**Nirmal Prajapat**
Nirmal first came to Shikshantar in 1999, when he was 14, to participate in a month-long art workshop with a local artist from Udaipur. Nirmal and his family are all involved in miniature painting. At Shikshantar, he experiments with new kinds of art and painting and also explores new interests like pottery, upcycling (making useful things from waste materials) and vermicomposting with *gobar* (cow dung). Nirmal considers himself a Swapathgami, because he is not interested in mainstream schooling and is rather finding other ways to discover and strengthen his talents.

**Mamta Prajapat**
Shikshantar was a just another building to Mamta, until she spent a couple of days observing what went on inside. The most recent member of the core team, she joined Shikshantar in August 2005. Since then, Mamta has become interested in natural medicines and healthy cooking. Every day, she looks forward to participating in a creative atmosphere where she can experiment and learn new things.

**Ramawtar Singh**
Several years ago, Ramawtar was working as a teacher in non-formal education centers. He realized that while he was teaching others, he wasn’t learning from his students. Moreover, he began questioning whether he was teaching anything of real value to children. Eager to join in a non-institutional atmosphere where he could work with his hands and meet others doing innovative projects, he came to Shikshantar in June 2003. He edits the Hindi issue of Swapathgami magazine, supports city farming and herbal gardens, and enjoys exploring the arts (theater, drawing, games) with children, youth and families. Ramawtar is continuously finding ways to be freer from the global market, by making natural medicines, *khadi* cloth, his own shoes, and even toothpaste!
Shilpa Jain
Shilpa came from the US in 1999 to support Manish and Vidhi in getting Shikshantar going. She originally planned on returning for graduate school, but didn’t want to go back to the fragmented life she led. “Here, I can do everything in a day; it’s a seamless flow: shram (physical labor), art, writing, and interacting with all walks of life. There is no division between friends, family, fun and work.” She is interested in farming, dance, jewelry-making, photography, learning with children, and much more… Shilpa appreciates the spirit of Shikshantar. It supports her in asking questions, in living a life in line with her convictions, and in considering and re-considering how to free herself from the ready-made world.

Panna Lal Patel
Panna Lal grew up farming in Udaipur and continues this practice today. While writing columns about social issues, he contacted Manish and came to Shikshantar in early 1999. Since then, he has passionately explored local knowledge systems, peoples’ relationship to the land, nature, histories, and the beauty of community life. He is also interested in organic farming, local language, and reestablishing pride in the farming community. Panna Lal has been instrumental in launching Hamo Desi Mela, the organic market/fair hosted by Shikshantar on a regular basis.

Shammi Nanda
Shammi came to Shikshantar in 2003, having heard about it from a local Udaipur artist. A year later, he helped to co-host a film-making workshop for swapathgamis, and has been addicted to the creative atmosphere of Shikshantar ever since. He believes that his mind opens up to new possibilities here, because the other people are so open to new ideas. “When I’m here, I feel that anything’s possible.” With this optimism, Shammi has been making jewelry, cutting hair, making sandals, working with clay, and anything else he can get his hands on.
Manoj Prajapat
Like his elder brother Nirmal, Manoj had his first introduction to Shikshantar in 1999. He participated in an art workshop when he was 12 years old. In early 2005, he came back to Shikshantar to work full-time. He believes it is a good place for learning, generating new ideas and, most importantly, carrying them out. He embraces the swapathgami spirit and practice, as he left school and is anti-globalization. He likes to practice organic farming, learn about herbal medicines, make paper bags, travel, solar cook, and cook without oil.

Guddi Prajapat
Shikshantar was in search of a cook, and Guddi responded to the call. After visiting for several days, she really enjoyed herself and decided to start working full-time. Cooking was just the start for Guddi, soon she started getting involved with workshops. The more she participated, the more confidence and energy she got to talk to people outside Shikshantar about what she was doing and how she was experimenting. She made a book on local folk-songs and another is in the works. We often find Guddi behind the sewing machine where she makes useful items from waste.

