

NEWS

Issue #50

April 2011

for friends of asha

Asha is a community health and development society dedicated to improving the lives of slum dwellers in Delhi

ASHA WISHES ALL ITS SUPPORTERS A HAPPY EASTER!

A New India Australia Partnership!

'We must empower the disempowered,' was the message from Mr Kapil Sibal, the Government of India's Cabinet Minister for Education, and chief guest at the launch of 'A new India Australia partnership to support the aspirations of Delhi's urban poor,' hosted by Asha and the Australia India Institute on Wednesday, March 2nd at India Habitat Centre.

The vast possibilities for India's slum dwellers and particularly the children of the slums that prompted Mr Sibal's appeal were reflected in the sentiments of one courageous girl, who spoke about her experience after being supported by Asha's higher education programme. Sneha, from N-86 Lawrence Road Slum Colony, studying Hindi honours at Shivaji College told the assembled guests, 'My achievement as the only girl in my family and in my whole village to have a college education has brought tears of joy to my parents' eyes. My self-confidence has greatly increased and I am now able to think about my future career. I have decided to join the police or armed forces and in doing so serve my country.'

The event was held to celebrate the launch of a flagship programme to study and address the inequities in India's urban areas, through the partnership of Asha and the Australia India Institute in collaboration with the University of Melbourne's Nossal Institute for Global Health.

Asha was privileged to welcome honoured guests Hon. Alex Chernov, Chairman of Australia India Institute and Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Australian High Commissioner HE Mr Peter Varghese, Prof. Dinesh Singh, Vice Chancellor of Delhi University and Prof. Susan Elliott, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. Distinguished guests included influential representatives of both India and Australia, illustrating the important relationship between the two countries that this programme will help to strengthen even further.

The groundbreaking initiative that was launched will focus on research that will look at why Asha's urban development model is so successful in reducing poverty in Delhi's slums. Mr Chernov said that, 'the research will inform the way forward at Asha and other slum communities and also for those in government concerned with meeting the challenges of India's growing urban population. This launch will no doubt be reflected in continued progress for the Asha community.' Asha Founder Director Dr Kiran Martin expressed her pleasure that the programme would also promote higher education opportunities for many more children in Asha slums, saying, 'As our slum children become well educated, they will contribute significantly to enhanced economic productivity and become a major asset to our nation.' Hon. Mr Sibal, a key supporter of the programme since visiting an Asha slum, endorsed the vision, saying he hoped that this programme would be replicated for all of India's millions of slum children.

You can now watch the entire event on YouTube! Go to <http://bit.ly/h2x2Xd> or search for Asha Society on YouTube.



Hon. Kapil Sibal, India's Education Minister, launches the flagship programme with Hon. Alex Chernov, Chancellor of Melbourne University, Dr. Kiran Martin, Australian High Commissioner HE Mr Peter Varghese, Prof. Susan Elliot and Prof. Dinesh Singh

Chancellor of Melbourne University meets with Asha slum residents



Above: Hon. Alex Chernov, Chancellor of the University of Melbourne and Governor Designate of Victoria, with Dr. Martin and the Asha college students

Asha was honoured to welcome a visit from the Hon. Alex Chernov, the Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Chairman of Australia India Institute and Governor Designate of the State of Victoria in Australia.

In Dr Ambedkar Basti slum colony, Mr Chernov met members of the community, who told him about the changes they had experienced in the slum since working with Asha. Later describing his discussion with women's group members, Mr Chernov said that, 'the empowerment of women in the Asha community had enabled them to be partners and key players in the transformation of their slum communities.'

Mr Chernov also spoke with a group of Asha college students about their educational experiences. They told him about their future plans, including their postgraduate aspirations. Mr Chernov said that their time at university was a foundation for what they would do with the rest of their life. He advised them to do what they enjoy, which would result in both an improvement of their self confidence and a meaningful contribution to the world. Mr Chernov said that the visit was a very informative and inspirational experience.

