

NEWS

for friends of asha

Issue #35

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



ASHA BREAKS PREVIOUS HEALTH RECORDS!

We're delighted to announce that our health programmes have produced outstanding results again this year. Not a single child has died as a result of dehydration due to diarrhoea for 2 years – a figure that is at an all-time low. This is in spite of the fact that diarrhoea is one of the main killers of children in slums, along with malnutrition and respiratory infections. Diarrhoeal diseases are responsible for 20% of under-5 deaths in India, and this percentage is even higher within slums.

This new low within Asha areas is thanks to the combined efforts of the Asha staff and the slum communities. Bal Mandal children as young as seven years old often surprise and impress visitors by confidently explaining how to make oral rehydration solutions for the treatment of diarrhoea. They also work to improve their surroundings, motivating their peers and neighbours into taking part in sanitation drives, and explaining the importance of keeping their environment clean.

Our environmental initiatives mean that more slum residents have access to clean water, toilet complexes and better drainage than before. Asha has established an environment committee with inspectors that are responsible for reporting any problems found within the slum areas, and raising awareness about the importance of their upkeep. These improvements are additional factors that reduce risks to the slum dwellers' health.



Bal Mandal children treating diarrhoea with ORS



A busy day at a Well Baby Clinic

The past year has seen dramatic improvements in many other key areas relating to health. In India's slums, 100 children die out of every 1000 live births, a staggering statistic resulting from a combination of lack of access to education and healthcare, poverty and social problems. In Asha slums, the infant mortality rate now stands at 25.5 for every 1000 live births, nearly half that of the average across India.

Maternal health is another area in which we've seen improvements. Maternal mortality rates are high in India, and particularly in slums areas. A shortage of antenatal care, lack of education and inadequate nutrition mean that many women die due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Women are often forced to rely on traditional birth attendants who are untrained, further endangering their lives. In contrast to this norm, we're pleased to report that this year, for the sixth year running, no women died during pregnancy or childbirth in any Asha slums.

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Interview With Mahinder, General Secretary Of The Ekta Vihar Bal Mandal

Mahinder is 15 years old and has been involved with the Bal Mandal for the last four years. He was able to talk knowledgeably, not only about child rights, but also about the responsibilities of children.

What's the most important change you've seen since you've been in the Bal Mandal?

The Bal Mandal has been strengthened as a group, and the community has been cleaned up. We have a computer room with good facilities and we've learned so much. Our parents are pleased as we've had the chance to learn so much more than they did. Lots of people recognise me now.

How do you persuade others to get involved, or to listen to you?

I've been involved in lots of work to raise awareness, such as organising street plays and rallies about TB, child labour, and why children should be admitted to school. Lots of people don't want to listen at first, so you just have to keep trying to catch their interest somehow. Once you do that, they start asking questions and you can tell them more. We've recently got results by going to the police station about a problem with people selling alcohol in the slum, and we've been to the head of the Sanitation department to see about getting drains cleared.

You've been very successful in getting children admitted to school - tell us about that...

I managed to get 10 children admitted into school in April. Usually their parents don't encourage them to go to school as they feel that it would be a waste of time and they would rather have an extra pair of hands around the house. So I went around the slum and did a survey of children who were not going to school. Lots of the parents didn't want to pay any school fees as there are many musicians living in the slum and if children practice instead of going to school, they can get jobs playing music at weddings when they are older. Parents often think that is a better choice for their children as they don't have many other opportunities and so I had to convince them that it's worth paying some money to give their children an education. I gave a list of their names, addresses and ages to the Principal of the school, as I get on well with him. He visited every household on the list and spoke to the parents, and so they allowed their children to be admitted. It worked really well – some of the parents were so encouraged when their children started going to school that they also started sending them to Bal Mandal meetings! Now there are enough members for us to form another Bal Mandal, so we are trying to think of a name at the moment.



One Month Left To Go – An Update From Our English Teachers



Rob with some Kanak Durga students

Laura McCulloch, Rob Suekarran and James Pole are volunteering at Asha for 5 months. After just a 2-week course in teaching English as a foreign language, they arrived at Asha and devised an English syllabus from scratch. Laura tells more..

The three of us hit the tarmac of Delhi airport on 8th March.. Our task, to teach English to young people in 4 of the 45 slums that Asha works in.

We have now been teaching for four months and the results have been amazing. We teach in each class for an hour every day from Monday to Friday. The students have been extremely dedicated and enthusiastic. They signed up to these classes on the condition that they would attend them even during their summer holidays. Their hard work has certainly paid off. A student came bounding into the classroom not long ago shouting 'I got seventy percent in my English exam. Thank you so much. My mother is so happy'.

