

NEWS

for friends of asha

Issue #37

January 2008

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

Asha would like to wish all its friends a very Happy New Year!

ASHA LAUNCHES NEW PROGRAMME TO CARE FOR SLUM ELDERLY



The average life expectancy in India is just 62 years. There is no official figure for slum dwellers, but if data from millions of affluent people living in conventional housing with easy access to healthcare were removed, the national figure would probably be much lower. Nearly every aspect of slum life is harder for the elderly. Their health suffers and they are susceptible to many other

illnesses in addition to the traditional afflictions of old age: dementia, arthritis, cataracts and strokes.

Sometimes they will have outlived their children, or been left abandoned after their offspring moved away in search of more work or a better life. Many elderly people live alone in their slum huts ignored by the rest of the community who are busy working, raising their children or merely surviving.

The elderly are rarely able to work, and are often unaware of government schemes that could help them. Poverty and the resulting poor diet causes them to be malnourished and weakens their immune systems.

Problems such as cataracts that are easily rectified in better-off people often go untreated and cause them to become virtually blind. This isolates the elderly further and makes it much harder for them to do things for themselves.

The extremes of Delhi's climate also causes them to suffer. They are often unable to travel and so the 45-degree summers are inescapable, and the harsh winters make them particularly vulnerable. Those that live alone lack even the warmth of other human bodies in their unheated slum huts.

Asha has devised a programme that will improve the health of the elderly, ensure that they get government assistance, and give them an opportunity for social interaction and support from community members. By addressing social concerns in addition to health and practical matters, the elderly within slums will feel less isolated and happier as a result.

The health aspect of the programme will include screening of all residents over the age of 60 for illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, osteoarthritis and depression. Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) and Lane Volunteers (LVs) will be vigilant regarding the health of the elderly in their areas, and the screening and treatment of each elderly person will be recorded on a health card maintained by Asha staff. Of course, any treatment will be provided at highly subsidised rates, and links with hospitals used when necessary.

Bal Mandal children will perform an important role by taking the elderly people in their lanes to the resource centre each week so that they can spend time with people of a similar age. These informal gatherings will give the elderly a chance to meet their peers, provide them with support and companionship and give them a reason to leave their homes. The children will also make house visits to elderly people within their lane, and report any illness or other problems to CHVs or Asha staff.

The government has several schemes designed to help the elderly, but many people who could benefit are often unaware of the schemes or how to apply. LVs will ensure that all the elderly in their lane are receiving any benefits to which they're entitled, and Asha will lobby the government and political leaders to make sure that maximum benefits are available to the elderly.

Asha's new programme will provide elderly people who are in particularly difficult circumstances with extra care. Those who are destitute or in poor health will receive financial help, and also practical support in the form of blankets, nutritious food and regular visits. Lane Volunteers and Asha staff will identify people who need extra help.

Life is very bleak for many elderly people in the slums; we're looking forward to implementing this programme and making their final years a bit easier.



Can you help the vulnerable elderly in the slums? If you'd like to donate, please visit the Giving page of our website at www.asha-india.org/giving or turn to the back page of this newsletter to donate by post.

Story of Bhapai, resident of Dr Ambedkar Basti



It's the sound of the children laughing and playing that keeps Bhapai happy and engaged during her visits to the resource centre at Dr Ambedkar Basti. At nearly 70, she is one of the oldest members of the elderly programme here at Asha.

Bhapai enjoys coming to the centre because the children provide her with youthful company. They invite her to the centre and she likes to watch and listen to

them as they play. It's a mutual relationship as the children equally enjoy her company and interaction.

Asha is providing for the elderly on different levels. Among many things, including help with applying for government assistance and milk, eggs and other nutritious food, Asha is providing company for the lonely. Many elderly people no longer have family in the slum, and loneliness is a common problem. Bhapai would like her family to visit her more often, but she is happy with the extended family she has created through Asha. "It feels nice to have a place to go to," she comments.

Bhapai has also found friendship in the other women that participate in the elderly programme. "We were all lonely before, but became friends after being a part of this community," says Bhapai as she looks on towards her companions.

