

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 Honours Students at Celebration of Learning 2011

'Every day a child from the slums goes to college, every time they graduate, every time they find a job, a small miracle is taking place.'

These were the words of India's Home Minister, Mr P Chidambaram at Asha's Celebration of Learning 2011, as an audience of 500 gathered to celebrate the achievements of Asha students entering higher education this year.

The evening was filled with the presence of miracles. It was a very moving experience to witness the 188 slum children who had been admitted to Delhi University and other prestigious private colleges. First year student Pinki from Trilokpuri slum colony described the miracle in her own life as Asha helped her resist her parents' plans to marry her off at 16 and instead continue studying to become a teacher. She is the first girl from her family and her entire village to join college. New graduate Diwakar beamed with pride and emotion as he personally thanked Mr Chidambaram for supporting his class of 28 students, the first children from the slums to gain admission to university in 2008.



Diwakar, a student from the first batch of Asha graduates, thanks the Home Minister for his support of the Higher Education Programme



Dr Kiran Martin, Professor Francis Clooney, Director, Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, Shri P Chidambaram, India's Home Minister, Mr K R Kamath, CMD, Punjab National Bank, Ms Lavina Collins, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Irish Embassy and Mr Sunil Pant, CGM, State Bank of India

Along with the Hon'ble Home Minister, Asha was delighted to welcome Mr K R Kamath, CMD, Punjab National Bank and Mr Sunil Pant, CGM, State Bank of India who spoke sincerely about their commitment to enhancing the role of financial inclusion in improving the lives of India's poor. Professor Francis Clooney from Harvard University praised the children for maintaining the courage to study and do well amidst such difficult living conditions. And the presence of Ms Lavina Collins, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Ireland highlighted the strong support the country has given to the Higher Education Programme.

In an address to those gathered, Dr Kiran Martin described her pleasure at seeing the numbers of children at university increase year on year since 2008. She emphasised that none of this would have been possible without the values of love, equality, social justice and a dignity for all that define our work, which 'in their practical expression have achieved miraculous results.' She appealed to supporters to come together and fight for the right of every child to finish school and go to college.

We were very happy to have many of our friends and supporters present on this special day. We would also like to thank all those who have expressed their support. It is incredible to have the encouragement of the Asha family all over the world.

Santosh from Dr Ambedkar Basti - A dream fulfilled

Santosh, from Dr Ambedkar slum colony, has become the first Asha student to pursue a postgraduate programme outside of Delhi. With the help of Asha, she has been accepted at Jai Narayan Vyass University in Jodhpur, Rajasthan to do a Bachelor's of Education. She joined Asha's children's group aged 13, where her self-confidence and personality bloomed. It was here that Santosh first developed the motivation to study beyond high school and have a career.

Her parents were more interested in getting her married than in her education, but Dr Kiran Martin encouraged her to stick to her ambitions. Asha helped her select the right college course and met all her financial expenses. Santosh was one of the first Asha students admitted to higher education in 2008. Today, she is a proud graduate of Maitreyi College, Delhi University. When she completes her next degree, she will at last be able to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher.



Santosh receiving her scholarship from Asha

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

Kiran's Letter

Dear friends,

From our beginnings in 1988, we have witnessed remarkable changes in health, equity and standard of living among 400,000 slum residents in Delhi. The Infant Mortality Rate has declined from 53.6 per 1000 live births in 2003 to 16.9 in 2010-11. This compares to 33 in 2009 across Delhi. Last year, the sex ratio at Asha for children aged 0-5 years was about 956 girls per 1000 boys, virtually identical to the natural ratio. According to India's 2011 census, the sex ratio was just 866 girls per 1000 boys in children 0-6 years in Delhi. This is attributed to sex selective abortion of females. Nearly 100% of Asha pregnant women had three or more antenatal checks, gave birth in a hospital or with a trained birth attendant, and breast fed immediately after birth. 90-95% of Asha children aged 5-10 attend primary school, and 60-70% go on to secondary school. To date, nearly 600 children from Asha slums have enrolled in tertiary studies. More than 13,000 residents have opened bank accounts since 2008, and 776 educational or business loans were given to slum residents, with repayment rates of 90-95%.



The underlying reasons for such success are found in the twin values of justice and love. I believe that they are the essence of the Divine nature, and form the basis of our strategies and approaches. Speaking about justice in the Old Testament, Hannah puts it beautifully: 'He lifts the poor from the dust - yes, from a pile of ashes - and treats them as princes sitting in the seats of honour,' (1 Samuel 2:8). Asha's belief in the inherent dignity and inalienable equality of each individual stands alongside its belief in social justice - the idea of creating a society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, on equal development opportunities and benefits, and on the rights of all people to reach their individual potential. However, Asha completely rejects the route of confrontation and aggression. Peacemaking, building bridges rather than barriers, creating an environment for harmony and fellowship, even between the exploiter and the exploited, is the way to individual and community transformation.