This happiness has been echoed amongst so many of the students. They truly understand that English will give them better opportunities in the working world and a chance of competing with those who are privately educated. It's exciting to watch people starting on the journey of making a better life for themselves.

In a period when India's economy is growing at an unprecedented rate it couldn't be a better time to give the up and coming generation a helping hand. The English lessons have also opened up doors for us in many of the communities. The students now call us friends rather than just teachers. It has been a real privilege to share in their everyday lives, meet their families and eat in their homes. The simplest things such as playing cricket with them lights up their faces.

In just one month we will be leaving close friends behind. This experience has been only a glimpse of life in the developing world and it has been a humbling experience. Asha's work is truly inspiring. It has been an absolute pleasure to work for this amazing organisation. Long may it continue to improve, build, and transform people's lives.



Laura & James at Dr Ambedkar Basti

If you hold a TEFL qualification and are interested in carrying on our volunteers' good work, please email us at info@asha-india.org,

You can see our teachers in action on our YouTube videos. Go to www.youtube.com and search for "Asha", "slum" and "teachers"

News in Brief

FREDDY MARTIN'S UK TRIP

Freddy's UK trip was a great success. He revisited many old friends and familiar towns and also went to new areas where people are now aware of Asha's work. He received a very warm welcome wherever he went and we'd like to thank everyone who spent time with Freddy, extended their hospitality or worked hard to organise venues and audiences for his talks – it is very much appreciated.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR ASHA'S DELHI OFFICE

We are looking for 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 6 months to one year. If you're interested in applying, please contact us at info@asha-india.org

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

A Tearfund Transform team of ten volunteers visited in May and did a fantastic job of refurbishing the Asha centre at Mayapuri. The residents are overjoyed with the results and were very happy to spend time with the team while they were here.

Wendy Butler, the wife of the British Deputy High Commissioner, visited to present Asha with a cheque for new equipment for the Polyclinic. We're very grateful to the British High Commission's Charity Committee for their generosity.

Mhoira Leng, palliative care specialist, brought her friend Kelly McAulay to Asha to see our work. Kelly is working with an organisation who do similar work in the Philippines and found the experience here very valuable.

David Johnson from Northern Ireland was a great help to our resident English teachers when he visited for 3 weeks in May – we're hoping that we'll get to see him again!

30 FAMILIES SUFFER LOSSES IN FIRE

A fire swept through a section of the Vivekanand slum in May, damaging the homes and destroying the possessions of thirty families. One couple survived the fire themselves but suffered the indescribable loss of all of their five children. Asha staff and the community's volunteers have been offering help and support for those who have lost loved ones or their few possessions. If you'd like to contribute to helping people rebuild their lives after the fire, you can donate online at www.asha-india.org/giving or use the donation form on the back page.

ASHA LAUNCHES BOOK CLUB

We have just provided every library in each slum with a set of two books that the children can read. They will be encouraged to sit around and discuss them in groups afterwards, increasing their understanding and developing their reading habits.

A NEW ASHA BABY!

Sharmila Roy, one of our programme officers, gave birth to a baby boy, Aparajit, on 20th June. Congratulations to Sharmila and her husband Dev!

SUMMER OUTINGS FOR BAL MANDAL MEMBERS

Recently Asha staff have been taking Bal Mandal children on various summer outings. The excited groups have been for picnics at India Gate, visited the Doll Museum and the National Science Museum, and other trips are planned. These days out are a real treat for children who otherwise rarely get to leave the slum areas where they live. We're hoping to be able to provide them with Asha caps or t-shirts for future outings, but we need to raise funds specifically for this as there are 400 children involved. If you'd like to contribute, please donate via our website or by using the form on the back page, and mention the Bal Mandal outings.

Llanelli Team Visits Chanderpuri

A team of ten volunteers from South Wales visited Asha in May to renovate the Asha centre at Chanderpuri and to spend time with the community there. They raised money in a number of innovative ways, including a marathon 26-hour session spent watching the entire TV series "Lost" and a sponsored swim in the freezing Atlantic on Boxing Day!

The seven young people and three adults got to know the women and children of Chanderpuri really well during their two week visit, and the children were delighted that some of their UK visitors were nearly their own age – the youngest, Sophie, is only 11 years old.

