

# NEWS

Issue #47

July 2010

# for friends of asha

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

## Asha slum children get top grades in high school exams

The smiles that light up the faces of our high school students these days are so contagious that a walk around any Asha slum, even on a hot summer day when temperatures exceed 45 degrees centigrade, is something to look forward to. Smiles of success, smiles of achievement, smiles that say that they have climbed another rung of the ladder that will eventually lead them and their families out of poverty - out of their slums - greatly encourage us, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for helping support these students to prepare for their high school exams.

Of the 300 Asha slum students who took the national high school exams, a large number gained unprecedented marks in a range of subjects. With top percentage scores well into the 80s and low 90s, these slum children have proven their abilities to achieve academic success, even when competing with other Indian students (many of whom attend expensive private schools). A couple of years ago, even earning the opportunity to write these exams was a feat in itself for students such as these.

One of these students, Shahwaj, whose father died of TB when he was 8 leaving behind his mother and 4 brothers, couldn't suppress the tears of joy when he saw his marks - 71.5% aggregate, 87% in Economics! When asked what these marks mean to him, he said, "Since my father passed away my family and I spend all day stripping wire from its insulation to sell to local dealers for about Rs 50 a day (£.70 / \$1). With these marks I can go to college, get a good job,

and take my family out of the slums to lead a respectable life! But," he worries, "my mother and brothers want me to work - how will they manage if I study instead of helping them earn?"

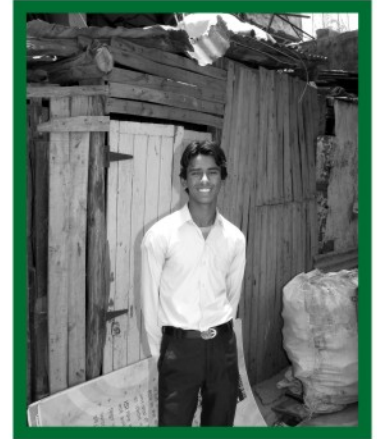
When we began working in Zakhira only about 40% of the children completed primary school - education was the last thing on their minds. Asha (left) became a member of the children's group in Zakhira when we began work there. "I didn't care much about studies," says Asha, "but when I saw a computer for the first time, I decided that I must find out how it works! I joined Asha's Computer Literacy Programme and then the English Literacy



Asha from Zakhira slum

Programme, and after attending numerous workshops at the Asha centre, I began to realise the importance of education. My father works as a lines-man in the telephone department, and he is the only bread earner in our family of 9. We have no savings and had it not been for Asha, I would have had to take my exams without books to study from. I am so grateful to Asha for the workshops, books and study guides they provided to me. Even Dr. Martin took the time out of her busy schedule to counsel and motivate me. Because of this," she proudly announces, "I scored 74.7% aggregate and 84% in Political Science!"

Gulshan's life has been filled with hardships as well. Her father deserted her mother and her two siblings when they were young. Her mother does whatever work she can find and the family often has to sleep hungry. "When I took my GCSE exams at 16, I didn't have a single book to study from and so I somehow managed to pass with 41%, but for my High School exams, Asha gave me books and study guides, and I scored 76%! I now want to go to college and study to be a teacher," she smiles. Encouraged by her marks and because of Asha's assured support, like many others, she is the first person in her family to even consider a college education.



Shahwaj from Seelampur slum



Gulshan from Seelampur slum

**This year, there are over 200 slum children who need our financial support to be able to realise their dream of a university education. We are also committed to continuing to help the 137 students who were admitted last year and are now in their second year of university.**

**The responses to a recent appeal we sent out have been sufficient to cover expenses for about 30 children. Having worked so hard with these children, we sincerely hope that financial obstacles will not come in the way of a university education. Thank you so much for all your support so far. We request you to be as generous as possible at this time so that no child will need to be turned away due to financial reasons. Even a small donation will go a long way.**

