

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

## Success of Asha's health interventions – the bigger picture



**Women run a training session on identifying signs of cancer**

You don't need to know much about slum conditions to imagine all the risks they pose to slum dwellers' health. The nature of slum areas makes official statistics very hard to come by, but those that are available paint a very grim picture. The environment complicates the provision of healthcare, but people also have deeply-ingrained beliefs that often need to be modified. Asha's healthcare programmes have been developed to address all these issues.

Success in tackling the most pressing issues in slum areas – preventing children dying as a result of diarrhoea, reducing maternal and child mortality rates and the spread of TB are just some of them - has improved people's quality of life, and enabled us to focus on other areas.

The coverage of all vaccinations has increased and yet again this year, no children were found to be suffering from a preventable disease. In addition to this, no child has died of diarrhoea in an Asha slum for 3 years now. The child mortality rate has fallen from 43.2 per 1000 live births last year to 29.71 this year (the figure for India countrywide is currently 176). When Asha started work it was 149, which shows just how far we have come.

It is not just a thorough vaccination programme and good maternal care that has reduced the child mortality rate to the lowest in Asha's history; awareness has increased drastically. Exhaustive training of CHVs and their skill in providing information in an easily-to-understand format means that mothers and families are aware of the importance of correct nutrition, hygiene, early breastfeeding and other issues that maintain the health of babies and children. The maternal mortality rate (number of deaths per 1000 live births) is still zero, an incredible result compared to the India figure of 540.

It's not just the improved health of the people that is significant. Their quality of life is simply better - they are able to hold down jobs, children don't need time off school, and members of families do not need to stay home looking after others who are sick. People know how to avoid the spread of many illnesses, and, after a concerted effort by Asha staff and volunteers, people suffering from diseases such as TB can get the help they need without fear of social exclusion. The number of TB patients has gone down again this year, and the vast majority of them are getting regular treatment via the DOTS programme. Quality of life is also improved by the smaller family sizes that Asha have promoted. The average number of children per family is now 2, as opposed to 5 when Asha first got involved, meaning that food and money go a lot further for each family.

Community members now realise that they have the right to affordable healthcare and information that will keep them well. Their involvement is vital to Asha's work, and in some respects, such as the immunisation of children, community cooperation has developed to the extent where preventable diseases are all but wiped out in all Asha slum areas.

It's now a good time to concentrate on wider issues surrounding health. Those such as depression, geriatric illnesses, diabetes and others may not all be life-threatening, but working to alleviate them can make an enormous difference to people who live in such challenging conditions.

## Saving lives in the slums – Pooja's story

Pooja embodies all the attributes that Asha hopes to bring out in slum community members. She moved to Dr Ambedkar Basti from a small village in Uttar Pradesh after getting married nearly 20 years ago. There was no water supply, drains were open, and their home was a mud hut with a polythene roof that regularly flooded in the rainy season. "I was lucky", she smiles. It's surprising to hear those words from someone who found herself living in such bad conditions, but Pooja is referring to the attitude of her husband.

Ashok was very supportive and recognised that his wife had much to offer her community. He encouraged Pooja to go out and find work, saying that he didn't want her to do what so many other women did and sit around gossiping all day rather than doing something meaningful. Pooja heard about the women's group being organised by Dr Martin, and immersed herself in learning about how disease can be prevented and how people can keep themselves healthy in a slum environment.

Pooja talks quickly, recalling just some of the many stories and examples she has accumulated over 15 years as a CHV. She said that her greatest achievement as a CHV is simply being there for everyone in her community, regardless of their background religion, or job. She gets so much out of the work that she wouldn't want to do anything else. She combines her work as a CHV with looking after 2 small children, working from 9am to 1pm in the Asha clinic, and then doing home visits in the afternoon. Money isn't the motivation, explains Pooja – she could make more money doing something else, but seeing the changes in her community has been hugely rewarding, and she can't imagine not being a CHV.



**Pooja monitoring a child's nutrition**

Dear friends,

On 9<sup>th</sup> June, I completed forty-nine years of my life, and found myself contemplating my journey over the years.

In the last twenty years, I have spent most of my time on the streets of some of the poorest places on earth, muddy and dusty slums, crowded and strewn with garbage, edged with stinking open sewers, narrow passageways filled with skinny, naked children with vacant eyes, deeply frustrated unemployed adults trying to scrape by somehow and thousands of people enduring brutal oppression and extreme misery. I have seen their lives filled with so much poverty, suffering, corruption and injustice, so much hatred and distrust.

When I began my journey, I wanted to pursue a vision that gave me direction, values and inspiration and provided a framework for my life. I wanted to be a force for liberation and transformation. If I believed that all human beings deserved to be treated with equal dignity, even sanctity, then I must face their injustices and seek justice for everybody, everywhere.