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

Record Number Of Volunteers Renovate 4 Asha Centres

In October, Asha greeted the first of our largest ever number of volunteers. A team of 14 students and 2 teachers from Methodist College, Belfast, 13 students and 2 teachers from Ballymena Academy, 18 people from the Global Generation Church in Ramsgate, UK, and 9 from St Swithun's Church in Bathford, UK, visited Kalkaji, Tigri, Seelampur and Trilokpuri slums respectively. All of them worked hard with dedication and good humour and delighted the slum residents in the process.

Creon and Wendy Butler, the British Deputy High Commissioner and his wife, kindly extended an invitation to all 58 volunteers. They all thoroughly enjoyed spending a few hours in the garden of the Butlers' residence, talking with Wendy, Creon and some members of the British High Commission's charity committee. It was a welcome contrast to the heat and crush of the slums and the smell of paint.

After a hectic week at the Asha centre in Seelampur, the Global Generation team, along with Asha staff and the people of Seelampur, got together for the inauguration of the centre on 26th October. The team had managed to renovate the centre - Asha's biggest, with 10 rooms - in just 5 days. Earlier on the day of the ceremony, seven members of the team went to visit another Asha slum at Zakhira. There, Sarah Miller presented Anandi, a member of the Mahila Mandal who had completed her midwife training, with a certificate and her equipment.



Sarah Miller of the GG team presents new midwife Anandi with her certificate



The Ballymena team on the day of the inauguration

The slum community of Trilokpuri were very impressed to watch the team from St. Swithun's refurbishing their centre: seeing the team that included several retired people working so hard bewildered the local residents. Jessica's beauty sessions with the women were particularly popular and a chance for some relaxation amid all the activity. Cathy and John stayed on for a week after the others left and continued to work, digging out over 2 tonnes of rubble from the perimeter of the centre!

The 2 teams from Northern Ireland - Methodist College and Ballymena Academy - worked in the centres at Kalkaji and Tigri. The students kept the children entertained with crafts, games, and songs, and had many eager helpers on hand. The children were overjoyed with the murals on the centre walls - they include some of the best artwork we have seen over all these years. The beautifully painted centres were inaugurated on 2nd December with much enthusiasm and cheer.

The students and teachers arrived resplendent in traditional Indian sarees and kurtas for the special occasion, and many emotional speeches were made as the students described the impact their time in Kalkaji and Tigri had made on them. We look forward to welcoming more students and staff from both Ballymena and Methodist colleges in the coming years, as do the communities of Tigri and Kalkaji.

All teams made fantastic contributions both in terms of hard work and also by raising money for the renovations and for Asha programmes in general. We'd like to offer our congratulations and thanks to everyone involved.

News in Brief



WORK UNDERWAY AT COOLIE CAMP

Progress is already being made at Coolie Camp, Asha's newest slum. Our mobile clinic is still visiting twice a week and 20 women have volunteered to learn about primary healthcare - the first step to forming them into a fully-functioning Mahila Mandal (women's group). A good relationship has been established with local councillors and politicians who have helped with the provision of a shop selling subsidised food and other basic needs. A water tanker is visiting regularly, water points are due to be installed, and the sanitation department has started to collect the rubbish. We're very grateful to everyone who donated to our Coolie Camp appeal - so much can be achieved with your help.

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

Recently Cate Murless & Catherine Salmon from South Africa have spent time teaching English in Kalkaji. We have been visited by a group from TEARFund New Zealand, and Robert Coulter, Stephen Moutray and Joe Reynolds from the Northern Ireland Assembly. Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, Executive Director of the African Institute of Health & Development in Nairobi and her colleague Rahel Oyugi visited Mayapuri to see how Asha helps women from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain socio-economic empowerment. Finbar O'Brien and Anand David of Irish Aid visited with Pat Bourne, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Irish Embassy.

FIRST STEPS TAKEN TO COMBAT DEPRESSION IN SLUMS

David Finch, Chairman of Friends of Asha (GB) and his wife Helen visited Asha recently and ran a training session for staff on depression, its diagnosis and treatment. Since then, over 100 people have already been screened and some of them have been diagnosed with depression and referred for treatment. Asha staff are due to receive training in counselling skills next year.