Vishal Singh Dhaybhai
Four years ago, Vishal came with a friend to Shikshantar and immediately identified with it. After one workshop, he was hooked and spent what time he could at Shikshantar while he attended school. “What attracted me here was that they’re always relating what they do to nature, whether it is trees, people, food, everything.” Vishal initially worked on youth publications, but has since branched out to filmmaking, farming, animation, and zero waste. Indeed, he has been key to initiating and furthering Shikshantar’s work with kabaad se jugaad (making useful things from waste materials). He can often be found in Shikshantar’s ‘Treasure Room’, figuring out new creations to make with paper, styrafoam, rubber, bottles, and much more!
Sunny Gandharva
Sunny came to Shikshantar 2 ½ years ago. While he finishes school, he is able to pursue his other passions of healthy cooking and filmmaking. He says, “I go to school, but Swapathgami is many things. I identify with it because I support alternative methods of living. There’s a lot of learning to do outside of school for me. I get some spirit; people give many ideas here.” Most recently, Sunny traveled to Mumbai to learn healthy recipes with The Health Awareness Center. With such great experiences traveling, he hopes to do more of it in the future.

Sumit Vaishnav
“I’m coming here because it’s something organic,” says a wise 12 year-old. Sumit was introduced to Shikshantar two years ago by a friend and was enticed by the friendly environment. At his own house, he has an herbal garden and practices natural medicine himself and treats others. He’s interested in everything from charkha, house farming, alternative waste material uses, and flash animation.
Hiramani Saragara, known as Hira for short, is a new ‘diamond’ on our team! Staying at home, she felt she wasn’t doing anything interesting. Coming to Shikshantar meant learning new things and meeting new peoples. She is focused right now on handlooming, jewelry-making and bag-making. Hira finds herself coming up with lots of new ideas for making useful things, just by sharing the space with others. In the future, she hopes to expand her experiences with upcycling by making diaries, paper baskets and other zero waste items. For herself and her family, she wants to weave a scarf out of cloth scraps. Her other interests include cooking and learning about medicinal plants. She has been trying out some zero-oil cooking experiments at home. Hira lives in Kharol Colony with her husband and two-year-old daughter, Vaishali.

Uma Saragara always wanted to do something different, something fresh and new and free from the rat race. She felt her schooling was limited and if she wanted to improve her own skills and talents, she would have to work at it herself. Uma has been on the team for nearly two years, after taking a year’s break at one point. Her major interests include handlooming and herbal medicines. After joining Shikshantar, she has noticed she has become a lot less angry and irritable; she has learned how to share her problems openly, rather than suppress them. Uma says, “I have changed myself a lot. I can talk freely when I meet new people now. I am not shy or scared anymore.” In the future, Uma wants to spend time with traditional healers and learn how to make other medicines. She is experimenting with completely giving up western medicine and with listening more to her inner voice.

When Deepika Garg heard that we respected real life experience a lot more than schooling, and in fact, had created a space that welcomed school walkouts, she came to check out Shikshantar. She had always thought she wasn’t so valuable, because she hadn’t really ever gone to school. After spending a few days in Shikshantar, she saw that the rumors were true! So, Deepika decided to join the team full-time. Oil-free food has become a big interest; she never knew before there was food was like this! Her family has appreciated the salads and oil-free dishes she has made at him, and she is looking forward to doing more experiments with that. Deepika also picked up the handloom very quickly and has already made a few bags. She appreciates how well waste is being used here, and also hopes to get more into herbal medicines. She is slowly overcoming her shyness and is learning how to talk to strangers. She is also noticing how much more comfortable she feels with expressing her feelings. Deepika lives with her mother-in-law and three children, aged four, eight and nine. Her husband works with MKS, an organic farming association in nearby village Oogna.

Her friend Hemlata told her about Shikshantar. Not only was it a place to acquire lots of skills, but also to explore ways to free ourselves of the violence happening in society. Ritu Joshi had other job offers in front of her, but dropped them when she got to Shikshantar. Since joining the team, she has found her negative thinking decreased and her relationships with others have sweetened and become more positive. Ritu sees Shikshantar as a very unique place, especially for children – they are treated as they really should be here. She finds herself interested in crocheting scraps of cloth, jewelry-making, creating coconut pendants, making diaries, etc. Ritu appreciates how people work through problems here, through dialogue, making molehills out of mountains (instead of the other way around). She also likes how ‘sirs’ and ‘madams’ don’t exist here, which lets us all have stronger relationships. Knitting, zero-oil cooking and raw food are her future interests. Ritu hopes her work reminds each person of their humanity, their love and respect, and their leadership potential to remove the ills we see in society.