**The annual breakdown of costs to send one slum student to college is as follows:**

Tuition & College Expenses	: £ 220 / \$ 325
Resources for A Level Exams	: £ 45 / \$ 65
Training (workshops, etc)	: £ 30 / \$ 40
Staff Support	: £ 45 / \$ 65
Programme Support (travel, communications, etc)	: £ 45 / \$ 65
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>: £ 385 / \$US 560</b>

**Please visit [www.asha-india.org](http://www.asha-india.org) to donate online or donate through Friends of Asha (details on last page) to help us meet our goal. We are grateful to friends like you who have enabled us to reach this far.**

**Visit the Asha website at: [www.asha-india.org](http://www.asha-india.org)**

## Kiran's letter

My dear friends,

As I turned 51 on June 9th, my heart was filled with pride at the thought of the astonishing success of nearly 300 Asha children from the slums in their high school exams. To me, their lives glow with the beauty of the rarest, brightest of gems. An education at Delhi University that many of them will now be able to obtain, will serve as a gateway to such exciting new opportunities. They will receive the chance to be taught by top experts in their fields, some of the best and most knowledgeable people in our country. This stimulation will encourage them to think, ask questions, explore new ideas, and grow and develop in marvellous ways. The level of respect that they will gain will be a testament to their levels of intelligence and tireless devotion.

When I try to comprehend this many splendoured miracle of God, I am reminded that these children have suffered from poverty through not one, but many generations. Not just financial poverty, never having had money to purchase goods and services, but deep emotional poverty, the hardest of all. Until Asha came into their lives, it was hard for them to even choose and control emotional responses. They had no stamina to withstand difficult emotional situations and feelings. Many were physically weak from poor nutrition. They did not have the mental abilities and acquired skills such as reading, writing and computing, to deal with daily life, since most of them never went to school. They had poor support systems, no role models and no access to a nurturing adult.

What has happened makes me reflect on the deep mystery of the power of love. A love that makes room for them to deposit all their hurts and worries. A love that is large enough for all their joys and sorrows. A love that understands what the child cannot say. A love that is instructional, unconditional and forever.

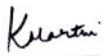
I am beginning to understand that the strength of love is greater than all natural laws. It is the fuel that enables a normal human being to do the impossible. It sees the miracle that is invisible to others.

Today I would like to pay tribute to my team whose deep devotion, kind precepts and wise counsel caused the clouds of darkness to dissipate from the hearts of these lovely children. May our love continue to nourish them and help them to grow, prosper and reach great spiritual, intellectual and emotional heights. May they always be able to count on us for the things that matter most of all.

I ask God to bless my hands that are folded in prayer for them today. May my hands ever be strong as they guide, and never ever be too far for a child to reach.

Thank you for the richness of your friendship, your loyalty and your prayers that have nourished my spirit all these years, and have encouraged me to grow and to become capable of what I am being. Thank you also for allowing me to share my thoughts with you.

With my very best wishes.



**Dr Kiran Martin**  
Director & Founder



## Asha Founder Dr. Kiran Martin meets with the Prime Minister of Australia, Ms Julia Gillard



During her recent visit to Melbourne, Australia, Dr Kiran Martin had the brilliant opportunity to meet with the nation's then Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Ms Julia Gillard, who has just taken over as the Prime Minister of Australia.

Being the nation's first female Prime Minister has made the Honourable Ms Gillard a shining role model for promoting women's leadership around the world.

Having visited Asha while she was in Delhi last September, Ms Gillard was delighted to now meet the organization's founder, who had been out of the country at that time. During the meeting, which occurred on April 8, 2010, Ms Gillard told Dr Martin that her time spent with Asha in Ekta Vihar had been truly "inspiring", and she described the powerful effect the slum community had had on her.

By speaking with individual slum students about their challenges and goals, Ms Gillard was able to see first hand the impact of Asha's work with education in Delhi slums. She was also particularly interested to have learnt more about advancements made in the areas of women's empowerment and group advocacy - issues which she herself is extremely passionate about, and personally concentrated on in her own work. The entire experience, she said, will be sure to stay in her memory for a very long time.

The meeting, which coincided with news of the possibility of Asha developing future links with Melbourne University, also comes at a time when the organization is preparing to support an increased number of new college students from its slum communities - both pieces of information which Ms Gillard was excited to hear.