Visit the Asha website at: www.asha-india.org

Rheumatologist Dr Elaine Smith reflects on her time as a volunteer doctor at Asha

There was plenty of time for reflection on my outbound flight from London to Delhi. I had offered to carry out rheumatology clinics in the slum dwellings under the auspices of Asha. However, could a consultant rheumatologist such as myself really help people in this setting, I wondered? But any concerns or trepidation soon vanished once I had been introduced to the fantastic team of people who work for Asha, and I soon got into the swing of things.

Most of my working days took place in one of the Asha centres where I carried out a clinic, seeing up to 63 patients in a day. What sort of cases were presented to me? The very first patient was a little girl who had juvenile inflammatory arthritis. I was able to reassure the family that this type of arthritis was self-limiting and I prescribed Ibuprofen for the child. The next patient was a man with a large knee swelling due to osteoarthritis which I aspirated and injected with some corticosteroid. I started feeling rather useful! There was one case of acute rheumatoid arthritis, three cases of rickets, one at least, requiring vitamin D injections and general malnourishment was not uncommon. One little girl particularly made an impression on me and when I examined her, I knew that I was looking at the jaws of poverty. This little girl was eating the soil because of her profound anaemia; a condition called pica. I was able to prescribe iron tablets and an anti-helminthic for a suspected worm infestation. I felt that my rheumatology clinics had acted as a filter to sift out these cases which could then be treated thanks to the support of Asha.

The overall musculoskeletal problems I saw were due to mechanical back, knee, and neck pain. One striking thing was that the women tended to suffer from lower back pain and I ascertained that this was due, in part, to the way they carried their heavy water containers on a daily basis. The postural advice which I gave about how to lift these containers may improve their symptoms considerably. In one clinic there were so many patients to see I gathered a group of all those who had mechanical neck and back pain together and carried out a class offering postural advice and exercises. Anterior knee pain due to knee osteoarthritis is also fairly common in both men and women. I think this is connected to the crouching position used to carry out so many domestic chores. For this, I could at least demonstrate how to carry out quadriceps exercises in order to avoid muscle wasting around the knee.

I was able to refer patients to a Government Hospital if secondary care treatment seemed absolutely vital. I also held a tutorial on rheumatic diseases for the Asha team. I have no doubt that the local community volunteers will be able to keep an eye out for any rheumatic disorders that require treatment. At the end of my stay, I found that the answer to my question 'could a consultant rheumatologist offer assistance and help to the slum dwellers of Delhi?' was a resounding yes.

If you are a medical doctor and would like to volunteer your time at Asha, there are many opportunities where you would be very valuable to the people of the slums. Contact us at info@asha-india.org or www.asha-india.org/get-involved/volunteer.



Friends of Asha Ireland Celebrate 10 Years!



Dr Martin & Mr Martin with Rev Preston and Rev William Sinclair of First Ballymena Church

Over 120 people gathered at First Ballymena Presbyterian Church to celebrate 10 years of Friends of Asha Ireland. It was wonderful to meet and connect with so many new friends and realise that everyone is part of the extended family of Asha supporters in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

In the event's main address, Dr Kiran Martin thanked the Asha supporters of Ireland for their care and hard work over the years. She spoke about Asha's journey and the transformation we have seen in many of Delhi's slums. Dr Martin shared with the attendees her vision to send 5000 slum children to university within the next 5 years.

It was also deeply inspiring to hear from people who had experienced life changing encounters while visiting Asha. Through their heartfelt words and joyful singing, the Friends of Asha Ireland supporters made this a celebration to remember.

Asha would like to thank First Ballymena Presbyterian Church, Barney Graham, Gordon Wright, the organising committee, the trustees, and all the volunteers and attendees.

Celebration of Asha Scottish Supporters

The first Asha Scotland Celebration was held on February 5th at Holyrood Abbey Church in Edinburgh. In attendance were long-time Asha supporters, new friends and representatives of 10 Scottish churches.

The participants were transported to the slums of Delhi as former volunteers and team leaders shared stories of their time at Asha and the ways in which they have become more deeply committed to the work. Another session took the group on a tour around the Asha website highlighting its potential as a valuable resource for supporters.

Dr Martin's affecting message and plans for Asha's future moved and re-invigorated the Scotland supporters to expand their own efforts for the people of Delhi's slums.

