

*Look at the beauty and perfection in Nature. Everything in Nature is so joyful.
Amma*

Litter Project Newsletter #2 September 9, 2011

On Labor Day I was reflecting about how to begin this newsletter. The answer was made evident minutes later. As I was returning home from picking up litter, a young man called out to me. He was probably in his twenties and was clearly coming home from some kind of sports practice. He said, "I want to personally thank you for what you are doing. When I see you cleaning up all of the litter and beer cans and bottles I get inspired to do the same. I am going home to teach my kids that this is the way to be." Needless to say, I was very touched. And I realized that this is a big part of what this project is about. Every time we clean something up in a public place, whether it is in a park, on a beach, or on a city street, we are seen. We are seen by people walking by; seen by people in passing buses and cars; seen by people waiting for the buses or just hanging out. Some of them may themselves start cleaning up litter. Some may teach their children. Some may think twice before they throw garbage on the ground. This is one way to change the world.

Contents of newsletter

Litter project hours report
Aluminum can sales report
Questions and Answers
Celebrating Amma's Birthday
Litter Song
Litter Pickup T-shirt
Reflections and Stories from Project members

Litter project hours

The project began on July 2011 with ten members. As of today, September 9, 2011 we have 76 members!!! Members come from Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, Bellingham, Nelson, Vancouver BC, Olympic Peninsula, Portland, Eugene, Cortes Island, Vancouver Island, Olympia and Vashon. Forty five people reported picking up litter in August, for a total of 184.47 hours! The group has picked up 284.64 hours of litter since the project began in July. Here are more detailed statistics for the months of July and August.

	July	August
Total number of hours for month	100.17	187.14
Total number of workers for month	10	46
Range of hours worked for month	1 to 72.5 hrs	.25 to 40 hrs
Average hours worked during month	7.25	4.1
Median hours worked during month	1.25	1
Total number of workers in project	11	73
Total number of hours worked since project began	100.168	284.64

Aluminum Can Sales

Seattle devotees are saving the aluminum cans they find as litter, plus those they can get from work, neighbors and friends. We are selling them to benefit the Pacific Northwest Amma Center. Here is an update on that project.

In the first 6 weeks of the can project we earned between \$2.20 and \$9.12 a week. This week (September 6) we earned \$12.96. The total so far is \$46.79. Every dollar helps!

Questions and Concerns

How many hours do I have to work to join the project?

Your contribution of time will be appreciated no matter how big or how small it is. It may be five minutes a month or 50 hours.

Tasha wrote: One way to help out with Amma's litter seva is to pick up what litter or cans you see while out running errands or while getting the mail. If you see a bit of trash pick it up and, viola!, you've helped out with Amma's litter seva.

To join the project write Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net

How do I keep track of my hours when I pick up litter here and there, a little bit at a time?

If you are picking up isolated pieces of litter, your minutes/hours will certainly need to be estimated rather than accurately tracked. Each day I write on my calendar how much time I devoted picking up litter. That makes it easy to add the time up at the end of the month. You could do it that as well, regardless of whether your time is one minute or two hours.

How do I estimate the time my kids help? They aren't always focused.

Young children almost certainly won't be as focused as adults. A friend and I took two 4 year olds out two weeks ago. I was amazed that they were actually able to stay excited and focused for half an hour. Then one went home and the other was tired. We asked if she wanted the job of finding litter for the adults to pick up. She loved the new job. We counted her time until she felt completely done with helping.

My family is doing it together. Can I just give you our total time?

The accounting of time is being done per person so I can get the statistics you saw above. So ideally please break it down and give me the time, even if it is an estimate, for each person. If you don't do it that way, I will either divide the total by the number of family members or if the hours include those of very young children, I will give the adults a larger percentage of the time. But it will be more accurate if you could be the one to split it out.

Can our satsang just report their hours as one number?

As I mentioned above, the accounting of time is being done per person so we can get the monthly statistics you saw above. So ideally please break it down and give me the names and their accrued hours for the month. If they don't want me to have their names then give me their initials or assign them numbers, i.e. Person 1, Person 2, Person 3, etc. The only way for me to send members newsletters and other litter emails, however, is if I have their names and email addresses.

By picking up and selling cans are we taking away a source of income from the homeless?

I have had several emails from members concerned that by collecting aluminum cans, we were taking away a source of income from the homeless. These members were from Oregon, California and New York where everyone pays a deposit when they buy a can. The aluminum cans are then turned in for a refund of the deposit. In Washington it is not like that. There is no can deposit and the amount that the recyclers pay for aluminum is low and getting lower. It has gone from 55 cents a pound in July to 48 cents a pound now. Last week I took more than 850 cans to the recycler and we made only \$12.96.

Also, far as I know there is only one place in Seattle where you can sell the cans so it would be very difficult for a homeless person to transport them to that location unless they had a car or lived nearby. Over the years I have seen homeless gathering cans from time to time, but I've only seen one person since I've been working on this project.

