

# NEWS

for friends of

# asha

Issue #54

April 2012

*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!**

## Healthy children show overall development of Asha slum communities

A child of the urban poor in India usually doesn't get a fair chance at life. There are many studies to indicate that poor health in young children will cause lasting ill effects to health and wellbeing through adulthood as well. Delhi's slum children have some of the world's worst health indicators.

Recent studies show that about 47% of Indian children under 5 are underweight, more than twice the average of sub-Saharan Africa. Many children in slums quite simply don't know where their next meal is coming from. India's poorest children are also the least likely to survive; the under-5 child mortality rate is 100.5 for the least well off. Tragically many of the illnesses that kill slum children are eminently preventable, but slum children typically don't receive the proper immunizations against common diseases, with only 39% of Delhi's poor children getting their basic vaccinations.

It is figures like these that remind us at Asha that we must keep working in child healthcare. We are very proud of the advances that we have made in health in our

slum communities, but our work is far from over. Asha identifies expectant mothers and provides them with checkups and delivery advice so all children in our slum areas will have a chance of being born healthy. We

monitor the growth of all young children and make sure they have received full immunization. In two key indicators of how healthy the children of Asha slums are, last year, **93% of children under 5 were healthy for their age and the under-five mortality rate was only 17.8.**

These healthy children reflect the improvements in overall development of Asha slum areas. Awareness and education of the community has made the slum residents knowledgeable about preventing sickness and seeking treatment for illnesses. In addition, the advocacy by the women's groups on infrastructure has

improved the environmental conditions of the slums and reduced the spread of disease. The transformation of the slums is evident in these children, who show us how far we have come and inspire us never to give up helping the poor, because real change is possible.



**Slum children live in conditions that endanger their health**



**Asha's child healthcare programme monitors the growth of slum children**

## Dick and Julie Hogben, a Couple Inspired and Encouraged by Asha

In 2005, Julie decided she needed to do a "gap fortnight" to help her understand God's heart for the marginalised. At Easter she found herself in Delhi with a TEARfund "Transform Team". This was her introduction to Asha. When she came home she wouldn't stop talking about what she had seen and her husband Dick, a GP, decided he needed to go and see it too. It just so happened that he was taking a sabbatical in the autumn, so in October we found ourselves in Delhi together, working with a church team from Ramsgate painting a clinic building. Kiran met Dick to discuss what medical help he could offer and set him a project to do!



**Dick examines health records in the slum community**

Since then we have been back five times visiting several slum communities to encourage the kids, the women and the students. However, we found *ourselves* inspired and encouraged by *them*! Dick has been able to teach the clinical staff, updating them and re-designing aspects of the clinical service together. We have brought 2 teams from Yeovil and are planning a further team visit next year.

Over the 7 years that we have known Asha, we have seen so much change. This is not a charity to sit on its laurels! Asha is always looking to see what more can be done on behalf of, and alongside the poor in Delhi. We have been so excited to see so many young people having the courage and resolve to enter further education. We were delighted to see so many people being assisted financially with loans from banks. Many of the poorest families in Delhi are having their dignity restored and their right to inclusion in society confirmed. We have learned that we cannot simply give a few coins to the poor. God is calling us to walk the journey with them and this is what we want to

**✠ Dick and Julie Hogben (Yeovil, UK)**

Visit the website: [www.asha-india.org](http://www.asha-india.org) | Facebook: [facebook.com/ashasociety1](https://facebook.com/ashasociety1) | Twitter: [twitter.com/ashasociety](https://twitter.com/ashasociety)

## Kiran's Letter

My dear friends,

As we take important steps forward in our 24th year, the gradual fall in Asha's Child Mortality Rate from 149 for every 1000 live births, to 17.8, demonstrates a highly effective approach to health care in the slums. Although India's growth rate is said to be 6.9%, the Child Mortality Rate across the nation is a dismal 66. Economic growth without question is important, as it gives the opportunity to provide resources to invest in improvement of the lives of our population. But growth by itself, without appropriate social policies to ensure reasonable fairness in the way its benefits are distributed, brings little benefit to health equity. Putting right health inequity, the huge and remedial differences in health between the rich and the poor, is a matter of social justice.

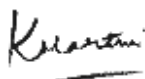
The daily conditions in which people live have a strong influence on health equity. Asha's community organisation and advocacy efforts in ensuring the basic human rights of clean water, sanitation, electricity, paved streets, and better quality housing and shelter, have had a major impact on the health of our slum residents. Employment and working conditions also have powerful effects on health equity. Mortality, morbidity and poor mental health are associated with precarious employment and effort-reward imbalance. While we have a long way to go as yet, our financial inclusion programme is providing families with enhanced incomes, social status, personal development and self esteem. The loans given take into account the real and current cost of living and the ability to repay.

