

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 would like to wish all our friends a very happy Easter



NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR JEEVAN NAGAR CENTRE

In January, a team of 7 volunteers from Southampton, UK, spent over a week painting the Asha health and children's resource centre at Jeevan Nagar. The group have varied backgrounds and skills include nursing, web development, church work, building and retail management, but the centre's colourful murals of underwater and jungle scenes prove that they are also talented painters. When they weren't painting, the team also spent time with the children, running craft workshops, and visiting other slums.

When the work was complete, an inauguration ceremony was held at Jeevan Nagar, attended by Ram Babu Sharma (President of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee and MLA). Mr Sharma congratulated the team on their hard work and their relationship with the people of Jeevan Nagar,



The main lane of Jeevan Nagar

and pledged to build a new toilet block and improve the water supply there.

Dan Pooley spoke on behalf of the team and said they felt privileged to have worked within the community and to have helped Asha's work within the area. He added that his church, City Life in Southampton, intended to build on its links with Jeevan Nagar by sending more volunteers to work in the area each year.



The Southampton team takes a break

After the guests had spoken the local children sang and danced for the large crowd, and Mr Sharma presented 7 of the area's newly-qualified Community Health Volunteers with their certificates. If you would like to contribute to the development of the slum please donate online at www.asha-india.org/giving or see the back page of this newsletter for postal donations.

ASHA CENTRE REFURBISHED

It was the experience of a lifetime, some volunteers from St. Stephen's Church stated before they exchanged hugs and gifts with slum dwellers to mark an emotional farewell. A few hours ago, on February 25th, a very large crowd had assembled outside an Asha center for its inauguration by Rev. Andrew Watson, the Vicar of St. Stephen's Church, Twickenham, and local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Mr. Subhash Sachdeva.

The St. Stephen's team comprising 12 volunteers who were led by Libby Smith, an Asha Ambassador, had the mammoth task of painting the Asha health & children's resource centre in just 5 days. The dedicated team, however, managed to give the centre a completely new lease of life with fresh coats of paint and dazzling murals in the children's rooms, with time to spare for other activities.

That the slum residents, despite having only a handful of material possessions, were so welcoming, even in the face of extreme adversity, was a source of inspiration to the team members who revealed that they found it really hard at first to face the daily grind of poverty experienced by the slum dwellers.



The team is welcomed in a slum home

Through the week, however, they realised that through Asha, the slum dwellers had hope, believed in themselves and were committed to improving their lives.

The time the teams spent at the slums was also a time of learning and fun for both the slum dwellers and the team. Whilst the slum dwellers had a lot to learn from the team, a team member, on behalf of the team stated, 'Our heads are full, are hearts are full and our emotions are all over the place. Every day is a yo yo of emotions.'

Conducting craft workshops and face painting sessions, singing songs and playing cricket with the Bal Mandal children, fellowshiping with the Asha staff and slum dwellers, attending prayer meetings, going prayer walking, and, of course painting the centre, were some of the activities the team loved.

Both Rev. Andrew Watson and Mr. Subhash Sachdeva spoke in their inauguration message about how delighted they were with the work Asha was doing and how much the centre would benefit the residents. The centre was truly giving hope to those who need it the most, they stated.



The inauguration function

Dear friends,

The interest shown by faith based groups across so many denominations in partnering with Asha in various ways reflects their belief that their duty is to change society on behalf of justice. Churches are realising the importance of them being a force for not just personal, but also social and political transformation. It reflects their desire to maintain the balance of personal piety and public prophecy for justice. Churches are rising to the challenge of deep spiritual hunger where people can develop a strong social conscience and learn the deeper rewards of service compared with the numbing drive of materialism. In a society where people feel reduced to mere consumers, churches are offering their members opportunities to serve the poor, contribute to a larger purpose and sacrifice for something worth believing in. This way they are speaking directly to the spiritual hunger that so many people experience.

Asha is a spiritually based social movement that measures its progress by concrete moral change and impact on society. By their partnership with Asha, churches are standing up for those who are being left out and behind and for those whose human rights are being violated. They are questioning the easy assumptions of popular culture and are also calling for moral, civic and political renewal in the wider Christian community.

Our society's greatest hunger is for spiritual meaning and

social purpose that alone can satisfy the human soul. Nelson Mandela once said, "While in all parts of the world, progress is being made in e n t r e n c h i n g democratic forms of governance, we constantly need to remind ourselves that the freedoms which democracy brings will remain empty shells if they are not accompanied by real and tangible improvements in the lives of millions of poor of those countries."

I take this opportunity to thank you all for your kind generosity and your support.