The other value that I must speak about, that I believe resides at the core of the Divine nature, is that of love. The apostle John writes - 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love springs from God; and he who loves his fellowmen is born of God and is coming progressively to know and understand God, to perceive and recognise and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him. He who does not love has not become acquainted with God, for God is love.' Love is in the true nature of every soul. It originates in the essence of our being. The energy of love, characterised by an attitude and demeanor of goodwill, kindness, support and benevolence towards all, opens hearts that may have once been closed by bitterness. This attitude has the power to replace that bitterness with acceptance and joy. It has powerful transformative effects on both the giver and the receiver of love.

I would like to end by saying that in the midst of the many challenges I continue to face, I offer my deepest gratitude to you all for having blessed Asha in so many ways. Every single Asha supporter is important, and I hope we can all believe together that each of us plays a very important part in this great work of God.

With my best wishes.

Kiran Martin

Asha slum children play cricket with New Zealand Prime Minister



**Asha Students with the New Zealand Prime Minister
Mr John Key and Dr Kiran Martin**

It was a momentous day for the 14 Asha students who met with New Zealand Prime Minister, the Rt Hon'ble Mr John Key. Speaking before an assembled gathering, the Prime Minister described the special connection between New Zealand and India, saying, 'We hope to expand the relationship in many ways. I acknowledge Asha and the kids that are here today. I understand the work that you do and the great steps you are making to help young people in India.'

HE Ms Jan Henderson, New Zealand High Commissioner to India echoed his words, saying that it is 'a passion for all of us to help kids from disadvantaged backgrounds become successful and confident individuals.' Acknowledging the students present, Dr Martin said that 'now they stand before us as the first in their families, villages and slum communities to step into the world of higher education.'

Dr. Martin also paid tribute to the partnership between Asha and New Zealand that is now in its 20th year. In her speech, she thanked the High Commission in Delhi for their support, as well as Asha's longstanding partner TEAR Fund New Zealand. The warm relationship between

the two countries was then perfectly symbolised in a boisterous exhibition cricket match between the Asha students and the Prime Minister. The children were delighted to have playing with them also, former New Zealand cricket captain Mr Stephen Fleming. All the Asha students had a chance to bat and they held their own very well against the Prime Minister and the cricket star. Usha, from Ekta Vihar had the best shots, hitting all three balls bowled to her by Mr Key. Asha would also like to thank the High Commission for their donation of cricket equipment.

Naushad tops his class again

Naushad is a 21 year old student from Seelampur. He has 5 siblings and his father supports the family by working in a local clothes manufacturing factory. His mother, an Asha Community Health Volunteer, encouraged him to join the children's association and youth group. While growing up, the Asha centre was a safe place to play and do homework. Naushad says its presence in the community kept him off the streets of the slum.

Worried his high school exam scores were not good enough to gain admission to Delhi University, Naushad became depressed. But Asha staff urged him to find an inner strength and not lose hope. He decided to apply to college and Asha helped him get admitted to Delhi University's Shyam Lal College to study Political Science. Asha also helped with all his expenses, even providing new clothes and a backpack for college.

Initially he felt very out of place. Nobody from his family had ever seen the inside of a college. He was uncomfortable in the environment and felt unable to make friends. He joined National Cadet Corps to work on his physical and character development. Everyday he attended the Cadet class and participated in rigorous physical activities before going to college classes. It was hard at first, but he soon started enjoying the routine. With no privacy in his one room home in the slum, Naushad continued studying in the Asha centre.

Unable to afford all the books he needed for his studies, Naushad relied on those available in the college library. Despite his lack of advantages, he worked so hard in his first year that he secured the highest marks in the entire college. This achievement suddenly made him a known figure on campus, recognised by his teachers and fellow students.

As his self-confidence increased, Naushad started participating in more college activities. He won the first prize in a college debate on the status of women in India. In his second year, he again secured first position in the college, the first time an Asha student has secured the top rank in consecutive years.

Everyone in college calls him by his new nickname, 'Mr Popular'. From the shy, uncertain boy of a few years ago, Naushad has grown into a confident young man, eloquent in expressing himself, with a look of optimism in his eyes as he talks about the future. When asked how he felt about Asha, Naushad responded with this poem: 'Asha is a hope, is a light, that supports the sinking people. Asha shows us the way and is with us always.'



Naushad at his home in the slum

Once illiterate, now a leader and teacher in her community

45-year-old Sameena is a Community Health Volunteer in Seelampur slum colony. She first came to Delhi newly married at age 15. Her husband worked as a tailor but did not provide much support to his family. In the absence of a regular income, she raised their 10 children with immense difficulty in a single room shanty hut amidst unhygienic conditions and extreme poverty. The family often went to bed hungry for days.