Asha is extremely pleased to have been able to meet once more with the Honourable Ms Gillard. We look forward to continuing this relationship in the future, and hope that it will prove beneficial to the slum dwellers of India.

Visit the Asha website at: [www.asha-india.org](http://www.asha-india.org)

## Helping new mothers in times of need – one of our midwives shares her experiences

Asha, wife of Prahlad, is a 50-year-old midwife, working in Dr Ambedkar Basti slum. Every day, she is on-call for any women who might need her assistance.

This week alone, Asha helped deliver 2 babies. At the same time, she is following the progress of at least 8-10 other pregnant women in her area. Equipped with fully stocked 'birth kits' (including disinfectant, gloves, and sterilized medical tools), Asha is ready to go at a moment's notice.

However, she has not always been this well prepared. In fact, when she first started working as a midwife - more than 20 years ago - Asha did not have any training and did not understand the importance of good hygiene in her profession. "I was not taking care of my own health," she explained. "Not cleaning my fingernails, or using gloves."

After being encouraged by our staff, Asha began taking supervised courses and workshops through our midwifery training programme.

She has now been working as one of our organization's 118 Trained Birth Attendants (TBAs) for more than 14 years. In this role, she helps to identify pregnant women in her areas of work - counseling and monitoring them throughout their pregnancies, taking them to Asha health centres and/or specialized hospitals when necessary, and acting as an emergency contact if any complications should arise. She is also equipped to attend the births themselves and provide follow-up care.

According to a recent report released by international NGO Save the Children, India tops the number of neonatal deaths (those taking place within the first four weeks of life) worldwide - with 50% of all deaths under the age of five occurring within the first month, and some 400,000 newborns a year dying within 24 hours. However, with an extreme lack of quality healthcare workers in the country, the situation is dire. This spring, the government announced that it is short of at least 74,000 accredited social health activists and 21,000 auxiliary nurse-midwives - contributing, no doubt, to the nation's depressing infant mortality rate of 52 (per 1,000 births). As part of the Millennium Development Goal targets, the Indian government aims to bring the infant mortality rate down to at least 38 by 2015.

"I enjoy giving help," Asha explains, "being there in times of need. Especially when there are complications in the night. Since I am a woman and a mother myself, I know what that is like, so I appreciate being able to help others." And, with more than a thousand births to her record, Asha has certainly done more than her fair share of helping. "Some of the children I helped deliver as newborns are now grown up and married," she explains, smiling.



Asha with a newborn after a successful delivery

## News in Brief



Sundeep Dale of the Asha Yuba City Committee and others from California visit Asha

### VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

Asha has been delighted to host a number of enthusiastic international volunteers over the past few months. These volunteers have included a group of five students from Harvard University, five from the UK, two Dutch medical students, and one from Northern Ireland - all of whom were involved in Asha's medical and/or English-language programmes in a variety of our slums. We're very grateful to all our volunteers for their hard work, and thank them for sharing their time here with us.

### SCREENING SLUM WOMEN FOR SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

In May, 900 slum women aged 15-45 were screened for STDs at various Asha health centres throughout the city. Testing counselling and treatment, where needed, were provided.



Deputy Vice Chancellor Ms Sue Elliot, with a delegation from Australia's University of Melbourne meet with Dr Kiran Martin and others from Dr Ambedkar Basti slum



Mr Sandip Ghosh, Regional Director, Reserve Bank of India, Mr Sunil Pant, Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, and Dr Kiran Martin at the Asha loan distribution ceremony

### ASHA WELCOMES UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Everyone at Asha was pleased to host a large delegation from Australia's University of Melbourne led by Sue Elliot, Deputy Vice Chancellor. During the visit, the Australians had the opportunity to speak with a number of our college students, and exciting discussions were held on possibilities for future partnerships and student exchange opportunities between Asha and the University.