There are homeless drinkers who sit on the green belt stairs that are near my house. They are actually helping with our project! Numerous times they have told me that they've left me a can on the ledge by the steps or have pointed out cans in the brush that I've missed! They know that the money is going to an organization that helps the homeless worldwide and have expressed their appreciation several times.

Deepti, from Oregon, mentioned that when she participated in a River Clean up project they took the cans they found and put them on the path knowing that they would get picked up by homeless people. I can also imagine project members in states that have can deposits handing the cans they find during their litter pick to someone who is obviously collecting cans. You would make their day!

I hope someday soon that Washington also has a can deposit and we are able to support the homeless in this way too. And at the same time, I know that the Pacific Northwest Amma Center will do many things to support the homeless.

What if the coats we find are ones that a homeless person stashed?

Tony and I found quite a lot of coats in the time we spent picking up litter in the woods a few weeks ago. Some were in really good condition. I've also found them from time to time on my daily rounds. Generally they are in bags that have obviously been there for a very long time, sometimes in areas overgrown with blackberry vines. Sometimes they have been part of dumps. While they clearly looked abandoned or dumped, I still was a bit concerned that I was taking something that a homeless person had left and still wanted. My theory was in many cases the person may have left the coat when they were drinking and never found their way back to it. None of the places Tony and I had found them were active encampments.

Since I was concerned though, I called Al Poole who works for the City of Seattle and is in charge of the city's homeless projects. He said the way I had handled it was correct. If it was part of an active encampment it would be better to leave it there for awhile. He did have some other words of advice that I think are important to share. He said that if we suspected anything was originally from someone who had been in a shelter, we should consider the possibility of bedbugs. He said that it would be best to take things to a commercial laundromat to wash them. If we washed at home, he said to run it through the dryer first, but added that it would be better not to bring it into the house at all.

By the way, I washed the coats that Tony and I found (before I had Al's advice) and donated them to Operation Nightwatch, a Seattle organization that works on the streets with the homeless.

Celebrating Amma's birthday through litter work parties

Eugene and Seattle satsangs are going to host litter clean up work parties in celebration of Amma's birthday. For more information about Eugene's work party contact Mandy at: namahshivaya@live.com

Seattle's work party will be held 10:30 to noon on September 24, with a potluck lunch to follow. For more information and/or to sign up, contact Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net.

Hopefully other satsangs will also host work parties. Let me know if you decide to do that..... and send reports and pictures!

For those of you who cannot attend a work party consider the idea Svaha sent: "I cannot be in Seattle on the 24th but I thought another option you may want to send out to everyone is what I was planning on doing anyway... on September 24th during the same hours as your clean-up party, 10:30 to noon I am going to be cleaning up in my local area. That way we can still feel like we are all doing clean-up in harmony as a group....I plan on chanting and singing while doing clean-up during that time..." :-)

Litter Project song

In July, Mike agreed to write a litter project song. He finished it this week! He will sing it for us at the Seattle litter work party on September 24. We will almost certainly sing it during Amma's tour next summer. Here are the lyrics of the first three verses!

THE LITTER SONG

**PICKING UP LITTER IS EASY TO DO
JUST LOOK AROUND AND YOU MAY FIND A SHOE
DOWN ON THE GROUND, CANS EVERYWHERE
PAPER BLOWING IN THE AIR**

**PLASTIC BAGS FLOATING IN THE STREAMS
PICKING THEM UP IS NOT AS HARD AS IT SEEMS
GRAB A FRIEND AND GO FOR A WALK
PICKING UP LITTER WHILE YOU TALK**

**PICKING UP LITTER IT'S EASY TO DO
IT'S UP TO ME AND IT'S UP TO YOU
PICKING UP LITTER CAN BE A LOT OF FUN
LET'S GO OUTSIDE AND GET THE JOB DONE**

Litter Pick Up T-Shirt

Mechas is working on designing a t-shirt for us! Perhaps her design will be ready to include in the next newsletter! We are blessed with having so many talented people working on this project, each contributing in their own way.

Reflections and Stories from Project Members

From Walter:

I love this litter collection community idea. I love to be part of a community doing this and a simple shift of an idea from resenting garbage cleanup to looking at it like community service and service to others has been a mental shift for me. Thank you.

From Geoff:

A little side story. We were waiting for the Edmonds ferry 2 weeks ago and it was a Friday. There was a big line way up the hill. So while we were waiting we got out to pick blackberries. We ate a lot of nice blackberries and after a while Lucia, who is 4 years old, and whose face and hands were now stained purple, switched to trash pick up completely on her own and started pulling cans and other trash out of the bushes. After she had accumulated a good pile we loaded it in the car and the ferry line finally began to move. I was surprised, and then impressed, by her self directed clean up effort!

From Madhavi:

Since I signed up (for the project).....I am finding so many things to be picked up around the house and in my life!!

From Tasha:

As I took a walk in my neighborhood I picked up a plastic bottle so that I could recycle it. It felt like I was picking up after my child. Like a mom picks up after her child. A mom goes around the house and picks after her child. She picks up the toys left over, the laundry strewn about, the blankets and pillows from the fort that her kids just made. Moms go around all the time and pick up after their children. Dad's do too.