During a visit of Dr. Martin to Seelampur 11 years ago, Sameena first heard about Asha and its work in the slum. With a hope of making her life better, she joined the women's association and has been an active member ever since. Previously illiterate, she also learned how to read and write and now serves as the treasurer of the association.

As she gained skills and self-confidence under the guidance and motivation of Asha staff, she decided to train as a Community Health Volunteer and birth attendant to be able to sustain her family while serving the community. Sameena is now responsible for the well-being of 300 families in her area and ensures that pregnant women look after their health and opt for safe deliveries.

Once illiterate, she today supplements her income by teaching the Quran to young girls in her area. She beams with pride as she describes how young graduates often approach her to learn the basics of account-keeping. Even when describing her accomplishments, she is forever grateful to Asha for bringing about the transformation in her life. 'Whatever I am today is because of Asha,' says a proud and happy Sameena.



Sameena, maintaining accounts at the Seelampur Centre

Subodh – A journey with Asha



'A passionate and careless young man, not believing in God', is how Subodh Maseeh describes his life before he started working with Asha. It was in 1993 that he joined the Asha family after working in an electronics factory. When asked about the reason behind this switch, he says that a personal tragedy at this time led him to realize the power of God and motivated him to devote his life to helping people.

Since joining Asha, he says it has been a wonderful journey working with the people in need of support and touching their lives to bring about change. Today he works as a Programme Assistant, supervising Seelampur and Chanderpuri slum colonies. His dedication towards his work is reflected in the love and respect he gets from the people living in his area. He has made it a personal mission to mentor young people in the slum and help those unsure of their future figure out the right path to follow, just as he discovered his own destiny with 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.



Mr. Sunil Pant addressing the audience at the Celebration of Learning 2011

In a world where many think that religions are mainly a source of trouble, Asha shows us that in peace and respect, our care for one another, in our hope that we can all be better, religions work quietly together as a source of great strength for a better life.

Prof Francis Clooney, Director of the Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University

(Excerpt from his speech made at our 'Celebration of Learning 2011,' July 28, 2011 at Chinmaya Centre)

My time at Asha has been an amazing and transformative experience. My students were nothing short of lovely and it was a privilege teaching them. My experience with Asha has given me real clarity. I realize that I want to use my skills to promote sustainable and just development for India's urban poor.

Karissa Tauber, volunteer from the USA



Karissa Tauber and Valerie Gupta with the students at Jeevan Nagar Slum Colony

Without a doubt, it was so valuable for me to work in India with lovely people from Asha. India is the first developing country I have been to. I have seen many pictures of people suffering in slums; however Asha slums were quite different. I was surprised at how much people's lives have improved with help from Asha.

Doga Makiura, volunteer from Japan

During my time at Asha, I learnt a lot about lives in the slums. I got to see first-hand how terrible their quality of living is. Yet, it amazes me how people who have the least can be the most wonderful people. Finally, Asha has taught me to value the ways that I live.

Valerie Gupta, volunteer from the USA

Dr Cathy Day, volunteer from Australia

Asha is dedicated to improving the lives of Delhi's slum dwellers in many areas, and education is a key part of the process. Asha recognises that English can be key to improving the opportunities of Delhi's poorest people. English Teaching Volunteers typically come from an English-speaking country for 2-3 months and teach in one of Asha's slums. They are often young, enthusiastic, well-educated people who want to share their knowledge with those less fortunate than themselves.

There is now a comprehensive English teaching package specifically designed for children living in Delhi's slums. Asha aims to make learning English fun, which is a far cry from the conditions that the students experience at their regular schools.

During the World Cup of Cricket, I had a debate with my students in Mayapuri. The rules were that they could say anything about the Australian cricket team, as long as it was in English and a complete sentence. One small boy, Anish, embarked on lively consultation with his classmates and after much flipping through the dictionary finally stood up and announced in clear and perfect English, 'Australia is falling apart'. This was the first complete English sentence I had heard from Anish. His English was great, and his cricket prediction was pretty good too!



Cathy with students in Mayapuri Slum Colony

Asha is actually a rejuvenation of faith, it is a resurgence of hope. It is a hope that is symbolized in the actions that you have been doing. As it is said, 'give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to catch fish, you feed him for life'. And this is what Asha is doing in its attempts to bring about financial inclusion and trying to send children to college. All these kids will grow up to be an example for others, telling them not to lose hope in life.

Sunil Pant, CGM, State Bank of India

(Excerpt from his speech made at our 'Celebration of Learning 2011,' July 28, 2011 at Chinmaya Centre)



Prof Francis Clooney lighting the inaugural lamp at the Celebration of Learning 2011

Call for Volunteers for Fundraising & Promotions to Help Meet Asha's Mission of Sending 5,000 Slum Children to University within the next 5 Years.