Asha is so grateful to the Holyrood Abbey Church, Mickey & Eleanor Robertson, Tom & Linda Speir, Peter Chirnside, the Friends of Asha Scotland organisers, volunteers and attendees who made the celebration such a success.

If you would like to get in touch with the Scotland chapter of Asha, please contact Eleanor Robertson at mickelna@btinternet.com or call +44 131 669 5044.



Mr Peter Chirnside at the Asha Scotland Celebration

Kusumpur Pahadi – A Financial Inclusion Success Story

The slum of Kusumpur Pahadi is like many other slums in Delhi. There are tiny one-room houses with makeshift tin roofs packed tightly together. Most of the residents are desperately poor and living hand to mouth. Many people are employed in low-paying jobs like rickshaw-pulling, driving, domestic cleaning or running small businesses.

Up until 2 years ago, banking services were virtually unknown in this area. If local people wanted to borrow money, their only options were local moneylenders, who commonly charged interest rates of 10% per month. One family borrowed 5,000 rupees in an emergency and soon found themselves 30,000 rupees in debt. If borrowers can't pay, the moneylenders use threats and coercion to take personal goods, jewellery, even homes and land. In particular, women in the slum were at a disadvantage. They had no idea about bank accounts or ATM cards. Whenever they needed money, they had to ask their husbands.

But recently a change has taken place in Kusumpur. In 2008, Asha launched a financial inclusion scheme for Delhi's urban poor, in collaboration with India's Ministry of Finance and leading national banks. The aim was to provide slum residents with access to a wide range of banking services. This financial inclusion scheme is unique from other microfinance programmes in that it enables the urban poor to claim their rights as citizens, accessing financial services directly from banks. Another advantage is that slum residents can get loans at half the interest rate of other microfinance options. Asha spread awareness in the slums, encouraging the slum people to open bank accounts and, if desired, take out loans to improve their circumstances. Less than three years later, tens of thousands of bank accounts have been opened and more than 700 people have taken loans totalling 24,000,000 rupees (\$525,000). Repayment rates are 98%.



Loan Recipients at their improved shop

In Kusumpur, the effects have been dramatic. Vijay Kumar, a shopkeeper, had tried to expand his business on his own, but kept hitting a dead end. Then he heard about the loan programme from Asha centre staff. With a loan of 50,000 rupees he invested in a soft drink venture. Today he is proud to be an official soft drink distributor and has doubled his daily income. Rajkali and her husband have run a stationary shop for the past 10 years. Her husband handled the business's finances. But with the support of her women's group and the Asha staff, Rajkali learned about her new financial options. She took a loan of 50,000 rupees for her business and has recently branched out into selling cosmetics and clothes. She has three children and wants to save for their education so they will all be able to go to college.

Individuals from Kusumpur say the benefits extend beyond improved incomes for individual borrowers. The quality of shops and homes in the area has improved. With increased financial security, parents are reaching a consensus on the importance of educating children. And the area's women have become far more confident and independent than before, armed with the newfound knowledge and power of having a say in financial matters.

Ram Hans – Profile of a loan recipient

Ram Hans has been running his own business in Kusumpur Pahadi since 1980. He long aspired to increase the size of his shop and expand his business. He had been keeping a savings account in a bank for many years and knew about business loans. However when he applied for a loan, the bank turned him down. So Ram Hans had to work twice as hard, pushing a goods cart through the streets to supplement his income. Every extra penny he earned was invested in the shop. Then one year ago, he heard about Asha's financial inclusion scheme. He signed up for a three year 25,000 rupee business loan which he invested in improving his shop and goods. His trade and income have increased so much that he has nearly paid off the loan in a single year and has plans to take another loan to build up his business even further. Ram Hans's experience has affirmed his belief that people from low income sections of society shouldn't be excluded from credit services.



Asha Celebrates International Women's Day



Local Councillor Mrs Darshana joins Asha Staff and women's group members to celebrate International Women's Day

On March 8th, Asha celebrated International Women's Day. It is a day for acknowledgement and appreciation of the accomplishments of women the world over. We also recognize that the struggle for gender equality continues. Globally and especially in India, women are often still second class citizens in their own countries and even in their own families.