Amma spends Her time traveling the world to help her children. Amma has started a program in India to help clean up India. We, as the most sentient beings of this earth, are, in a sense, entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the earth. In a way we have been given the duty of being parents to the earth, and family to each other, our community. As a way of picking up litter, and cans, I might just be picking up after my own child or my sister's child. Who's to say that the piece of trash on the side of the road wasn't accidentally dropped by someone I know? Who's to say that the location the litter was found wasn't in my own driveway or street that I live on. And then wouldn't it be my job to pick it up? Had they known that they had dropped it, might they be sad that they littered? The challenge, it seems, is that we claim other streets and neighborhoods as our own.

From Karuna:

I've been walking on a path that has blackberries on each side. A week or so ago someone dumped furniture in the blackberries. I've been irritated and judgmental about the dump. Then a few days ago a glint of metal near the furniture caught my eye. I looked closer and saw that underneath the furniture and into the blackberries were LOTS of soda and beer cans. Some of them were near the path and many were buried deep into the blackberry vines. Later I realized what a good metaphor that was. We see the negative aspects of people that are on the surface but if we look deeper we may find the gold that is inside each of us (for me right now, aluminum cans are gold!).

From Upasana:

My awareness to litter is getting more & more keen; I've put gloves and plastic bags in the trunk of my car, and I picked up a stray beer can at a park and some tin foil from a hiking trail over the weekend. But in August, I was still just adjusting my awareness! This is a great project! I'll have hours to report in September.

From Tasha:

When I went walking on the Foster Island trail last weekend, with Visala, a duck swam up to us and we noticed that it looked like it had whiskers on one side of its head. Ducks don't have whiskers. As we looked closer we realized that it had two fishing lines stuck in its mouth. One end was stuck in its mouth and the other to some part of its back (under a wing). It hung out with us for a while as if waiting for us to help it. We tried to get help but had no luck. It hung around longer. What was so heart breaking about this duck's situation is that it was unable to extend its neck. This means that it can't dive for food under the water's surface. It can't stretch it's neck. I've seen a lot of pictures over the years of how pollution (and litter) affects animals but never up close. The duck really did seem to be waiting for us to help it. (Tasha attached a picture but I can't figure out how to make the pictures work in the newsletter. I will keep them and send them out at another time)

From Karuna:

Nowadays when I see aluminum cans on the ground, I feel like someone gave me a Christmas present.... or that I found an egg on an Easter egg hunt! So I don't get over focused on cans, I've been using the mantra "This is a litter project. Focus on litter and the cans will come." That has certainly been the case. Sometimes it also seems like they come as a reward for effort or good deeds.

As I mentioned earlier in this newsletter, last week I discovered lots of cans in the blackberry vines under some furniture that had been dumped. I picked up the cans that were easily accessible at that time, but the others were far into the vines. They kept coming to my mind so this past Saturday I got up and armed with tools went to get them. As I cut a tunnel through the blackberry vines, I recalled the joy I felt as a child when I made paths through the forest near the apartments we lived in in Germany. I gathered about 20 cans that way and felt quite successful.

As I finished collecting those, an Asian man walked by the road above me. I noticed he had a can in his hand. He kept walking but then turned around and came back. He asked if I wanted the can and I said "sure". He then asked me if I wanted a whole lot more cans. I say this as if we were talking, but the reality is he didn't speak any English. So we were both talking but couldn't understand each other's words at all. But the message was clear. He had cans at home and he wanted me to have them. I knew I needed to be cautious since I didn't know him; I certainly wasn't going into his house, but I decided to check it out. Turns out he lives about a block away and what he wanted to show me was on the floor of his open air garage. A section of the garage had a huge number of cans that he had collected on his walks and he clearly was delighted to have someone who could take them away. Needless to say I was into "WOW" mode! I filled my two large bags full and couldn't get them all in. He clearly didn't want me to leave any. Eventually he realized the problem so went into his house and gave me another bag. Once I got them home, I decided to count them. 196 cans!!!! And only about 20 were ones I had retrieved from the blackberry field.

Later in the day I helped some neighbors in a variety of ways, not something I normally do. When I came back from doing that, I discovered a neighbor or devotee had left 38 more cans sitting on my front porch. And in the

evening even more cans were delivered. Yes it is true, focus on the litter, and on service, and cans or some other form of grace, will almost certainly come!

Closing

I think this newsletter is plenty long enough! There are more stories but there will be more newsletters.

Write me at karunap108@comcast.net if:

- 1) You want to join the project.
- 2) You have a story or reflections to share. (I may use them in the newsletters. I will assume that is okay unless you ask me to keep your email confidential. I may shorten them or make small edits.)
- 3) You didn't get the first newsletter and want me to send it to you.
- 4) You have any other reason to want to write me!

I hope you all enjoy picking up litter and look forward to seeing some of you at the September litter pick up work party in Seattle. Everyone from everywhere is welcome to join us. There will be plenty of litter available for all!

In Amma's Service,

Karuna

No piece of plastic is too small to pick up!

Achala