### NEW LOAN CHEQUES FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Mr. Sandip Ghosh, Regional Director, Reserve Bank of India, was the Chief Guest and Mr. Sunil Pant, Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, was the Presiding Guest at an Asha loan function held in Mayapuri slum on 30th March. 109 new loan cheques were presented to Asha slum dwellers from all over Delhi that day. These loans, to be used in areas such as home improvement, business establishment and/or expansion, and education, will help to transform the lives of many individuals. This is now the 3rd year Asha has been helping slum dwellers to access financial services - and, with a loan repayment rate well above the national average, we look forward to many more years to come!

# 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.



◀ **Left:** Children from The All-Saints Primary School in Waddington, UK, hold a fundraising day for Asha.

**Right:** Three teams from Holywood Parish Church, Northern Ireland, ran the Belfast City Marathon in aid of Asha. This was the second time that members from the church decided to support Asha by running the marathon. ▶



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## SUPPORTERS FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD CAN DONATE DIRECTLY TO US 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, 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.**

Alternatively, please visit [www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx](http://www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx) to donate online in a choice of currencies.

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_
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Full name & title \_\_\_\_\_ Organisation (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

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Three teams from Holywood Parish Church, Northern Ireland, ran the Belfast City Marathon in aid of Asha. The Holywood Parish Church has been a long-standing supporter of Asha, and this was the second time that members from the church decided to support Asha by running the marathon.

All of us at Asha would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Church who supported our cause by running the marathon.

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### **Only if you wish to Gift Aid your donation:**

Please make your cheque payable to "Friends of Asha, Ireland" and mail to: Mrs Daphne Wright, Friends of Asha, (Ireland), Hermitage, 70 Demesne Road, Holywood, Co Down, BT18 9EX, UK. Email: [wgw70@yahoo.com](mailto:wgw70@yahoo.com)

Charity Registration No. XR 37459

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The All-Saints Primary School in Waddington, UK, held a fundraising day for Asha. The children involved in the live video conference between the school and the Asha slum in Mayapuri were the main organisers of the day. They did group presentations to other students, to inform them about Asha's work. The children could come to school in their own clothes, and some chose to wear the colours of the Indian flag.

All the children were involved in an activity where they had to follow a map from the 'village' to the 'well' and back again. Their journey involved them going through 'The Lotus Flower Archway', over the 'Neem Tree bridge' and along 'Banyon Tree Way', to name a few landmarks. They had to carry buckets and try not to spill a single drop as water is very precious.



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Please make your cheque payable to "Friends of Asha, GB" and mail to: Phil Leighton, Coordinator, Friends of Asha, (GB), Woodlands, 34 Knoll Road, Sidcup, Kent DA14 4QU, UK. Email: foasha.leighton@tiscali.co.uk Charity Registration No. 1085071

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From 4th – 6th March 2010, the Harvard South Asian Association celebrated the 21st anniversary of Ghungroo, one of the largest cultural events on Harvard's campus and SAA's hallmark event. Ghungroo brings the diverse and ever-changing traditions of South Asia to the Agassiz Theatre at Harvard, inviting the whole campus to celebrate South Asian culture.

Against the background of a new stunning, student-built set, over 200 Harvard undergraduates presented student-choreographed dance pieces, musical performances, dramatic selections, and artwork all inspired by the sub-continent and its diaspora. The dances included traditional folk dances like Bhangra and Garba Raas, classical dance in the form of Bharatanatyam, as well as modern adaptations and pieces inspired by Bollywood. Other acts brought student musicians to the stage to sing Qawwalis (poetry set in music) along with fusion pieces. The profits from the show went to support the efforts at Asha.



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## IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A VALUED CONTRIBUTION TO ASHA'S WORK

Please fill in the form below, make a check payable to

**"American Society for Health for All"** and mail both to:

Louanne Hempton, American Society for Health for All (ASHA), 96 Sweetwater Ave #6,  
Bedford, MA 01730, USA. Email: [lhempston@hotmail.com](mailto:lhempston@hotmail.com). EIN #01557632.

ASHA (USA) is a 501 (C) 3 registered charity.

Alternatively, you can visit [www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx](http://www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx) to donate online in a choice of currencies.

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