At Asha, women are at the core of our programmes and women's rights are a central theme in our activities. Asha provides training and empowerment sessions for community members where women learn about key issues of health, advocacy and financial inclusion. The Asha lane volunteers, community health volunteers, birth attendants and women's group members have transformed their slum communities and showed that the empowerment of women improves lives and brings people out of poverty.

This International Women's Day, the Asha women's groups held celebrations in their slum communities. At Jeevan Nagar slum, Mrs Darshana, the local government councillor, was the chief guest. For the last few years, she has taken a strong interest in Asha's work, particularly the education programme. She addressed the women's group members, praising them for their success in bringing the community together. She encouraged the children to pursue

education, saying it would bring really positive changes in their lives. The women were extremely pleased when she promised to make sure the collapsed wall of the slum's toilet complex would be soon repaired. After the event, she invited the women to accompany her to a rally for women's rights, where women from all over Delhi had gathered. She said she was very proud to have a representation of such empowered women present.

Visit the Asha website at: www.asha-india.org

Impressions of Asha

At Asha we are privileged to have friends and supporters from all over the world. We feel very grateful that so many people have come to the Delhi slums to give their time and help the communities here. We've asked a few of them to share their thoughts.



Linda Speir volunteering with children at Asha

"My life changed when I became involved with Asha and visited the slum colonies - I finally found the true meaning of unconditional love; respecting one another; community spirit; loving your neighbour; sharing the little you have with others, and empowerment. The people, particularly the women, have had a huge impact on me and I thank God for them every single day.

Being involved with Asha makes me feel part of a big family. I have been an Asha supporter and volunteer for 10 years and that feeling has never diminished. When I read the newsletters or prayer requests I very often know who is being referred to and that is part of what makes Asha so unique and special. Those at Asha share their love with everyone they come into contact with and love that is shared is a wonderful thing!"

-Linda Speir, Dumbarton, Scotland

"I have supported Asha for over 10 years and I wanted to come and see the work firsthand. I wanted to get a clear grasp of the situation and needs of the poor people by talking to, treating and visiting the families living in these colonies. I worked for three weeks doing medical clinics in the slums. It was a great privilege to care for these people who were so inspirational; managing with so little and yet sustaining a dignity about their lives that would be hard to find in the UK.

Their medical problems were in many respects similar to problems encountered working in General Practice in the UK. However they are much less aware of the problems caused by malnutrition and what is available to help their medical conditions. They have an admirable fortitude in their constitutions for coping with the stresses of ill health which they forge into their lives as they battle with the extremes of life's misfortunes."

-Dr Chris Paxton, Old Sodbury, England



Dr Paxton conducting a workshop for Asha staff

"This is my fourth time bringing a team to Asha and the transformation of the lives of the team yet again amazes me. Asha and its training produces communities of love and hope for the future – united, nothing is impossible."

-Stella Andrea, Global Generation Church Team, Ramsgate, England

"This was the second time in India and spending time with Asha. Asha is such an amazing charity. I've had the best time working with Asha and seeing what Asha does. I can't even put it into words but anyone who has an opportunity to work with Asha, do it!"

-Natalie, Global Generation Church Team, Ramsgate, England

"I have really enjoyed experiencing life in a slum. The young people have so much excitement and happiness within them, and it is great to hear stories of how Asha has brought the community closer together. The atmosphere and people have really inspired me."

-Scott, Global Generation Church Team, Ramsgate, England



Global Generation Church Team

A few words from our Asha Teaching Volunteers

"I just finished my A-levels and am working with Asha as part of my gap-year before I head off to university next year. After working three jobs in Northern Ireland to raise money for my trip I came out to India. I heard about Asha through my school, Methodist College. After hearing my classmates' reports on their experiences at Asha and reading up on Asha's work, I decided it was definitely something I wanted to be involved in.

