

NEWS

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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 NEW YEAR!

Celebration of Learning 2010



Mr. P Chidambaram, India's Home Minister, Mr. KR Kamath, CMD, Punjab National Bank and Dr. Kiran Martin, Founder and Director of Asha with some of the students

The words of Asha founder and director Dr. Kiran Martin summed up the Celebration of Learning 2010. 'Children who would have once been working in roadside stalls, shining shoes, or picking rags, now have the confidence to attend university with much more privileged youngsters.'

On Monday 15th November, 450 people gathered to celebrate the admission of 170 slum children to Delhi University and other institutes of higher education. And what a celebration it was. Asha was delighted to welcome honoured guests, Mr K R Kamath, Chairman and Managing Director, Punjab National Bank, HE Peter Varghese, Australian High Commissioner, HE Bob Hiensch, Ambassador of the Netherlands, HE Kenneth Thompson, Ambassador of Ireland, HE Rupert Holborow, New Zealand High Commissioner and Mr Sandip Ghose, Regional Director of the Reserve Bank of India, who contributed words of wisdom and encouragement to our students after hearing the story courageously recounted by one child.

'The day I got admitted to Delhi College of Engineering, I could not believe that my dream had actually come true. I am the first student from my family and my entire village to have embarked on the journey towards higher education,' Mahesh Koda declared proudly. He also described the difficulties he had faced, from trying

to study amidst power cuts and noise disturbance in the one room hut his family of four shares, to being worried about getting enough to eat on his widowed mother's daily wage of less than 50p (\$1) per day.

Mahesh's story was a representation of the hardships and the incredible achievements the children have experienced. The Honourable Home Minister of India and the function's Chief Guest, Shri P. Chidambaram acknowledged these struggles in a moving speech, in which he said that while he takes his own 10 year old granddaughter's educational opportunities for granted, none of the children from Asha slums can take anything for granted, not even their next meal. Mr. Chidambaram paid tribute to Asha's work and expressed his desire to see every child in India complete school and have the option of higher education. Asha is grateful for its pioneering leadership, under which India's leading national banks have joined with Asha in our financial inclusion scheme that has enabled educational loans for children and business loans for hundreds of slum dwellers across Delhi.

Each of the remarkable children ascended the stage to rapturous applause to receive their loans and Asha educational scholarships. As each name and college course was read out, the students' beaming faces touched the hearts of those present. Their pride was equalled by the happiness felt by all the parents, Asha staff and supporters who witnessed such a landmark moment in their lives.

Diwakar – fulfilling his dreams with help from Asha

When Diwakar Thakur completed school, college seemed out of the question. His whole family shared one room in Kanak Durga slum, the walls of which were made of mud, with only a wooden sheet as a roof. They were so preoccupied with trying to manage in such a small space that they couldn't begin to think about education.

But then Diwakar started attending career counselling workshops organized by Asha. When he met Dr. Kiran Martin, she assured him of her full support and Asha has since provided fees, books and the encouragement that helped him gain self confidence and a place in the BA programme at Delhi University's Ram Lal Anand College. Next spring he will graduate and intends to pursue an MBA.

Diwakar shared his story at a reception given by the Australian High Commission to honour Asha slum children at college. It was a special day for students from Asha slums, who chatted enthusiastically and confidently with guests about their home and college experiences. The Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Peter Varghese, also presented Dr Kiran Martin with a grant from the High Commission and a donation made by athletes of the Australian Commonwealth Games Team.



An Asha student Diwakar addressing the gathering at the Australian High Commission in the presence of Dr. Martin and the Australian High Commissioner HE Mr. Peter Varghese

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

Message from Dr Kiran Martin

My dear friends,

As history was made once again last year, with 170 students from our city's slums performing the extraordinary feat of overcoming extreme poverty to be admitted to university, the question being asked everywhere was, how did this remarkable achievement happen?

All their lives, the poor have heard voices such as, you are ugly, you are worthless, you are despicable, you are nobody. They have often lived in darkness, and even felt unwelcome in human existence, with parents wishing they were never born, seen as one more mouth to feed. They are then confronted with powerful feelings of self rejection, and they hear inner voices that say, I am no good, I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten and abandoned.