I wanted to seek to help turn the trajectory of the poor from a downward arc of destruction to an ascending spiral of transformation and hope. I did not want to be resigned to a failing and dysfunctional culture, to an inadequate and destructive ideology. I realised very early on that my charity to the poor must not go only skin deep, but I must go farther than charity, to the realm of justice, and deal with the systems that make and keep poor people in poverty.

Today, when I walk among these communities after twenty years, and witness the lives of the women, men and children into whom I have invested my days and years, it gives me great joy to see so many of them seeking peace through justice, generosity and mutual concern, expressing and sharing a generous overflow of love, joy and life. Together, our lives have found profound meaning through the pursuit of virtue, peace and mutual care for one another. Together, we have found that vibrant communities can be built through the advance of love, neighbourliness and reconciliation. Together, we have become bound to justice, and are not free of our duties to our neighbours.

In these communities, the poor are treated with high dignity and respect; the lost and excluded are recovered and given a place, and leaders stoop to serve. We all learn to live more humbly and responsibly, never forgetting the communities' weakest and most vulnerable members. Some of the poorest women, men and children are at the forefront of the pursuit of love, justice and the common good. They are reshaping the social and spiritual landscape of our world.

Serenity and satisfaction is not obtained through possession and consumption, but rather through contemplative gratitude and neighbourly sharing. We can defect from the goal of growing our personal wealth portfolios, and instead grow our good deeds portfolios for the common good, specially the good of the poor and marginalised. The result will be a qualitative improvement in the lives of everyone. We can defect from the system of progress through rapid growth, and from greed and self-centeredness. Wealth and power can instead become a matter of responsibility and accountability.

We can either glamorise material gain and the pursuit of narrow individualistic preoccupations, or we can redefine the terms of what we should be striving for in life. We can bequeath to our children and grandchildren a world where our energies are directed from accumulation and self-protection, towards compassion and service, and where equity becomes our sacred passion and personal ambition.

The dominant system we live in today has no power except the power we give it by believing it. If we continue to give the dominant system our confidence and consent, it will absorb and neutralize all our attempts at reform because we will still be part of it. But if we transfer our trust from the dominant system into a new way of seeing, believing and living, normal people can turn into heroes and history changers, calling all people to live life in a new way.

Thank you for these long years of love and friendship that have helped me discover a magnificent vision and a sacred mission that have given my life unimagined meaning.

Dr.Kiran Martin  
Director & Founder



*Kiran with the women of Mayapuri on her birthday*

## News in Brief

### VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Ross Simpson and Kerry Trewern from Scotland taught English in Jeevan Nagar, Sharon Weterings and Bas Willems from The Netherlands spent 10 days studying Asha's projects. Lolly from Tufts University, Nick, Devin, Madeleine, Amar and Katherine from Harvard taught English in Zakhira and Mayapuri. Bernard Gomes of TearFund New Zealand, Steve Beck, formerly the CEO of Geneva Global visited Asha and local slum areas. 16 people from a Tearfund Transform team lived up to their name by working wonders in the centre at Anna Nagar.

### BROADBAND INTERNET REACHES THE SLUMS

A very big "thank you" to everyone who donated to our broadband appeal. We have now been able to install computers and broadband in all our slum centres, and the children are extremely excited about the new opportunities it brings them.

### ASHA'S INFLUENCE SPREADS WEST

Dr Kiran Martin lectured at both Harvard University and MIT in April. The talks were very well received, and we expect to welcome more volunteers and research students from the East Coast as a result.

### DR MARTIN VISITS NORTHERN IRELAND PARLIAMENT

Dr Kiran Martin was invited to Stormont House, the Northern Ireland Houses of Parliament, by Rev Robert Coulter, Member of the NI Assembly. Rev Coulter had visited the Kalkaji slums with colleagues last year and was very impressed with the work he saw there.

### MORE SLUM CHILDREN TREATED TO HC VISITS

Children from a number of slums visited the New Zealand High Commission at the invitation of Jane Anderton, wife of the NZ Minister for Forestry, Biosecurity and Fisheries. The children were treated to games, food and drinks, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Wendy Butler, friend of many of our slum residents and wife of the British Deputy High Commissioner, invited more children (this time from Anna Nagar) to her home for an informal chat and a presentation on the education system in the UK. As expected, all children had a wonderful time.

### SEE ASHA VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE!

We're continually posting more videos on YouTube: visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search for "Asha Society" to see Asha's work past and present.

## Choices for slum children thanks to career guidance

If you were to ask a slum child what was expected of them in life, many might say to leave school as early as possible and start earning money. Others might assume that they will take the same jobs as their parents, who may be labourers, sweepers or have similar unskilled jobs. Thousands of bright children have been unable to realise either their dreams or their potential after growing up in a slum environment. So many of the children and adolescents in numerous slum areas show promise but are held back by the restrictive views of their parents, the shortcomings in their schools or by their own lack of confidence in their ability to join the mainstream. We want to see this change.

Asha has already held several career counselling sessions for students who have just taken their exams (aged 16/17), and is helping them to recognise their strengths and all their options.