My day of teaching begins with my boys class. A bright bunch of lads, aged 12-18, who are always keen and lively, some days a bit too lively! I normally start the class with a game, for example, a game of hangman involving recently learnt vocabulary. I then teach some grammar or vocab and we do an exercise or worksheet on what has just been learnt. After class the boys stick around until they have to go to school. We normally sit and talk or play games unless I am dragged out to play cricket. I hit my first six the other week!

During my time with Asha I have seen many aspects to the work they do. It has really become clear how important education is to these children as they all have high aspirations, which without Asha's help could not be achievable."

-Rory Tinman, Bangor, Northern Ireland

Visit the Asha website at: www.asha-india.org

A few words from our Asha Teaching Volunteers (con't)

I first heard about Asha in April last year when Dr Kiran Martin spoke at a conference for World Health Day in Melbourne. I was so inspired by the work that Asha does, and by Dr Martin's passion, that I decided straight away that I'd look into volunteering with them to see it firsthand and to help out where I could. Asha is an incredible organisation, and every day when I go into the slum I see the impact they have made on the lives of people who would otherwise probably not be going to school, definitely not be at university, not be getting adequate healthcare, and probably not be nearly as motivated as they are to effect change in their own community.

I really enjoy teaching English to the slum children. Straight after lunch, my four "little girls" (aged 10-12) come bounding in with their big smiles and their English greetings. We play games, we sing, we dance, we read books, and they try whenever possible to get out of doing any hard work! Slowly but surely though, these girls are learning to improve their reading and vocabulary, and it's really encouraging to see.

-Steph, Melbourne, Australia

I came to Asha as part of an internship for graduate school. The bottom-up approach to Asha's work, as well as its unique community-health based model for development in Delhi slums, appealed to me and made me want to come to India for my internship.

Now that I am here, my days are mostly filled with teaching English classes in Jeevan Nagar, a slum in southwest Delhi. One of my favorite parts of the day are my meetings with Kishan, a college student studying commerce. He is one of the first children from his community to attend college. In between his studies, Kishan finds time to help his father at the family fruit stand. During our daily meetings we read current newspaper articles and discuss the topics to help him practice his conversational English and learn new vocabulary. His story is very inspirational, and hopefully will encourage other children from his slum to set their dreams high!

-Katie, Philadelphia, USA



Katie with her students

News In Brief

MOCK EXAMS AT ASHA CENTRES

Hundreds of Class 12 students took mock exams at Asha centres in February to prepare for the March national board exams that determine whether or not they can go to university. All the exam preparation materials and study resources were provided by Asha. We wish our students the very best in their results.

JAPANESE EMBASSY FUNDS ASHA MOBILE VANS

The Chargé d'Affaires of the Japanese Embassy, Mr Hajime Hayashi and Dr Kiran Martin signed a contract for the Embassy to fund two mobile vans that will provide healthcare in some of Asha's areas. Present at the signing ceremony were First Secretary Mr Goki Inada and Development Consultant Ms Takako Ueno. The mobile vans will improve the healthcare access of the residents of several large slums.



Japanese Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Mr Hajime Hayashi and Dr Martin sign the contract for mobile health vans

UK TEAMS MAKE AN IMPACT

We were so happy to welcome back UK teams from St. Stephen's Church in London, City Life Church in Southampton and Global Generation Church in Kent. Amanda Clegg and the St. Stephen's team did a fantastic job of painting the new meeting hall in Trilokpuri. Dan Pooley and the member of City Life Church got the Jeevan Nagar children involved in their decoration of the Asha centre, and Stella Andrea along with the team from Global Generation Church did great work renovating rooms in Mayapuri.

CAREER COUNSELLING FOR THIRD YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

In February and March, Asha conducted weekly career counselling workshops for the students from Asha slums who are in their third and final year of college. As these students prepare for graduation in a few months, they are making plans for their next steps. Most want to continue on to a postgraduate degree. Others are hoping to enter government service. Many of these options require taking difficult exams, which the students must prepare for. Asha is providing them with all the materials that they need as well as guiding them through the process.

VOLUNTEERS

We would like to thank English teaching volunteers Tom & Linda Speir, John & Louise Heywood, Rory Tinman and Kate Masters from the UK, Katie Aiesi from the USA, Dagmar Wladarz from Germany and Steph Dubbeld from Australia. A big thanks to those who helped out with the Asha Press Team during our events as well.

