

Green Friends

Pacific Northwest Litter Pick-up Project

Nature on its own is indeed beautiful and clean. The hills and rivers do not need us to clean them. In fact it is nature's water which cleans us; it is trees which purify air for us. Because we have littered, we have spoiled its pristine beauty.

Amma



December Greetings

I have been cleaning an area on Martin Luther King and Rainer since our project began. I was disheartened when school started in the fall and dozens of high school students descended on the area each day, throwing litter everywhere. Lately though, the amount of litter seemed to be significantly reduced.

Shortly before leaving for India, as I picked up litter in that area, I was wondering if there was a way to get the high school students involved in our project. Ten minutes later a woman walked up to me and asked if I was cleaning simply to be a good citizen. We talked for a while and she told me she worked at the high school. She said they were making keeping the surrounding area free of litter an emphasis in the high school this year! When we parted she said "From one citizen to another, thanks for helping to keep our community clean."

Moments later a young high school student who was walking behind me said "Thanks for doing that, you're awesome!"

The increase in consciousness about this issue is exciting!

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).

Eugene litter work party!



On November 26, 2011, Eugene devotees gathered to clean up an area around a freeway exit. There were 7 adults and 4 kids, and we gathered up 10 large bags of trash! It was a great experience for all of us, and several devotees were coming up with ideas for the next trash gathering. Jai Ma!!

Upasana

It was great to be a part of the Eugene work party. I kept thinking about how Mother Earth's body is not only our physical home but provides the materials for everything we need to live in this world; food, shelter, clothing. I loved the opportunity to bow down in gratitude to Her and while I was down there, well, pick up the litter left behind. Amma is patient with the litter in my mind and continues to guide me to the place underneath that is still untouched and pure, just like the Earth..... Jai Ma!

Linda

The four kids worked together as a team and had so much fun! They filled their first bags within 10 minutes. Then they huddled together comparing, showing us their findings. They worked as a real team, the bigger kids mentoring the younger kids. They got right to work on their second garbage bag. My husband and I took great pride in watching our children, Amma's Children, serve Mother, our city and strengthen their bond.

The kids felt so proud of themselves. They were cleaning on the side of the freeway and people kept thanking them for their hard work. I heard each of the kids say several times "Wow, I never noticed how much garbage there was till I actually looked." So cool. I was so happy that their eyes were opening. Amma has given them the tools to be a better generation to our planet.

Mandy

Litter Project Membership

As of November 30, 2011, we had 175 members.
42 new members in November!

Litter Project Hours

In November, 88 members plus 6 guests reported picking up 194.24 hours of litter.

Members Average : 2.2 hours

Range 2 minutes to 15.58 hours

Median : 1.5 hours

The group has picked up 846.96 hours of litter since the project began in July! Reaching 1008 hours by December 31 is a serious possibility if we all make some extra effort!

Words from Amma

In San Ramon, I gave Amma a short report about the project and then asked her whether she wanted me to be spending as much time doing this as I am, or did she prefer that I focus more on making the tiny dolls, which is my normal seva. I think her response might be meaningful for many of you, so decided to share it in the newsletter. I hope you find it helpful.

I started by telling her that I think about litter, I dream about litter, I talk about litter, all the time. She interrupted Swami Ramakrishna as he was translating for me and said that I shouldn't worry about that. She said what I am really doing is focusing on what is underneath the litter, i.e. the earth, not the litter. As he was translating her words to me, she interrupted him again and said, "So say your mantra and pick up litter!"

I love that she reminded me that it is the earth we are focusing on not the litter!

Karuna



Cigarette Butt Work Party

Background

The process by which we obtained the King County grant was amazing. The end of October Divya wrote a piece for the newsletter that mentioned the problem of cigarette butts. I looked it up on the internet and put more information about their toxicity in the newsletter. About the same time, or soon thereafter, Jyotsna wrote me and said King County was offering grants for picking up cigarette butts. I didn't look at the link for awhile but when I did I found out that it was for only 2-4 hours of work! It would pay \$750 which we could donate to the NW ashram.

I knew I needed to get Swami Dayamrita's approval and he was in Europe so I didn't know if I would be able to reach him. I wrote him and he responded almost immediately with several questions.

I was able to find out the answers right away and wrote him again. He quickly sent the approval to proceed.