With help from Dinesh Tiwari, (a careers counsellor and deputy editor of the Hindustan Times newspaper), Dr Kiran Martin and Asha staff members, the young people have considered their options and are now applying for courses to enter careers as diverse as multimedia designing, air hostessing, computer programming and engineering.

Course fees are naturally a concern for the students, but Asha has been able to liaise with local banks to secure loans for college courses. They will also receive help with the cost of clothing, books and other essentials that will allow them to enter their chosen courses feeling prepared and confident enough to study alongside more privileged children.

Lots of career-related resources will be made available to the students, and there will be further follow-up sessions to address any questions that come up.

These young people now have a very real chance at a rewarding career and adult life, and can look forward to finding a way out of poverty. We look forward to reporting on their various career directions as the counselling progresses.



**An initial counselling session gets underway**

## Help for Mayapuri residents struggling with alcohol addiction

Some parts of the Kanchan Basti slum in Mayapuri have an all-pervading smell of alcohol. Ramesh, an Asha programme officer who works in the area, explains how men, women and even children drink in that area – it has become a way of life for many of the families there. There are a few liquor shops close by, making access to alcohol all too easy if people have any money. Those who are addicted will always find it, and it is usually the only money that is available for life's basic necessities. These people are in such a bad situation that they couldn't be persuaded to visit the Asha resource centre, so instead Asha staff go into the community and spend time explaining the dangers of alcohol abuse and making sure they know where to get help if they decide that they want it.

Asha supporter Jez Etherington is involved with Alcoholics Anonymous in the UK and recognised that there was a real need in the community after speaking with some of the men in Mayapuri. He contacted the Delhi branch of AA, who have been visiting the area for several months now. The number of men attending the AA meetings has dwindled, but those who are still turning up clearly understand the reasons for giving up alcohol and have a real hope of overcoming their addiction. The battle against alcohol addiction is even harder for people who are constantly surrounded by it and have plenty of difficulties from which they want to escape – lack of employment, or badly paid jobs, a cramped home lacking the most basic necessities, and the general sense of disappointment and hopelessness that accompanies these things.

Jez is aware of the difficulties that these men face, and is planning to come out with a small group of men, also members of AA in the UK, to spend time with the community's men and work with the Delhi AA staff. We're grateful for their help, as this is an area where a lot of people are struggling to cope.

## A day in the life of a volunteer English teacher



**Kerry, children and staff take a trip to the Science Museum**

Arriving at the slum in the morning, we are immediately surrounded by excited children. Some are regulars in our classes, some are simply curious and keen to shake our hands. While enthusiastically grasping our hands, the children repeat their favourite saying: "good morning, how are you, I am fine".

Prior to our first class, we converse with the women who run the centre. Only a few speak English, yet we manage to communicate with everyone using the odd Hindi word, smiles and sign language. The women are extremely friendly and are ecstatic when we use our pidgin Hindi. They also seem to appreciate the fact we try to embrace their culture by wearing traditional clothes, greeting them in the correct way (hands folded as though in prayer with a slight bow of the head) and joining them in their food and games.

Our first class begins at around 11am. We teach the boys in the morning and the girls in the afternoon. Having prepared the lesson plan in advance, we launch straight into activities. The children respond well to games, so we attempt to be creative. The boys in particular thrive on competition, so team games such as pictorial and hangman are instant hits. Our aim is to not only extend their vocabulary but to introduce basic grammatical concepts.

The main thing that strikes us about teaching these children is their enthusiasm. We have very little resources, the heat can be overwhelming (there is no air conditioning in the slums!) and we are not highly experienced English teachers. Yet these children give up their school holidays and attend day after day. Their excitement over anything new is inspiring and gives us the motivation to use our imaginations and come up with new and improved activities.

Asha provides these children with amazing opportunities; opportunities which are wholeheartedly embraced. It would humble any cynic! We are grateful to be involved, if only in a small way.

**Kerry and Ross are Scottish solicitors working with the children of Jeevan Nagar for one month**

# 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.

Cate Murless and Graeme Rayner, both Asha supporters and past volunteers, were fortunate to get a place in this year's London Marathon. In addition to training for long hours, they persuaded many people to sponsor them and donated all the money raised to Asha. Both Cate and Graeme finished the gruelling course – congratulations to them both!

The Besom Foundation made a large contribution to the children of our slum areas by funding the purchase of 8 computers. The computers have been distributed amongst a few different resource centres, allowing us to extend the computer literacy programme to yet more children. Our grateful thanks to the Besom for their help.

***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: foasha.leighton@tiscali.co.uk 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

For private circulation only. Distributed free of charge by Asha Community Health and Development Society Ekta Vihar, R K Puram Sector 6, New Delhi 110022, India. Tel. +91-11-26196857 / 26170618 / 26179844 Fax. +91-11-26179844. Email: info@asha-india.org. Website: www.asha-india.org