Access to good quality healthcare is vital to good and equitable health. In a city with an appallingly weak healthcare system and massive inequity in provision, Asha's well organised and appropriately designed healthcare programme is a critical component of the vastly improved health in Asha slums. The Asha healthcare system is based on principles of equity, universal coverage, disease prevention, and keeping prevention and promotion in balance with investment in curative interventions. In the absence of Asha, hundreds of thousands of poor would have been pushed into further poverty each year through catastrophic household health costs.

Empowerment of women is the key to achieving fair distribution of health. Gender biases damage the health of thousands of girls and women in the slums. The position of women is also associated with child health and survival. Discriminatory feeding patterns, violence against women, lack of decision making power and unfair divisions of work and leisure adversely affect women's health in the slums. Asha's empowering of individuals and groups, particularly women, to represent strongly and effectively their needs and interests, has brought about a change in power relationships with political, social and economic institutions. The process of organising and empowering the urban poor has built local leadership, provided fair representation in decision making, and given them a greater sense of control over their lives and future. This in turn helps to promote and realise the social and political rights that affect health equity.

Good governance and adequate finance are key to improved health and health equity, and this transformative picture in the Asha slums is only becoming possible through the wonderfully enriching partnerships that we enjoy together with you. The work of Asha is only made possible through your kind and generous donations and gifts, however small or large. The entire Asha team and I offer you our gratitude for being so faithful and committed in your involvement. Our faith and trust in a loving God for whom social justice, the right of all people to reach their individual potential is central, as well as your most sincere prayers for the work, are the foundation of all that goes on.

With my very best wishes.



Kiran Martin



## Savitri's Story: Caring for Kalkaji's Mothers and Babies

Savitri is 55 years old and has been living in Kalkaji slum for over 30 years. She dropped out of school by age 14. When Asha first started working in Kalkaji slum many years ago, she had been working as an untrained midwife to bring in some extra income. The Asha staff asked her if she wanted to undergo professional midwifery training. Before her course, people in the slum knew she was working as a midwife but were wary of using her services. But after she got the training, her skills became known and recognized in the community and she is now very highly regarded. She has also served as president of the women's association and monitored the overall welfare of around 650 households in Kalkaji. If there is a conflict in someone's house, Savitri is the one who helps resolve it.



Savitri examining a patient

As a trained birth attendant, Savitri does checkups of pregnant women in their homes. She motivates them to opt for a hospital delivery, but if they cannot go to hospital, she conducts the delivery. Recently she had a case of a first time pregnant mother who was suffering from high blood pressure. She referred her to a government hospital as a high risk pregnancy. The mother was admitted to the hospital, and her infant was delivered by caesarian section. The child is now a healthy two year old and her mother is forever grateful to Savitri for stepping in at the right time.

## Q & A with Asha Supervisor Rani on Asha's Female Empowerment Programme

### Originally, why do you think the slums needed a female empowerment programme?

The social position of women was very low in the slums. The women would never leave their homes. They didn't even know their neighbours. They weren't allowed to make decisions in community or family matters. There wasn't any platform for them to voice their concerns. Originally, their husbands opposed them forming groups because of a fear of them learning too much and asserting power. But we kept at it because if you empower one woman, she will empower an entire family.

### What Asha values do you try and impart to the women?

We encourage the people to love each other, to help each other, to be of service, to act peacefully and to treat everyone with equality.

### In what ways does the programme help the women themselves?

Women develop confidence and self-worth. They feel independent and have respect from the community and government officials they interact with during advocacy activities. They have more say in family issues and take better care of their families in terms of health and education, now that they have been empowered.

### How does the women's group improve community harmony and reduce tensions within the slum?

There were a lot of divisions in the slums, particularly based on background and caste. Now they sit and eat together and join to celebrate marriages and festivals, which they would never do before. There is more of a sense of community now and they are better able to solve community problems collectively.

### Can you think of any recent stories where a women's group has made a difference in their community?

There was a big problem in Ambedkar Slum Colony of illegal alcohol being sold. The men would spend all their money on drink and then go home and create problems. The women's group wrote a complaint to the police and action has been taken, with all the alcohol shops recently being closed down.

Also last winter, there was a fire in one of the poorest parts of Mayapuri slum and many houses were burned to the ground. The women's group raised money for blankets for the residents so they would have something to warm themselves when they rebuilt their homes.



Rani meeting with a women's group

## Despite Poverty at Home, Asha Slum Children Find Success in University Life

It goes without saying that college students from slums face many more obstacles at University than their peers from more privileged backgrounds. Asha students have been known to walk long distances to college because they don't have money for the bus. They study in cramped rooms late at night by the light of kerosene lamps. They face pressure from families who want them to drop out and start bringing in income. But despite these demands, Asha college students from the most desperate of circumstances are not giving up but are thriving and succeeding in their new academic environments.