Yours,



Dr. Kiran Martin
Director & Founder



Dr. Kiran at Jeevan Nagar slum colony

News in Brief



CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTIES A HUGE SUCCESS

We'd like to thank everyone who donated money for our children's Christmas parties this year. As anticipated, all the children were thrilled to attend the parties – they put a lot of effort into producing and performing Nativity plays, and thoroughly enjoyed the dancing, singing, food and gifts.

ASHA'S NEW WEBSITE NOW LIVE

If you haven't already visited the new Asha website, please do! It features lots of photos and information, comments and blogs from our volunteers, and it's regularly updated with all our news. We'll soon be adding videos and the Asha Craft online shop. If you've visited Asha and have any photos or stories or have any suggestions, do send them in – we'd like the site to be as interactive as possible.

Asha's new website www.asha-india.org has a provision for making secure online donations (one-off or monthly)

THANKS TO MARCOM FOR THE WEBSITE

We'd like to say how grateful we are to Marcom for their work on the website. Mark Baines, the director of Marcom in Bath, UK, was fantastically generous with his expertise and time, and with that of his team. Marcom designed and built the new website, enabling any of the Asha staff to easily add content, photos and updates here in Delhi. It's everything that we could have hoped for in a website and we're extremely thankful to Mark, Eoin, Rob and the team for all their hard work and great ideas. You can find out more about Marcom by visiting www.mar-com.net

MORE OVERSEAS SUPPORT FOR ASHA

In January, Asha welcomed visitors from the Japanese Embassy. Mr. Yasushi Furukawa and his colleagues Narita and Dibakar were impressed with Asha's work. Lennard Roubos, from our partner ICCO, visited Trilokpuri slum and Graeme Waters, the New Zealand High Commissioner, and Charles Chauvel, Labour Party MP from New Zealand, also visited Asha.



Grame Waters, NZ High Commissioner & New Zealand MP Charles Chauvel

FREDDY MARTIN'S UK TRIP

Freddy Martin will be visiting the UK between 29th April and 27th May this year. He'll be spending time in London, Southampton, South Wales, Somerset, East Anglia, the Midlands and Edinburgh. If you're interested in hearing Freddy speak about Asha, log onto our website at www.asha-india.org for full details of his schedule.

ASHA'S SPECIAL EASTER APPEAL

Keep an eye out for your leaflet with our Easter appeal! This year, we're raising extra funds for the most deprived families in our slums so that we can give them completely free medical treatment during Easter week. Please give generously.

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

Recently volunteers have included Laura Whallon, Lindsay Peterson and Bria Schurke from the USA (they worked in Asha clinics and with the children), Triona Winter (teaching English), Jared and Rachel Percival (working with children playing sport and doing workshops). James Saunders volunteered as a dentist, and Christina Lee, taught English in two slums. Visitors included Mhoira Leng (palliative care expert) and Libby Salnow (medical student from Cambridge) from the UK.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR ASHA'S DELHI OFFICE

We are looking someone to assist our fundraising team at Asha's Delhi headquarters. The person will need to be available to work full-time on a voluntary basis for 3 months, to one year. If you're interested in applying, please contact us at paul@asha-india.org

RESTORE TEAM REFURBISHES EKTA VIHAR

A team from Restore (Peckham), a church in London, lead by Fran Beckett, OBE, visited Delhi to volunteer for Asha. The church has been supporting Asha's Sonia Gandhi camp for several years and the team were keen to see Asha's work first-hand. The team refurbished Asha's clinic and resource centre at Ekta Vihar and painted murals on the walls of the main hall and IT room.

Both women and kids helped the team paint bright murals of kites and birds. They also visited women's and children's groups in different slums. Through these visits, the team was able to build good relationships with key members of the community, including the members of the Bal Mandals and Mahila Mandals. The action packed week ended with a colourful celebration marking the inauguration of the Ekta Vihar centre.

REFURBISHED POLYCLINIC UNVEILED

On 5th January the Asha Polyclinic was jointly inaugurated by Miss Fran Beckett, CEO of Church Urban Fund, and Dr David Hempton, Professor of History and Religion at the University of Harvard. Asha was fortunate to have many visitors present for the occasion including the Restore team lead by Miss Beckett, 3 volunteers from the USA, Bria, Lindsay and Laura, and Dr and Mrs Hempton and their children Johnny and Steve.

After a candle lighting ceremony, a ribbon at the entrance was snipped and the guests were given a tour of the brilliantly coloured Polyclinic. Shortly after the inauguration a number of patients queued outside the Polyclinic reception to get their treatment started! In addition to the Director's office and an administrative department, the Polyclinic has an out-patient department and an X-ray, ultrasound and a laboratory section.