To help us achieve our goal of sending 5,000 slum children to university, we are putting out a call for volunteers to assist us in procuring the support and resources to make this possible.

Role and responsibilities: To work with the Asha Promotions Team in Delhi on fundraising related to Asha's higher education programme. Volunteer duties may include soliciting donations from trusts and foundations, meeting with supporters, developing communication material and social networking. Most of the work will be office-based but there may also be some field work in the slums.

Time Period: Volunteers must be prepared to give a minimum volunteering commitment of 4 months, and ideally up to 1 year, as it typically takes time to understand and orient oneself to the programme.

Qualifications: Volunteers need not have specific qualifications or experience in fundraising but some relevant experience is preferable. Candidates should have very strong communication skills and an interest in fundraising.

Accommodation: Asha will be unable to provide inclusive accommodation for this volunteering post. However we will be able to assist you with securing an affordable place to stay, according to your budget.

Contact: Interested applicants should contact us at info@asha-india.org.

Announcements and News In Brief

CHILDREN'S GROUPS CELEBRATE INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY

Children from Asha slums celebrated the 64th anniversary of India's Independence on Aug 15 at small events in each slum centre. With great enthusiasm and patriotism, the children watched the raising of the Indian flag and put on cultural performances for the community to mark the occasion.



Children's group from Dr Ambedkar slum colony celebrating Independence Day at the Asha Centre

Second year student Asha from Zakhira slum colony with her mother receiving her educational scholarship



SCHOLARSHIPS DISTRIBUTED TO ASHA COLLEGE STUDENTS

Asha held ceremonies in each of our slum areas to celebrate the second and third year college students and present them with Asha educational scholarships for the coming year. Proud parents joined the women's groups and Asha staff in applauding the students to acknowledge their achievements.

DR MARTIN IN IRELAND

Dr Martin will be in Ireland from the **25th Nov. – 4th December**. For details on where she will be speaking or if you want her to visit your church, fellowship group or home meeting, please contact Gordon Wright at ashaireland@mail.com or Tel. 02890 427201.

FREDDY MARTIN IN ENGLAND & SCOTLAND

Associate Director Freddy Martin will be in England & Scotland from **November 5th to November 27th**. His itinerary will be posted on the Asha website. To know if he is still available to speak in your area please contact faith.ross@asha-india.org. Alternatively, you may contact Phil Leighton at foasha.leighton@tiscali.co.uk for details about England dates and Mickey & Eleanor Robertson at mickelna@btinternet.com about Scotland dates.

IN MEMORY OF DR RAJANIKANT AROLE

Asha was saddened to learn of the death of Dr Rajanikant Arole on May 25th, 2011. Dr Arole was an eminent public health figure and the founder and director of Community Rural Health Project in Jamkhed, Maharashtra, a groundbreaking community health organization. Dr Martin knew Dr Arole very well and his mission was an inspiration to Asha in our work among the urban poor. Asha sends our deepest condolences to his children and extended family. We believe his legacy will live on.

VOLUNTEERS

Asha would like to thank our volunteers from the USA, the UK, Bahrain, Australia, Japan and India.

We also want to express our appreciation to Anjuli Rogers for her incredible work with us over the past year.

ANNOUNCEMENT: ASHA CONFERENCES IN ENGLAND IN NOVEMBER

South West Conference: Saturday 12th November from 9:30am - 3:00 pm at St Nicholas Church, Mill Lane, Bathampton, BA2 6TU. Dr Kiran Martin will be the keynote speaker. A light lunch will be provided. Please RSVP to Rev Paul Burden at bathampton.claverton@btopenworld.com.

Midlands Conference: Saturday, 19th November in Lincoln. Dr Kiran Martin will be the keynote speaker. For more details, please get in touch with Sam & Lisa Gibson at lisa.gibson6@btinternet.com

South East Conference: Saturday, 26th November from 10:30am - 3:00 pm at St Stephen's Church, Richmond Road, East Twickenham, TW1 2PD. Freddy Martin will be the keynote speaker. Please bring a packed lunch with you. Please RSVP to Heather Brown at heather.brown@hotmail.co.uk

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 Northern Ireland, Toni Bassett and her team from Ballymena Academy, who are coming to Asha in October, have been very active in fundraising. Their numerous activities and events include coffee mornings, table quizzes and a marathon relay. They even packed bags at Asda supermarket. Congratulations to all the students for their creative efforts to raise money!

In the UK, Dr Louise Dolan is leading a team of doctors, nurses, physios and support staff to Asha in October. Their colleagues have equipped them with protocols in diabetes, chest medicine and dermatology with which they will be training the Asha clinic staff. They have even had these protocols translated into Hindi. The team will also be taking specialist clinics for slum dwellers and teaching in the slum centres. As part of the preparation for their trip, the group is raising money for Asha through the UK online giving site justgiving.com

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 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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