious effort to recycle more things in our home and in my classroom including milk and juice cartons, plastic bags and containers, even wrappers that I would have never thought to recycle before working with you at the ashram. I have started collecting all of my paper and plastic waste at school and at home and I give it to the local paperman (a man that goes door to door collecting recyclable materials so that he can sell it to a recycling center and make money to support his family).

Also I initiated a big discussion on what we can do to create a recycling program at our school with my fellow "roots and shoots" coordinators. I arranged for a man from a recycling movement based in Chennai called Paperman (you can look it up I think the website is paperman.org) to come and speak to us. His organization works with schools to establish recycling programs. We are going to plan to have a recycling drive at my school to see how much paper we can recycle as a school. At the end of the drive the paper will be weighed and the school will be awarded a certificate that states how many trees we've saved as a result of our recycling efforts. After the drive, as long as we get cooperation from the head of the school, we hope to start a full-time recycling program and make efforts to reduce the waste we produce as a school.

So that is what I have been working on this month. Raj and I have also wanted to go around our neighborhood and take pictures of the dilapidated trash cans and also of the small corner businesses that collect and sell recycled goods but we haven't had the time to do so yet. Hopefully by the next check in we'll have some photos to share.

From Achala in Tacoma:

It's great to be back! I LOVE scanning the beach for plastics! I ask Her to bring them to the shore for me. The other week She brought me 2, 3 foot long by 12 inch pieces of styrofoam, obviously floats of some type. I was able to bring them to the garbage by wrapping the dogs leashes around them to carry. I hear we will start seeing debris from the tsunami soon.

New Opportunities

Kick Butts Day March 21, 2012

United Health Foundation is sponsoring Kick Butt Day, a "national day of activism that empowers youth to speak up and take action against Big Tobacco at hundreds of events from coast to coast."

This is the 17th year of this project. While March 21st is their main day, they are fine with adults and youth doing Kick Butts activities on a different day.

For more information go to:
<http://www.kickbuttsday.org>

World Cleanup 2012

Excerpts from
<http://www.economist.com/node/21542395>:

"World Cleanup 2012 is the biggest attempt so far at voluntary rubbish collection.

The moving spirit behind the campaign is Rainer Nolvak, a high-tech entrepreneur [from Estonia] who has devoted himself to a worldwide blitz on trash.

Estonia has a tradition of volunteer efforts aimed at cleaning up the blight of illegal rubbish dumping in public spaces. In 2008, 50,000 Estonians turned out and collected 10,000 tons of trash in less than a day. By 2009 similar events in neighboring Lithuania and Latvia were mustering 120,000 litter pickers. In 2010 a cleanup effort in Slovenia brought out an estimated 270,000 people, or more than one-eighth of the country's population.

This year's target is to mobilize 300 million people [from all over the world] to pick up 100 million tons of illegally dumped waste in six months, starting on March 24th.

To learn more about the World Clean Up 2012 project go to: <http://www.letsdoitworld.org/>

(I've written World Clean Up 2012 to get more information. I'm sure you will be hearing more from me about this project. It would be nice to support both of these events by doing something individually and/or in groups that week in March.) Karuna