I believe it to be the truth of life that each of these wonderful children is seen by God as unique, special and precious. His eyes of love see them as children of infinite beauty and eternal value. He cares for them with great tenderness, goes with them wherever they go, and watches over them.

As my team and I spent time with them, they were taught and instructed with patience and perseverance. They were encouraged to keep going when they were ready to give up, and stimulated to try again when they failed. They were reminded of their true identity as priceless and irreplaceable. The love they were given was all embracing and non comparing. This made them feel safe, gave them boundless energy and the will to fight their seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

So then, curses, accusations and blaming bring forth destruction and death, but in the truthful and tender encounter of love, man is able to create, and live.

As we all enter the New Year, I offer you my grateful thanks for your friendship and support that I could not do without. I pray for your good health, love of family and friends, wisdom to choose those things that really matter in life and the best of everything that you so well deserve. May God's angels watch over you and may your heart be filled with new hopes and dreams, new horizons and beautiful tomorrows.

With my very best wishes.



Dr Kiran Martin
Founder and Director



News in Brief

DR MARTIN SPEAKS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Dr Kiran Martin delivered the Chancellor's Human Rights Lecture at Australia's University of Melbourne, making a very powerful and lasting impression in a talk entitled "Making Human Rights Real: Transforming the lives of India's poor and homeless." Professor Rob Moodie of the Nossal Institute wrote after hearing her address: "There is much Australia and the rest of the world can learn from the approaches taken by Asha." You can watch the lecture in its entirety at <http://bit.ly/h4Zzjs>

JAY KNOX OBITUARY

It is with much sadness that we announce that Jay Knox passed away on November 21st 2010 after 7 years of living with cancer. One of the co-founders of Purple Flame Media, Jay and her husband Phil filmed our Asha promotional video, which has been seen by audiences worldwide. Jay was a woman of great tenacity, enthusiasm and creativity, who loved people and was passionate about seeing justice done in their lives. We are thankful to have known such a wonderful woman for whom Asha became so very special, and she will be dearly missed by us all.

ASHA THANKS JACK VAN HAM

Dr Martin paid tribute to Jack van Ham, General Director of ICCO, at his farewell ceremony on October 23rd in the Netherlands. We congratulate Jack on 10 amazing years at ICCO!

ASHA WELCOMES DEPUTY PREMIER OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Asha was honoured to receive Dr Kim Hames, the Deputy Premier of Western Australia, for a visit to Dr Ambedkar Basti slum, accompanied by Dr Martin.

TEA WITH THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNOR GENERAL

17 college students from Asha slums met the New Zealand Governor General, the Rt Hon Sir Anand Satyanand and his wife Lady Susan at a tea at the New Zealand High Commission, hosted by New Zealand High Commissioner HE Mr Rupert Holborow and Mrs Polly Holborow. The Governor General praised the students' achievements and presented them with gifts.

NORTHERN IRELAND TEAMS BRIGHTEN ASHA CENTRES

Asha was thrilled to welcome back teams from Rainey Endowed School and Methodist College. Methody took on the ambitious task of the 60 foot inside wall of the Kalkaji Centre yard. The Rainey Endowed team made an excellent job of the rooms in Kusumpur Resource Centre. The teams also conducted craft and English conversation lessons with the children of their slums. We can't thank them enough for all their hard work!

**Volunteers from
Methodist College
add some colour to
Kalkaji Resource Centre**



ASHA UK SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE

The First Asha UK Southwest conference was held in September at the Gateway Church in Yeovil, UK. Dr Martin was the keynote speaker and met with many talented and loyal Asha supporters. Huge thanks to Dick and Julie Hogben, Nigel and Sue Rees and all the organizers, speakers and supporters for making this conference a great success.

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

Empowerment in Asha slums pays off

'Neighbours never used to talk to each other,' Manju, a long-time inhabitant of Trilokpuri slum recalls, 'but we have become a community who demonstrate real concern for each other.' The pressures created from a lack of resources were a constant source of tension, and the different cultural backgrounds of the residents added to feelings of disunity. The area was dirty, people lived in shanty huts and there was no reliable source of water. 'We would have to wait 2-3 hours per day to collect water from tankers and we often fought,' Manju says.