ASHA PROGRAMMES GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

The Women's Empowerment Programme was recently evaluated with very encouraging results. Training has included Gender Sensitisation Workshops and a workshop on the various government schemes available for people of a low economic status. Our children's Book Clubs have proven to be very popular and the children are learning a lot.

RELIEF FOR THOSE IN NEED THIS WINTER

Asha staff have been busy distributing over 300 blankets in many different slums recently. The extra warmth may have made the difference between life and death for some particularly vulnerable people over the Delhi winter. Our grateful thanks to everyone who contributed towards the blankets this year.

CANCER AWARENESS TRAINING COMPLETE

Staff have recently completed a fifth Cancer Awareness session run by an expert from one of India's most well-known hospitals. Dr Rakesh Thakur ensured that Asha staff and CHVs became aware of many different types of cancer, their signs and possible methods of treatment. He stressed the importance of detecting signs of cancer as early as possible to improve the chances of successful treatment. Screening is now taking place in many Asha slums.

GUEST SPEAKERS INITIATIVE SET TO BE A SUCCESS

Ian Farr, a long-term friend of Asha, visited and spoke to the children of Trilokpuri about life in South Africa, apartheid and how life has changed there over the years. The children loved hearing about life in other countries and are keen to meet future speakers. Some children from a number of different slums will soon be lucky enough to visit the British High Commission as guests of Wendy Butler during her stint as a guest speaker.

Asha's First Guest Speaker Leaves Children Wanting More

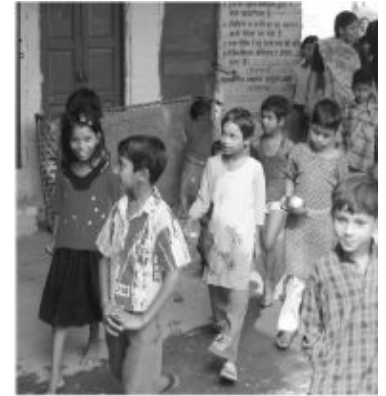
Mr Aditya Awasthi, a board member of Asha and a journalist for the Times of India, spoke to the children of Zakhira recently. He was the first guest speaker to visit any of the slums and sparked the imagination and ambitions of many in the group. He explained how he came from a very small village and used to study by the light of a kerosene lamp on the floor of his bare room.

He assured the children that if they regularly read the newspapers provided in the Children's Resource Centres they will develop a good understanding of current affairs- something that is as important as developing their own writing style if they want to be journalists when they are older.

Mr Awasthi writes for a Hindi language newspaper, a fact that was particularly exciting for the children as it made the occupation sound even more accessible to them. They were impressed when they realised that a career in journalism would give them an opportunity to raise issues that affect them, or had done in the past; a real incentive for children who remain marginalised by society.

At the end of the talk, Saddam (aged 12) jumped up and announced that he wanted to be a journalist. The children had lots of questions for Mr Awasthi and were clearly delighted to hear about an occupation that is so different from those of most people they meet within their community.

The group are already eagerly awaiting their next guest.



Children from the group at Zakhira

USA Fundraisers from East to West

Congressman Mike Thompson and his wife Janet organised a repeat of last year's successful Asha Day at the end of September. A large crowd gathered in the picturesque surroundings of Alpha Omega Winery in Napa Valley to enjoy a day of Indian food, wine and talks from special guests whilst raising funds for Asha. The guests were welcomed by radio personality Jeff Schechtman and a silent auction was held, after which Dr Kiran Martin, as Keynote Speaker, gave an update on Asha's work. Kailash Chaudhary, President of Chaudhary & Associates, Inc., and his wife Gisela generously underwrote all the expenses for the event. All the money raised will go towards vaccinating children as part of Asha's Child Health Programme.



