

# NEWS

Issue #43

July 2009

## for friends of asha

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

### Asha's recent success: in numbers

We're pleased to be able to share some highlights from Asha's statistics for 2008-2009: they are encouraging in many respects.

Healthcare coverage is greater than ever, and during the year over **48,000 patients** visited the Asha polyclinic, the slum-based health centres or the mobile clinics.

**56%** of women gave birth in hospital and **44%** in the presence of trained birth attendants (in India as a whole, only 47% of births are attended by skilled personnel). **100%** of newborns were **breastfed within 6 hours** of birth, and **93%** of newborns were of **normal birthweight** (2.5kg or more).

**The neonatal mortality rate** (for infants between birth and 28 days old) is the **lowest ever in Asha slums** at 16.5 per 1000 live births (for India as a whole the figure is 39/1000). The **infant mortality rate** is now **27** (in India it is 57, more than double, and in other Delhi slums it is 100 per thousand live births). All these figures illustrate the effectiveness of Asha's healthcare and awareness programmes and reflect the nutritional status of the mothers, the sanitation of their surroundings and the socio-economic status of families in Asha slum areas.

**This year, 22,788 vaccinations** were given as per World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations – a 95% coverage of children under 5. As a result of the immunisation programme, **not a single child** died from a preventable disease. **89% of all children in Asha slums are healthy**, a figure that compares very favourably with the India percentage of 47%, and the Delhi slums figure of just 20%.

Asha is also working hard to reduce gender inequality, and the statistics show progress in that area. The **sex ratio** in Asha slums is **940 girls to 1000 boys**, a big improvement on the Delhi statistic of 868:1000 and the India figure of 927:1000. This result shows just how effective community education can be.

Access to reproductive health education means that **28%** of couples have opted for **permanent methods of contraception**, and **36%** are spacing their children using **temporary contraceptive methods**. As a result, the **average number of children per family** is now **2.8**, a reduction in family size that will have a long-term impact on families' health and finances.



**Sheela Devi of Ekta Vihar with a business she has expanded thanks to a loan**



**An optometrist visits a slum area to identify people with eye or vision problems**

There are now **92 computers** in Asha resource centres, and **broadband internet** connections in every one. **833 children** have completed **computer courses** (see the inner pages for a success story!).

**359 children** attended **English classes**, and many are still learning or have started classes this year.

Slum infrastructure has been improved in many areas, and many people have chosen to take loans to extend or improve their homes.

**63 new taps, 22 new handpumps and 8 new tubewells** have been installed, greatly increasing communities' access to safe water. The efforts of community volunteers are ensuring that these facilities are being kept in good working order, and thousands are feeling the benefits.

**143 people** have taken out loans for businesses, home improvements, education and other purposes totalling **Rs. 7 million** (US\$148,000 or £90,000).

The loan **repayment rate** is **99%** - much higher than the repayment rate of other bank customers, which is around 93-94%.

Visit the Asha website at: [www.asha-india.org](http://www.asha-india.org)

## A celebration for slum children entering higher education

We are delighted to give you more information on Asha's plans to celebrate a momentous event in its history. This July, for the first time in India, Asha will be sending around 200 children from slum communities to the University of Delhi and to other reputed institutions for professional courses.

While these children are standing at an exciting juncture of their lives, we must remember that their journey has been one of great struggle. Poor living conditions, including overcrowded shacks, lack of electricity and noise pollution, have made it very difficult for them to study. On a deeper level, these children have faced numerous setbacks; whether in the form of the death of a loved one or a severely dysfunctional family, these negative inputs have made it even more difficult for the children to succeed as students. The lack of role models exacerbates this situation – most of the individuals that these children look up to have not even made it through high school, and fail to emphasise the importance of education. As we help these children take steps towards breaking the cycle of poverty that traps them, we are battling not only their undesirable living conditions, but also the resulting disadvantages of poor self-esteem, lack of support, and lack of resources.