**Surender** from Ambedkar Slum Colony, studying in his second year at Sri Aurobindo College, Delhi University, has high ambitions. But his aspirations have been threatened by the duty he feels to support his family. His father passed away 10 years ago of tuberculosis and Surender gave up studying for five years to work and help support his family and younger siblings.

But he still had hopes and dreams, and first approached Asha to learn English. The staff encouraged him to return to academics and apply to college. His duties toward his family do present a challenge to his studies but Surender is determined to graduate and go on to a postgraduate degree in linguistics. He has already shown he is capable of great perseverance and achievement.

Last year he successfully applied for a scholarship to attend an Asian Youth Camp in South Korea. 'I never thought I would sit on a plane,' Surender laughs. In Korea, he participated in a cultural exchange with students from all over Asia. 'Now thanks to my experience and Dr Kiran, I feel that I am something,' Surender says. He wants to go on to study languages and build a career successful enough to help his younger siblings so they don't have to go through the same struggles as he did.

**Huma Khan**, from Ekta Vihar slum colony exudes confidence, poise and warmth. She is the first girl from an Asha slum to study engineering. After her father, an Afghani refugee, passed away 15 years ago, her mother and grandmother were forced to move into the slum because of financial difficulties. Huma was very gifted academically but when she got into an engineering course, she could not find a guarantor for a bank loan for the tuition. Then she learned about Asha's financial inclusion programme and made a personal appeal to Dr Martin to help with her situation. Dr Martin helped her to get her bank loan approved and today Huma is a second year student at Priyadarshini College of Computer Sciences. She travels a total of 5 hours every day to and from college, during which time she tries to study. In spite of her challenges, Huma has an extremely positive attitude, clear plans for her life in the future and enormous gratitude for all the assistance she has received from Asha.



## Impressions of Asha

**At Asha we are privileged to have friends and supporters from all over the world who have pledged their support to Asha in many ways. A few of them share their thoughts on Asha here.**

Its very difficult to really imagine the life of a child as he grows up in a slum. You're talking about a sea of humanity that are living in conditions that are unbearable. Somewhere we have to commit ourselves to reach out to them in whatever way we can; to allow them to participate and become part of the mainstream. The one thing that each individual is entitled to, is equality of opportunity. Once you give each child that equality of opportunity, the child is able to realize their own potential and genius and move forward. The problem is that these children are not given that opportunity, but what Kiran has done is to create the architecture to give those children that opportunity.

### **Hon. Kapil Sibal, India's Cabinet Minister for Education**

*(Excerpt from his speech made at the launch of 'A New India Australia Partnership to Support the Aspirations of Delhi's Urban Poor,' March 3rd, 2011 at Stein Auditorium, Indian Habitat Centre)*



**Hon. Kapil Sibal speaks to slum children at an Asha event**



As a teacher, education is not just about passing exams. It's about life. It's about allowing my young people to experience life at its fullest and to be challenged about the things that really are important in life. And as a teacher, particularly a teacher of religious and moral education, I think that's one of the things I really love about coming to Asha.

### **Ruth McKibbin, Leader of Methodist College Team, Belfast, UK**

**(left) Ruth speaking at a Friends of Asha (Ireland) event**

This is my fifth visit to Asha and I love coming back and I love bringing people for several reasons: I think that we are part of a global family. I love bringing teams as well because I love seeing the dynamic of the team. I love that we come together and that we work together to contribute in different ways. We all have individual gifts that we can bring, and we share the experience as a team. But also as team leader I see that for each person coming, I see them going on a journey, an individual journey.

### **Amanda Clegg, Leader of St Stephen's Church Team, UK**

**(right) Amanda addressing the community members at Zakhira slum colony**



**Hon P Chidambaram standing next to Dr Martin and the slum children**

On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> February, India's Home Minister Hon Mr P Chidambaram met with seven Class 12 children from slum areas in Delhi. The children went on behalf of the entire batch of nearly 600 Asha Class 12 children to get the Home Minister's good wishes. They spoke to Mr Chidambaram at length about the challenges they have faced in their studies while growing up and the hopes they have for the future. The Home Minister gave the children his blessing for their upcoming exams and counseled them strongly to complete their education. Just as he was so supportive during this meeting, Mr Chidambaram has been a champion of the students from the slums for a long time and has taken a keen interest in their development. To all our children, he is a mentor and an inspiration and they will always be grateful for the personal care he has taken in guiding and looking out for them.

On a personal level, I have been completely and totally transformed by the openness and welcoming that I have seen from the slum dwellers who have invited us to their homes and have just been so welcoming and kind. They totally changed my perspective on life. So now when I go home, I'm going to find that I'm not bothered by little things or focus on material things, but I'm going to value the relationships I have with my loved ones and really just focus on being a better person because I know that without love or support, regardless of how many material possessions I have, I won't be able to get anywhere. A lot of this comes from what I have seen in the people in the slums.