Kailash Chaudhary, Dr Kiran Martin,
Janet Thompson & Congressman Mike Thompson

The South Asian Men's Collective (SAMC) and South Asian Women's Collective (SAWC) at Harvard revisited a supremely successful fundraising initiative of the SAMC on Asha's behalf recently. They organised an auction at Harvard on 26th October, managing to convince a wide variety of people and businesses to sponsor it and provide items such as iPods, holidays in Hawaii, airline tickets and restaurant vouchers. The organisers also included novel lots such as breakfast in bed provided by SAMC or SAWC members, thereby going to even greater lengths to raise money for Asha! The auction was attended by Louanne Hempton, Co-ordinator for Asha (USA) and her husband David.

In addition to the auction, the SAMC organised a charity dance on 11th November. 'Stan Up' had music by DJ Shiftee and was also a great success, keeping guests dancing until 2am.

We'd like to offer our sincere thanks to everyone who worked so hard to organise these events and make them such a success.

Asha Polyclinic Improves Facilities Thanks To The Japanese Embassy

Following a generous grant from the Japanese Embassy's GGP (Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects) scheme, the Asha Polyclinic now boasts new pieces of equipment that greatly enhance both the level of healthcare that we can offer our patients and the efficiency of the clinic.

Now, not only do the patients get subsidised treatment at the polyclinic, but there is also no need for them to spend time and money travelling elsewhere for further tests or treatment that we were previously unable to provide.

One of the most important new items is a generator. The electricity supply to the clinic can be very erratic, particularly in Delhi's searingly hot summers when the city's power supply is under great strain. The generator will enable us to keep a constant supply of electricity to the building, which is vital for much of the equipment and also for the wellbeing of staff and patients.

The addition of an automated ELISA system enables staff to run on-site testing for diseases and infections such as HIV/ AIDS, Hepatitis B, Tuberculosis and certain types of cancers.

A treadmill with a wireless ECG machine helps us to screen people for potential heart defects, especially those who are diagnosed as suffering from hypertension or diabetes during standard screening for these conditions. In the cases of patients who visit the clinic with unexplained chest pain, the treadmill is particularly useful for carrying out Exercise Stress Tests to give a general indication of the health of their hearts.

A refrigerator and a deep freezer both help to maintain the correct temperature needed for the storage of vaccines. Variation in this temperature can have a negative impact on their efficacy and so these items help to avoid such damage. Finally, a cell analyser electronically measures patients' blood counts. Abnormally high or low counts may indicate the presence of many forms of disease, and so blood counts are amongst the most commonly performed tests. Haemoglobin levels are often tested to diagnose or monitor anaemia in slum patients, a common problem due to poor nutrition. In the past, blood samples were analysed manually under a microscope, a method that is more time consuming and has a greater margin of error.

All this equipment is helping us to achieve our aim of providing slum residents with the best possible healthcare at highly subsidised prices. We're very thankful to the Japanese Embassy for their generous assistance with this.



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.

Friends of Asha from many different countries have excelled themselves in response to our Christmas appeal this year. Donations have gone a long way to funding Christmas parties for hundreds of children, providing shoes and warm clothes for those children most in need, and blankets for the vulnerable elderly in the slums. Supporters have been busy organising coffee mornings, sponsored events, auctions, dances and meals in order to help our cause – we're thankful to everyone who has helped.

Each donation makes a difference, and we're grateful for every single one. Your money goes a long way in India! We'll continue to use it where it is needed most, but if you have any preference for how your donation is spent, please just let us know – we'll be happy to hear from you.

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

Please complete the form below, make a cheque payable to "Friends of Asha, Ireland" and send both to:

Christine Burnett, Coordinator, Friends of Asha (Ireland), 7 Demesne Avenue, Holywood, County Down, Northern Ireland, BT18 9ND, UK. Email: christine.burnett@gmail.com.

Charity Registration No. XR 37459

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American Society for Health for All (ASHA)

If you want to contribute to the lives of poor slum dwellers in Delhi, then we suggest that you support the American Society for Health for All (ASHA). As part of ASHA (USA), we welcome you to join the Asha family that exists to help the downtrodden and oppressed live a life of dignity and hope. Supporters of Asha make a huge contribution to our activities through donations and fundraising events, volunteering and raising awareness of our work.

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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, MA01730, USA. Email: lhempston@hotmail.com. EIN #01557632.

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

Yes, I want to become part of ASHA (USA)

- 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.
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State _____

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