The inauguration concluded with a function at an open-air function next door to the clinic. Asha staff sang a number of songs and performed a few dances. All our visitors loved the function and some of them took to the stage to dance! A lunch was also arranged to end the occasion.



The renovated polyclinic is reopened

Thanks to the Global Generation Church, Ramsgate, U.K, Friends of Asha, Northern Ireland, and all of you who contributed towards the renovation of the Polyclinic.

SLUM CHILDREN BREAK LANGUAGE BARRIERS



Following the stupendous success of 'Ek Choti Si Fairytale', a play produced by Asha and performed in English by slum children, Asha is launching its English Literacy programme for those who don't have the best start in life. A team of 4 volunteers from the UK, holding qualification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), will be at Asha for 5 months to teach English to slum children.

Most kids go to government-run schools where they are taught in Hindi and English is merely a 5th subject. The children do well in most subjects but score low in English. Most of their parents work as auto drivers, tailors or maids, yet if you ask them what they want to be when they grow up they say doctors, teachers, social workers or even cricket players! Without adequate English communication skills, the children are ill-prepared for the world of white-collar work.

After introduction of computer literacy, Asha's English literacy programme will give the slum children another reason to smile and dream. Reinforcing that they have the same right to a good job as any other child in India, the programme will give them the extra support that neither the basic schools they attend nor their illiterate parents can. Being confident in English will open up a whole new world of opportunities for them, and the children can't wait for classes to start.

People who hold a TEFL qualification and are interested in coming out to teach slum children can contact Dr. Ambika Rajvanshi at ambika@asha-india.org

ASHA STRENGTHENS CHILD HEALTH PROGRAMME

The slums of Delhi house thousands of children who are not the beneficiaries of the gains of our growing economy, the ones who are fittingly termed by the UN as excluded or 'invisible'. From the outset, their lives are set for failure and the cycle of suffering that trapped their parents automatically consumes them as well. They are without adequate access to life-saving vaccines, education and protection Children who are most in need, whose rights are abused and undervalued and who are currently excluded from services, are marginalised and unprotected by society.

These children are born into large, very low-income families residing in temporary shelters and shanties constructed of whatever material is available. They grow up with a distinct lack of basic amenities such as clean drinking water, sanitation and even toilets. The infant mortality rate is alarmingly high at 100/1000 live births, 54% dying from malnutrition and hunger while others not even living past their first birthday due to easily preventable illnesses like diarrhoea and pneumonia. Those who survive become vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. They grow up with negated self-worth, their rights ignored and their voices unheard; any remaining joy of childhood overwhelmed by the constant struggle to survive.



A CHV carries out a child health check



Neglected slum children have nowhere to play

These children deserve our commitment to give them the best start in life. We are working to secure the rights of these children, promote healthy living, provide access to essential services such as healthcare, education and protection - contribute successfully to transform the 'invisible' children to 'included' children and to bring down the infant mortality rate. In the months of January and February, we carried out an extensive assessment of why some children are still dying in Asha slums. We found that maternal factors like diabetes, high blood pressure and anemia during pregnancy were causing deaths due to premature births and low birth weight. Asha staff, CHVs and midwives are now being intensively strengthened to provide special care to pregnant women at risk, in the form of timely investigations, disease control and nutritional supplementation to prevent premature births. Monitored institutional deliveries of these high risk cases are being planned as well as intensive care for premature babies in hospitals. 'Kangaroo Care' for babies born before date and low birth babies is being aggressively promoted.

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.

On Friday November 3, 2006, the Harvard South Asian Men's Collective (SAMC), in conjunction with the South Asian Women's Collective (SAWC), hosted its second annual Charity Auction to raise money for Asha. The Auction was an overwhelming success! The event was the second part of an evening designed to introduce freshmen parents to the premier South Asian student groups on campus. It was preceded by Fall Dinner, an annual event hosted by Harvard's South Asian Association during Freshmen Parents' Weekend.

A group of East Twickenham churchgoers spent one night sleeping outside in temperatures close to freezing to recreate the living conditions of Delhi's slum-dwellers during winter. The group spent 18 hours living in makeshift slums overnight to raise money for their trip to Asha.

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 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.

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 want to contribute particularly towards _____
- Please keep me informed about **Asha's** activities. My email is _____

Full name & title _____ Organisation (if any) _____

Address _____

City _____ Postcode _____

County _____

Only if you wish to Gift Aid your donation:

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: leighton@clara.net Charity Registration No. 1085071

ASHA CURRENCY CONVERTER

- **£10** will provide 10 children with Vitamin A supplements to prevent blindness
- **£20** will provide a child with full medical care and vaccinations for the first year of its life
- **£50** will provide basic health education to 150 people
- **£180** will equip a Community Health Volunteer for one year, including all medical supplies

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