The next issue was that most of us would be with Amma starting the 20th of November and I was leaving for India December 1. There was already a satsang event scheduled for the 12th. That left Sunday November 13 as the only possible date for the work party.

How could we get a grant application in and accepted in less than a week? And would we be able to get a big enough group of volunteers in that amount of time. Four business days after we applied, we received our acceptance letter!

(We learned more about the grant later. King County wants to have smoke free parks. Opponents say that is not necessary, that county employees can pick up the butts. The purpose of the grant was to help them prove that there are large numbers of butts in the park and that it is indeed a significant problem.)

Work Party Report

The cold weather did not deter 31 volunteers, from gathering at Cal Anderson Park in Seattle, to pick up every cigarette butt they could find. Dressed in warm winter hats and coats, the group dispersed throughout the park determined to find the littered cigarette butts in every nook and cranny. Working quietly alone or in small groups, the volunteers combed the park from one end to the other for three hours.

Part of the requirement for the grant was that we count all of the butts and related paraphernalia. We were delighted to discover we had picked up 6536 butts! The King Count Tobacco Prevention Program personnel were ecstatic. They wrote: "You guys did an AMAZING job. Thank you. We chose you for Cal Anderson because your group had experience doing litter pickups. It sure shows."

The next two pages of the newsletter will contain members stories from the event.

Cigarette Work Party Stories & Reflections



From Deepti in Seattle:

When I dropped my plastic bag, a man just strolling through the park, picked it up and handed to Kartik. As Kartik went to say, "Thank you", the man cut him off saying, "No, thank *you* for doing this."

Later as the soccer players were leaving, two of them watched Kartik picking up the cigarette butts and asked each other, "Is there really any use in picking up discarded cigarettes?" My first thought was, "Is there any use not to?"

From Nirmala in Seattle:

This experience let me know what a difference a "group" of people can make in a few hours of trash collecting. I was especially happy to be detoxifying the earth given the toxic chemicals in cigarettes. I would like to see that data go out to everyone so everyone knows how really toxic cigarettes are to our Mother Earth.

One very shy guy walked by as I was picking up trash at the park and didn't look anywhere but straight ahead and kind of blurted out a simple, Thank YOU!

Another man with his two daughters said he was trying to teach his girls to pick up trash whenever they see it if there is somewhere nearby to throw it away. He said that cigarette smokers must still be some of the biggest offenders of littering.

Another man saw me counting butts and stopped to see what we were doing and said that it was truly gross that we even had to do such a thing and he

thanked us for being willing to do it.

I also noticed that after I left I was MUCH MORE aware of trash on the sidewalks everywhere I went. I went to Traveler's and picked up a bunch of trash all around the outside of the store. Luckily there were trash containers nearby. I noticed in Paris recently that there are trash receptacles on many street corners, something which is absent in Seattle.

From John in Seattle:

As someone who smoked once upon a time, it took me right back to then. I felt like an opportunity in a way to make amends for the butts I tossed without thinking. The experience also put me in touch with the gratitude I feel for quitting over 20 years ago.

People in general were curious and appreciative. I especially enjoyed the satsang with other devotees and it felt to me like we were bringing awareness to folks at the park and a nice energy in our efforts to clean things up.

Of course this dovetails with my ongoing efforts to pick up trash when I am out walking. I was aware of Amma's presence, teaching and guidance throughout our time at the park.



Cigarette Work party stories (cont)



From Radhika in Seattle:

One man was walking with two of his friends. He came over to me and whispered, "Thank you." At first I didn't hear what he was saying as his voice was very quiet.....

It seems like a lot of people are aware of litter and would like to do something about it. I enjoyed working with the other devotee's, and being with one another, and doing something positive to help heal the earth and make it a better place to live.

From Aditi in Iowa:

Thanks to your much publicized cigarette stub cleaning project, I'm now hyperaware of these things everywhere here. Have taken to having a glove and plastic bag in the car or stuffed in my pocket at all times!

From Shirley in Bellevue:

While I was picking up cigs from the children's playground, a little boy watched me for a minute and then asked his dad what I was doing. He told his son I was tidying up the playground, and wasn't that a nice thing to do. Sometime later, the dad came over to me and remarked that it seemed I was mostly picking up cigarette butts. He asked if I was picking them up as a litter volunteer or doing a study or getting paid.