Consequently, what these children have overcome is quite remarkable. They have excelled in the national level Class 12 Board examination, many earning places at reputed colleges in Delhi University. The experience has been an immensely challenging one for them, and we believe that such accomplishment merits recognition. Through the events in August, we hope to honour these children and encourage them as they work towards an improved quality of life. Moreover, Asha hopes to send a powerful message to all the other slum children in India who feel defined by their circumstances – to encourage them to dream big, work hard, and hold themselves to the highest standard possible.

Asha will be hosting a ceremony for all accepted students on the evening of August 8th, 2009. We would be delighted to see any of you that could make it, but naturally we realise that many of you are overseas and won't be able to attend. However, there is a way you can help to make this event very special for the young people whose achievements we are celebrating:

**We will be collecting as many messages of goodwill and encouragement as possible and displaying them at the entrance to the auditorium on the night of the celebration. In addition, every message will be added to a book that will be given to each student as a memento of the evening and of their success. Of course, we will translate the messages into Hindi so that the students will have a full appreciation of every word. If you are sending your message by email, please send it to Paul Frey at [paul.frey@asha-india.org](mailto:paul.frey@asha-india.org). If you will be posting a message on behalf of a school, a church or an organisation, it would be wonderful if it could be on a letterhead to give some variety to the display.**

Given the numerous challenges that lie ahead for these young people, we strongly believe that it is important to demonstrate our support as they prepare to navigate such unfamiliar territory. Your messages will mean a lot to the young people who have achieved so much, and will encourage them to make the most of every moment of the exciting years ahead.



*Dr Kiran Martin with some students on the day their exam results were published*

## News in Brief

### THANKS TO A LONG-TERM VOLUNTEER

This month we're sad to say farewell to Michael Wallace who has given his time and a great deal of energy in helping Asha over the past year. He has helped in the office and also done a great job of teaching English in Kalkaji and Tigri over the last 6 months. His efforts have paid off – the children's English has improved a lot and they have enjoyed his classes immensely. Thank you, Michael!

### BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

We are very grateful to all supporters who donated money to our recent appeal for books for Class 12 students, and also to the British High Commission's Charity Committee which gave money for the same cause. We're now able to give badly-needed books to Class 12 students who are starting their final academic year this month. The children are delighted, and we know the books will be a great help to them.

### EXAM RESULTS FOR CLASS 12

Over the past year we have been making sure that the students from our slums have the books, study guides and guidance required to help them prepare for exams. It worked! The students have done really well, and are now more motivated and excited about applying for college. Thank you for your support; together we have made a huge difference! Now their excellent marks will ensure that these students have many more opportunities for higher education, and we are doing our best to motivate them to pursue their dreams despite the challenges they will face.

### DISTRIBUTION OF BIRTH KITS

Thanks to the organisation Canassist, Asha received 1,500 good-quality birth kits that Asha will distribute in all its slum areas. The kits are expensive, and the government no longer provides them free of charge. Now CHVs and Trained Birth Attendants are very happy with the extra resources, and no expectant mother will be left without a birth kit in the case of an unexpected delivery at home.

### VOLUNTEERS

A team led by Fran Beckett from Restore, Peckham (UK) did a wonderful job of decorating one of the centres. Amy Skaria, Katharine Best Burmaster, Nina Jain and Jyoti Jasrasaria, from Harvard University, USA, have been busy teaching our slum children English and assisting our medical staff. Jennifer Sault from Canada, Sonia Dandiya from the USA and Sam Lowe and Megan Pennell from the UK are also helping with our English Literacy Programme.

### TRILOKPURI CELEBRATES COMPUTER LITERACY LAUNCH

This April, His Excellency, Mr. Rupert Holborow, the New Zealand High Commissioner to India and his wife, Mrs. Polly Holborow, inaugurated the Computer Literacy Programme at Trilokpuri. The NZ High Commission had generously donated money for 8 computers, an internet connection and a printer, as well as books for aspiring students. Mr Holborow explained that the money had been raised by auctioning a cricket bat used by the New Zealand cricket team, and raised a laugh by mentioning that it may have raised more money had the NZ team won!