### **Arian Rustemi, Volunteer from Boston University's School of Public Health**



**Arian speaking to some students in the slums**

## Loan programme helps improve slum businesses

**Meena**, 45, lives in Saraswati Camp Slum Colony. Her husband used to run a very small second hand goods shop before he passed away 4 years ago. As a childless widow, she was worried about her future income. A member of the Saraswati Camp women's group, she heard about the new financial inclusion scheme and applied for a loan of 30,000 rupees.

Earlier, she would buy second hand goods from the dealers who went door to door collecting people's old goods. After taking her first loan she was able to purchase more goods to recycle and sell. She then took a further loan which allowed her to start selling furniture and electric items. With her increased income, Meena has been able to renovate a small house left by her husband and let it out on rent. Her sister was struggling to care for all her children, so Meena has taken in two of her nephews and is now involving them in the business.

**Ramswarup** is a tailor in Saraswati camp. He had just one old sewing machine on which to stitch clothes. His wife Champa was in the women's group in the area and heard about the opportunities through the financial inclusion programme. Ramswarup applied for a loan of 50,000 rupees, with which he bought two new sewing machines and employed people to work them. His business increased dramatically, and he has more than doubled his income. Encouraged by the orders he has started getting from outside the slum, he plans to apply for a larger loan to purchase more advanced equipment and open a small shop outside the slum from which to operate his business.



Meena at her recycling shop

## News In Brief

### DR MARTIN COUNSELS SLUM STUDENTS

Dr Martin has been meeting with many of the high school and college students in the past few months. In extensive one-on-one and group sessions, she has spoken to all the children about the difficulties they are facing at home and in their studies, in order that Asha may be able to better help them through to higher education. Dr Martin told them to never give up on their dreams and assured them that Asha would be there supporting them on every step of their journey.



Dr Martin counseling Asha college students

### ASHA BIDS FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR KEN THOMPSON AS HE LEAVES INDIA

Asha would like to say goodbye to Ambassador of Ireland Hon Ken Thompson who enjoyed a very warm relationship with us. He visited several times and was closely involved with Asha's work. We want to thank him for his support during his time in India.

### AMBEDKAR WOMEN'S GROUP CLEANS UP SLUM

There was a huge garbage heap in Ambedkar slum next to the Asha resource centre that was an environmental and health hazard. After intense monitoring and awareness building by the area's women's group, the community members have stopped dumping trash there and are instead using the portable dust bins installed outside the slum.

### ASHA HELPS CLASS 12 STUDENTS IN PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL BOARD EXAMS

The high school students in their final year took the national board exams in March. These tests determine whether they are able to complete school and go on to higher education. To help them prepare, Asha gave the students sample exams and held practice test sessions to give the kids a better chance of performing well.



Prof Ron Waldman and Prof Lynn Freedman from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health visit Jeevan Nagar slum colony with Dr Martin

### CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Asha is inviting applications for a **Fundraising and Promotions** volunteer to work with the Asha Promotions Team in Delhi. Candidates should have very strong communication skills and an interest in fundraising.

Asha is looking for **Medical Doctors** who are interested in volunteering in the Delhi slums. The doctor's role will be to help with running outpatient clinics in our slums as well as training our nurses.

We are also looking for **English Teachers** to teach children in the slums. A teaching degree or ESL qualification is preferable but not essential.

For more information, please contact us at [info@asha.india.org](mailto:info@asha.india.org)

# 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.

**In England**, Andy Dodwell and Cafe Culture, a group of Christians from churches across Barnstaple in Devon, held an acoustic evening where attendees enjoyed music and standup comedy while raising money for Asha. Additionally, the members of the St Stephen's Church team, led by Amanda Clegg, fundraised in many ways including wine tastings, dinner parties and a clothing sale. Thanks to the team for all their hard work!

**In Northern Ireland**, the team of students from Methodist College, Belfast did a wide variety of activities to raise money for our slum programmes, in preparation for their visit this February. Students did table quizzes, organised dinners and even are planning an abseil this spring to raise additional funds. Congratulations to all the students!

**In Australia**, Cyndi Frieman asked friends and family to donate to Asha in lieu of gifts for her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. We're very grateful to all who gave in honour of Cyndi!

***There are all sorts of things you could do to raise funds for Asha. If you organise something, 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](http://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 COMMUNITY HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**" (*cheques must be in this name*) and post it to us at:

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

- **\$20** - will support a children's computer literacy programme at one slum for three months
- **\$40** - will guarantee a child full medical care and vaccinations for the first year of its life
- **\$100** - will provide a student with study materials for their high school exams
- **\$150** - will support the activities of a women's group for six months
- **\$510** - will train and equip a Community Health Volunteer with medical supplies for one year
- **\$700** - will cover all university expenses for one child for one year

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