I told him I was indeed focusing on the tobacco related rubbish mainly, and that our community group was getting a grant from the county to pick them up. I said we'd be counting the butts at the end of the day to report the total for the park! He thanked me for cleaning up the playground. I think I picked over a dozen butts from the playground.

From Maheswari in Shoreline:

It appears as though people smoke outside of the building located across from the park and flick the

cigarette butts into the street. I am guessing when the blowers clean the street many of the cigarette butts end up on the park side.

Although I do not advocate smoking, I wonder if the lack of ashtrays or receptacles for people to dispose of the cigarette butts contributes to the reason why the cigarette butts end up as litter. Who wants to put a nasty cigarette butt in their pocket or purse and the cigarette butt also needs to be completely extinguished.

From Prakash in Redmond:

Felt great to be part of this effort. Everything was so was so neatly organized. Next day when my boss asked me about how I spent my weekend, I told him about the project and he was very impressed. I was able to show him few pictures too. He asked quite a few questions.

From Ohkn in Tacoma:

I think the experience was good for me in several ways.

- As an ex-smoker it affirmed my resolve to not smoke.
- It gave me an idea for something tobacco companies need to provide their customers (INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FIELD DRESS A CIGARETTE and not just flick it when it's done).
- It reminded me how easy it is to make a difference, even though many won't notice those cigarette butts are gone.
- It reminded me I was connected to some great people (like minds/spirits seem few and far between in Tacoma/U.P. sometimes).

From Kavita in Redmond:

I liked the experience. It felt like I was doing something for the community and overall I enjoyed it.

From Clarice in Seattle:

It was almost like a walking meditation for me to be so focused on the ground and moving so slowly. There was one gentleman who walked by and said "thank you for cleaning the park; it is good for the community."



Other litter stories!

From Divya in Bellingham:

The worst offenders of litter are the sanitary pick-up employees themselves! Make it a point to go on a trash pick-up walk after they have collected in your neighborhood. You will be amazed.

From Karuna in Seattle:

I have found credit cards, checks, ID, insurance cards, etc. while picking up litter. A couple of times I have tried to track the people down so that I can return the item to the owner. I recently received a letter from Portland that said:

*Dear Karuna Poole,
Thank you for returning my license which was stolen in Seattle. It is a comforting thought that my personal details are safe and also there are kind people around that care. You are a kind person. Sorry for the delay with this card only I have been overseas.*

*Kind Regards
M. H.*

The opportunity for seva comes in many forms. This letter reminded me that we can give considerable relief by returning items like this to their owners.

Nature is our first mother. She nurtures us throughout our lives. Our birth mother may allow us to sit on her lap for a couple of years, but Mother Nature patiently bears our weight our entire life. She sings us to sleep, feeds us and caresses us. Just as a child is obligated to his birth mother, we should all feel an obligation and responsibility towards Mother Nature. If we forget this responsibility, it is equal to forgetting our own self. If we forget Nature, we will cease to exist, for to do so is to walk towards death.

Amma

From StanleydelMundo in Seattle:

I find that I am telling people about the Litter Project and making it sound so inviting that the only answer that can be given is YES

Although J. at first said "If D. is already on the team I'll let her do it" and I said "What do you do when you see litter?" "Do you walk by or....?" and J. quickly answered, "I am always cleaning / picking up litter around the station" (a Fireman). So I said, "J. all you need to do is to consciously say yes and know that you are helping to keep Mother Earth picked up and then each month I will send out a litter reminder and you can send me the total number of hours even if the total is zero.....it is simply a fun way for us all to connect and help..... "

I am proud and happy to be a part of the Amma Litter Project....and also really glad to know that there is a conscious effort to Green-UP the planet.....

From Mandy in Eugene:

We talked with the kids about safety and the type of things people could throw on the ground. We told them if they were to find any glass or drug paraphernalia to let us know. Keep in mind we had two 8 year olds with us and had to tread lightly. Within 30 minutes our son's 12 year old friend picked up a napkin and about 15 needles fell out! They called us right away and we ran over. Thankfully there were tips on the needles and no one got hurt. Amma had created the circumstance so we could have a very serious conversation about the gravity of drug use on the way home.

Pacific Northwest Litter Project

To join: write Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net

To learn more about the project go to: www.seattlesatsang.amma.org/litterproject.html