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## Mehfooz Ali – a loan changed his life

Mehfooz Ali has had great success with the loan scheme that was piloted in his community one year ago.

Married with 3 children, Mehfooz earns his living by driving a goods carrier for a courier agency. When Asha first asked Ekta Vihar residents if they could benefit from a loan, Mehfooz was keen, but said he had never dealt with a bank before. With Asha's assistance, he took a loan of Rs. 2.12 lakh (US\$4,420 or £2,715) to buy a goods carrier.

Mehfooz rents his vehicle to the same courier agency for which he works at Rs. 800 per day, and gets on average Rs 20,000 per month. After paying the hired driver Rs. 5000, Rs. 6000 in loan installments and Rs. 4000 for fuel, he takes home a balance of Rs. 5000 in addition to his salary of Rs 6000 per month – a real help to his family.

Now that his income has almost doubled, Mehfooz is very happy that he took a loan. He has had no problems making the repayments and intends to complete them as soon as possible. Then, he is planning to take out a new loan and buy another goods carrier.

Mehfooz has a bank account, a good means of earning a living and a sense of security – we're looking forward to seeing many more slum dwellers get similar benefits as a result of their financial inclusion.



**Mehfooz, Dr Martin and the goods carrier that has allowed Mehfooz to nearly double his income**

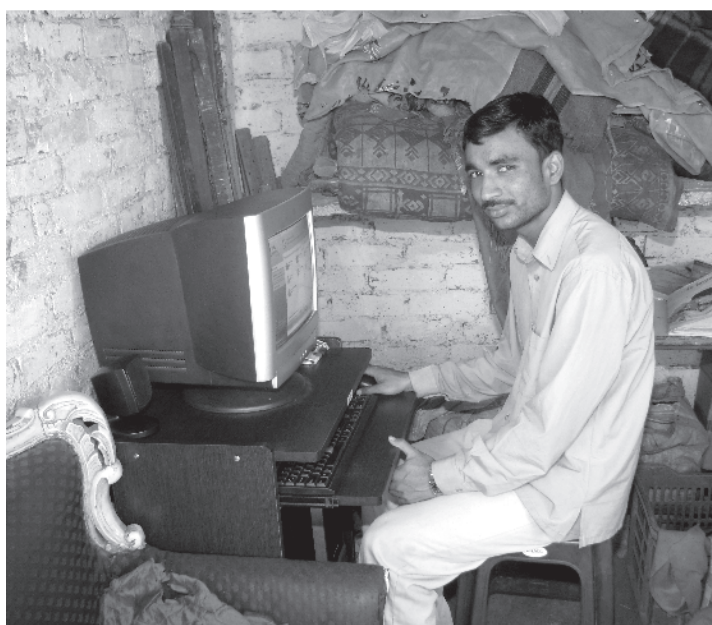
## Tackling TB with a special focus month

Of all the numerous challenges and disadvantages caused by a slum environment, Tuberculosis is one of the most deadly. The disease kills 1,000 people in India every day, and thousands more suffer its effects for many months, growing weaker and becoming unable to work or care for their families. Slum dwellers are at risk because TB is spread by droplet infection, a method that is highly effective in such densely-populated conditions. People with TB are stigmatised, and so those with symptoms are reluctant to seek help, fearing social exclusion. Finally, treatment is a long course of antibiotics that has a high failure rate as people stop taking them when they start to feel better.

Asha's vigilance in spotting likely TB patients and supervising their treatment means that 216 people were cured of the disease last year, and many more people were identified in time to start their treatment and have a good chance of recovery.