A huge thank you to Dr Elaine Smith and Dr Chris Paxton, both doctors from the UK, who gave their professional time and expertise taking clinics at Asha centres.

JACK VAN HAM BECOMES ASHA AMBASSADOR TO THE NETHERLANDS

Asha was so grateful to have Jack Van Ham, the former director of ICCO, with us in January. Jack visited a number of slums and facilitated Asha strategy meetings in an advisory capacity. He said he was delighted to become an advisor to Asha during this new stage of our development.



Bishop Huggins & his family visit an Asha slum

ASHA WELCOMES BISHOP PHILIP HUGGINS & FAMILY

Asha was honoured to receive the Right Reverend Philip Huggins, Bishop of the Northern and Western region of the Anglican Dioceses of Melbourne, along with his brother David Huggins, Assistant Director, Catholic Education Office, Melbourne and their wives and children for a visit to an Asha slum.

CONDOLENCES

As you know, tragedy struck the nation of Japan recently in the form of a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Asha's deepest condolences go out to our friends at the Japanese Embassy during this difficult time.

We send our thoughts to the people of Christchurch and our friends in New Zealand for the tragic earthquake that occurred there.

Asha's prayers and wishes are with the residents of Brisbane, Australia, who are rebuilding after serious flooding earlier this year.

Friends of Asha

If you want to contribute to the lives of poor slum dwellers in Delhi, then we suggest that you become a Friend of Asha. As a Friend of Asha we welcome you to join the Asha family that exists to help the downtrodden and oppressed live a life of dignity and hope. Friends of Asha make a huge contribution to our activities through donations, fundraising events, volunteering and raising awareness of our work.

Asha supporters plan rickshaw ride from Lincoln to Delhi

Long-time Asha supporters Anna Hagans & Lisa Gibson from Lincolnshire in the UK are embarking on an incredible adventure. After visiting Asha centres in Delhi, Lisa hit upon the idea of driving a rickshaw from England to Delhi. They felt that, aside from being the experience of a lifetime, such a challenge would be a really good way to raise awareness for the cause. Anna and Lisa are scheduled to leave Lincoln in July 2011. They recently held a launch event in Lincoln that was a big success. You can read more about the trip and contact them on their website tuktuktour.co.uk.



There are all sorts of things you could do to raise funds for Asha. If you organise something interesting, please send us details and photos, and you may be in this space next time!

SUPPORTERS FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD CAN DONATE DIRECTLY TO ASHA IN INDIA

Asha is registered to receive donations from overseas which means that we do not need to pay tax on any of your gifts. Sterling donations are acceptable, as are those in any other currency. If you'd like to make a valued contribution to our work, you can donate online or via cheque.

To donate online, please visit our website at www.asha-india.org/getinvolved/donate and follow the simple steps to make your payment via a secure server. This is the simplest and most cost-effective way for us to receive your donation.

If you want to donate by cheque, please fill in your details below, write a cheque made payable to "ASHA SOCIETY" and post it to us at this address:

The Administrator, Asha Society, Ekta Vihar, RK Puram Sector 6, New Delhi - 110022, INDIA.

Posting named cheques to India is a perfectly safe and secure method of making your donation. Please be assured that you will not incur any bank charges when donating directly to Asha in India.

Yes, I want to become a 'Friend of Asha'

- My contribution of _____ is enclosed.
- I would like to become a Hope Giver and contribute _____ every month. My first contribution is enclosed. Please send me a standing order form.
- I particularly want to contribute towards _____
- Please keep me informed about **Asha's** activities. My email is _____

Full name & title _____ Organisation (if any) _____

Address _____

City _____ Postcode _____

Country _____

How we will put your money to work

- **\$30** - will cover one college preparation workshop for 30 children
- **\$40** - will buy books for one child for one year
- **\$70** - will cover the college admission process expenses for one child
- **\$100** - will provide a student with new clothes for university
- **\$300** - will cover university tuition fees for one child for one year
- **\$700** - will cover all university expenses for one child for one year

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