Then 12 years ago, Asha began working in Trilokpuri, offering healthcare services and organizing women's groups. The Asha staff taught the women how to make petitions and visit their government representatives to present their requests. Sanjay Camp's women's group president Parveen describes how the area's communal toilets were badly constructed and had a major sewage problem. Encouraged by Asha staff, the women's group visited local councillors and city officials for 4 years, until at last the government agreed to build the toilets. Today the women's group proudly show off the complex, which is spotlessly maintained and odour-free.



Electricity meters installed

Other initiatives have brought such developments as running water and electricity meters to the area. But the most incredible change has been the evolution of a communal spirit among Trilokpuri inhabitants. As well as caring for each other, local people now believe in the power of community action to bring about change, which has given residents a new sense of responsibility and ownership of the slum.

Time after time, Asha has shown that a group of people living without basic necessities in desperate conditions, can develop into a thriving, forward thinking community. By empowering individuals to become advocates for their rights and their communities, change has come to many slums in Delhi. Through education, persistence, patience and a lot of very hard work, slum dwellers have secured much needed improvements in local infrastructure that have made their lives better and brought them closer together.

There has been a surge of development in Asha slums in the last few months. In Seelampur, construction started on a new pipeline that will bring water to one deprived block. The children's groups have also taken an active role in advocacy initiatives. One group paid a visit to their councillor to request pest control be done to prevent the spread of malarial mosquitoes. Their actions resulted in fines by the authorities for local trash collectors not practicing proper disease prevention.

When a sewage overflow crisis threatened homes and the Asha Centre in Mayapuri during the monsoon season, women and children's groups visited the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and convinced them to clear the drains and put in a new pipeline. This collective community response secured the preventative measures that saved the area from flooding. In Tigri, one block has finally succeeded in getting authorities to replace their drains. Their next project is to get a police booth installed in their area to combat an increase in crime. Asha staff in Chanderpuri are helping local people without identity cards to apply for electricity meters. All of these measures of improvement are an indication that the seeds of empowerment planted by Asha in Delhi's slums are flowering.



Toilet complex in Trilokpuri



New tubewell

Upcoming Events

ASHA CELEBRATION IN SCOTLAND

The Asha Scotland Celebration will be held on **February 5th** at **Holyrood Abbey Church, London Road, Edinburgh** from **10:30-3:30**. Dr Kiran Martin will be the Guest of Honour. For details, please contact **Eleanor and Mickey Robertson** at **mickelna@btinternet.com** or call **+44 131 669 5044**.

ASHA CELEBRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland Celebration will be held on **February 12th** at **First Ballymena Presbyterian Church, The Paddock, Ballymena** from **10:00-2:00**, with Dr Martin as the keynote speaker. Car parking will be available. For more info, please contact **Barney Graham** at **nfjgraham@hotmail.com** or call **+44 28 2564 3093**. Or visit **www.asha-india.org/2011conferences** for more details.

FREDDY MARTIN IN ENGLAND & NORTHERN IRELAND

Asha Associate Director Freddy Martin will be in England from **January 15th to February 5th** and Northern Ireland from **February 6th to 14th**. Mr Martin will be visiting many places during his visit. If you want to know the dates he may be in your area, please check for updates on the Asha website at: **www.asha-india.org/ukschedule**. Alternatively, contact **Phil Leighton** at **foasha.leighton@tiscali.co.uk** for details about England dates and **Gordon Wright** at **wgw70@yahoo.com** for the Northern Ireland schedule.

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.

Jack van Ham said farewell to ICCO after 10 years as General Director. Jack has been an incredible champion of Asha's work and ICCO has been a fantastic partner. We are so honoured that Jack asked people to make a donation to Asha in lieu of a farewell gift and that he will continue to be an Asha Ambassador in the future.

Asha supporter Sam Gibson reported that the annual Asha Trophy Cricket Tournament was a great success this year. Participants raised funds which will be going towards Asha's Peera Garhi project. Thanks to everyone who took part!

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 form to arrange monthly donations.
- 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 _____

ASHA CURRENCY CONVERTER

- **\$15** - will cover 3 awareness training workshops for a children's group
- **\$40** - will purchase course books for a college student for one year
- **\$85** - will provide training sessions for a women's group for 18 months
- **\$150** - will support a women's group's activities for 6 months
- **\$300** - will cover university course fees for a college student for one year
- **\$600** - will cover all costs to send one student to college for one year

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