

Good News



Quarterly updates about our charitable initiatives in Varanasi, India

Thanks to a group of selfless volunteers, we have been providing vocational training to underprivileged Indian women.

Shakti Beauty School Lifting Families out of Poverty

Many opportunities exist for skilled hair stylists, makeup artists, manicurists and pedicurists in India. Experienced workers earn 423,000 rupees per year, which is roughly 6,000 U.S. dollars, a livable wage. This motivated Maricruz, friend of Sonoma Ashram and professional beautician, to assemble a group of like-minded colleagues who wanted to be of service. Out of their joint inspiration, Shakti Beauty School was born.

Shakti Beauty School is ongoing and self-perpetuating. What began as a small class for girls has grown into an operational salon for hands-on learning. Some women are now teachers and others have their own shops and salons.



“As long as you are living for yourself, you are not going to find happiness. Look for it in the smiles of others, particularly those smiles that are caused by your actions.”

Aghoreshwar Bhagwan Ramji



Students honored their program sponsors, left to right: Maricruz, Noemi, Raquel, Ori and Carmelita (Barbara not pictured).

Six Hispanic professionals, from the U.S. and Mexico, have traveled to Varanasi since 2019 to offer free training in the Beauty Arts to local women. Throughout the year at home, they collect donations of tools and materials of the trade from their salon clients and other well-wishers. Each January, they make their annual trek with loaded suitcases and overflowing hearts. Maricruz shares, “With so many occasions to look one’s best and the popularity of Western-style hair fashions and makeup, a beautician in India has a bright future.”



Advanced Training Scholarships

Shakti Beauty School operates completely from donations. Enrollment is free for basic and intermediate classes. Promising students receive scholarships for an eight-month advanced hair fashion and makeup program. Upon completion, they qualify for open positions at established Varanasi salons.

Meet four graduates currently enrolled in the advanced program:



ANKITA has an interest in combining what she learned at the beauty school with principles of Ayurveda. When she completes training, she looks forward to working in a fine beauty salon using an Ayurvedic approach to hair, skin and makeup treatment.

ANJELA, who is only 19, was raised in Shanti Niketan, a safe home for girls. While there, she was a role model and a leader to other girls who, like her, will soon transition into adult life. She is grateful to receive the scholarship and is passionate about the idea of one day owning a salon.



POOJA's family moved from Mumbai to Varanasi during COVID when her husband lost his job. She is determined to succeed so she can support her family. This scholarship has given her the confidence that she will.



RENU has been part of Project Shakti since 2020, where she became an excellent seamstress. She lost her husband during COVID and supports her two children while attending the advanced program. This scholarship, she hopes, will lead to work at a top-tier salon and allow her to better provide for her family.



Your generosity makes a difference

Watching young women eager and quick to learn, and so grateful for the opportunity, gives meaning to what we do at Shakti Beauty School. A single scholarship costs \$869 and prepares a young woman for a career that can keep her family from poverty. Many more talented women merit these scholarships. Please help make their dreams a reality.

Gracias!

Visit sonomaashram.org/shakti for more information and to donate.

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