The team braved temperatures of over 40 degrees to paint the centre with stars and rainbows, and spent lots of time running craft workshops and playing games with the children. A whitewater rafting trip to Rishikesh on the middle weekend was a welcome break from the painting, and from the heat and dust of Delhi.

The completion of the centre was marked with an inauguration ceremony. The guests were presented with flower garlands by the grateful residents who then sang songs and danced for them. The visit ended with emotional farewells between the team and their new friends at Chanderpuri.



The Llanelli team with new friends

We'd like to thank the team for all their hard work and the money that they've raised for Asha and Chanderpuri.

Asha Continues To Fight Against Gender Bias

A worrying story relayed by an Asha supervisor highlights the width of the gap that still exists between the treatment of boys and girls in India, particularly in the slums. In one slum, a couple live with their two sons and a daughter. They have had several children previously but all of them have died. All of the children are filthy and look uncared for, but the girl is particularly malnourished. All the Asha staff and volunteers in the area have approached the couple and explained what kind of food they should be giving their children, but they have refused all advice.

Failing to get through to them, the staff instead began visiting and giving the girl nutritious food. The parents were furious and insisted that they should be left to their own devices. Tragically, they seem to intend to neglect their daughter so badly that she could die.

This bias against girl children is a problem that is widespread in slums, where communities tend to be more traditional than in many areas of the country. The poverty found in slums makes people even more susceptible to the belief that girls are a mere drain on resources. As girls will leave their homes and move in with their in-laws when they get married, any money that they earn or work that they do around the house will benefit the new family and not their parents and this causes much resentment.

Asha is combating this problem in slums with education programmes for men, women and children. The group members are spreading the word amongst their peers and neighbours, and reporting any cases of neglect. They have also held rallies to highlight the issue to whole communities. Good progress is being made as people begin to understand the need for gender equality, but there is still much work to be done.

ASHA BREAKS HEALTH RECORDS – continued..



We have also made great progress in educating communities about the prevention of disease. Many community members are now happy to take their children to be vaccinated at Asha clinics, when some time ago these simple and life-saving procedures would have been viewed with suspicion and avoided by parents. Again, continued efforts by Asha staff, CHVs, women's group members and other volunteers all contribute to the success of these initiatives as they educate people wherever possible and actively seek out those who are suffering from disease.

After reviewing the various threats to slum dwellers' health, we have developed new programmes and increased the scope of existing ones. Working amid the obvious problems of slum conditions, it is easy to forget that there are many diseases and health concerns that can affect slum dwellers in addition to those such as diarrhoea, worms and malnutrition that are common in slums and often made worse by living in that environment.

After investigating these threats, we've taken steps to tackle them. We are currently carrying out diabetes and hypertension screening and sufferers are being treated and then monitored long term to keep their conditions under control. HIV and AIDS, although not a serious problem in Asha slums at the moment, are still a concern. We are working hard to raise awareness within slum communities, and all pregnant women are tested for HIV, as are all TB patients.

There are obvious benefits to limiting family sizes in areas with high levels of poverty and extremely cramped living conditions, and Asha is making good progress in educating slum families in reproductive health and family welfare. 77% of the communities' women were trained this year, and 25% of men; a substantial increase on last year. There has been a significant rise in the number of couples using temporary or permanent contraception methods, and the average number of children per family in Asha slums is now down to three.

All these statistics mean so much more than better health for the slum communities. Their improved general health, when coupled with smaller family sizes, means that people in the slum communities are fit and able to earn enough money to provide for their families and as a result, they are freed from some of the pressures that can contribute to domestic violence and other social problems that are common in slums.

These improvements are a credit to the hard work and collaboration of Asha staff, the community health volunteers, midwives, and all the men, women and children who have been eager to learn how to prevent disease and to keep themselves safe, and willing to spread those messages to the rest of the community without expecting anything in return.



CHV Shayamwati visiting a newborn

You can view our new annual report by going to the News section of our website

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

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.

Sam Gibson raised money for his April trip to Asha by organising his own fitness challenge at his local gym. He gained Fitness First's full support and people were able to donate by simply putting their money in a barrel at the gym's reception. The local press went along to publicise the event that turned out to be a great success. Then Sam visited Asha for 3 weeks and was a great help in a practical sense – thank you Sam!

The South Asian Men's Collective (SAMC) at Harvard University has raised money for Asha's Child Health Programme in a number of ways. Among other things, they held two charity dances, a cricket match and also a charity auction. The events have been invaluable in raising awareness as well as funds; many more people among Harvard's staff, the students and their parents are now aware of our work.

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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