Asha constantly works to identify and treat TB patients, and in June its activities in slums were highlighted by a special focus month. Asha staff and CHVs go door-to-door to find out if people are experiencing any symptoms (such as a cough that lasts more than 3 weeks, blood in the sputum, loss of weight), and pay particular attention to the families of current TB patients to ensure that the disease hasn't spread to other members of the household. People displaying symptoms are referred to the nearest Asha clinic for initial testing, and those who test positive are sent to a Government DOTS centre for further tests that can confirm TB. DOTS staff give TB patients advice and information, and send medication to their local Asha clinic to be administered by CHVs or Asha staff. We are determined to continue fighting the spread of TB, and hope to see a reduction in cases over the coming year.

## First a computer course, now his own cyber café – Irfan's story



**Irfan in his home in Amar Park slum colony, Zakhira, with his new source of income**

One of ten children, and a school dropout at the age of 14 – many people would have assumed there was no hope for Irfan's future.

Irfan had been earning money by doing embroidery work, but at the age of 18, seeing his younger brother taking a course at Zakhira's children's resource centre sparked his interest in computers. Irfan's limited education meant that he found the course challenging, but with a lot of patience, hard work and support from the teacher, he completed the course.

Realising that there was nowhere nearby for local children to practise their new-found computer skills, he bought a second-hand computer and printer, got them working properly, and opened the area's first cyber café! He makes money by selling soft drinks as well as by charging a small fee for the use of his computer and printer, and he intends to buy more computers soon.

Irfan is taking exams equivalent to the school final year certificate and hopes to go to university when he has passed. He now understands the value of education and has said, "It's never too late to learn, and now I'm determined to set an example to my younger brothers and sisters, and to other children in my community".

# 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.

We're extremely grateful to the Right Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry, who chose Asha as his charity for his installation in the Cathedral last November. The generous donation will be used for Asha's education projects; he quoted a head teacher who had said, "education is liberation" – we couldn't agree more.

We have Mrs Sheila Rowe to thank for enabling Asha to benefit from funds raised during a recital on 3rd May at the Holy Cross Church in Bearsted. We're very grateful to Elaine Tate who offered to share the funds raised at the recital with Asha. The recital was entitled "Sing a Song of Sixpence" and featured songs performed by Elaine, along with Alex Ashworth. Poetry and prose readings were also featured, and the evening's entertainment was very well received by all.

***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**

Donating online is the simplest and most cost-effective way to support Asha. You can donate online in a choice of currencies via our secure server by visiting: [www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx](http://www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx)

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 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 \_\_\_\_\_

### **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**

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- **£50** will provide course books for a college student for 2 years
- **£100** will provide the treatment needed to put 10 TB patients on the road to recovery
- **£100** will pay for books for a 16-year old until he/she finishes school
- **£180** will pay to train a CHV and equip her for one year
- **£500** will cover university course fees for 3 years

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Dr Kiran Martin was pleased to meet Asha supporters old and new at a Fundraising Breakfast held at Holywood Parish Church, County Down, during her recent visit. Dr Martin gave a presentation on the work of Asha and many people gave donations that will help our work greatly. A big thank you to everyone who donated, and to everyone who worked hard to make the event possible.

Asha supporters also ran the Belfast marathon and raised a lot of money and awareness of Asha's work in the process – we're very grateful for their efforts. We're also pleased to have a number of new supporters as a result of these events, and would like to thank them sincerely for their interest in Asha.

Finally, many friends of Asha in the form of long-term supporters, churches and schools also helped to make Dr Martin's trip a great success – many thanks to them all!

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Please make your cheque payable to "Friends of Asha, Ireland" and mail to: Mrs Daphne Wright, Friends of Asha, (Ireland), Hermitage, 70 Demesne Road, Holywood, Co Down, BT18 9EX, UK. Email: [wgw70@yahoo.com](mailto:wgw70@yahoo.com) Charity Registration No. XR 37459

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Derek Simpson ran the Boston Marathon for Asha in April – well done Derek, and thank you!

We are grateful for the help of Amy Skaria, Katharine Burmaster, Nina Jain, Jyoti Jasrasaria (all Harvard students), Sonia Dandiya who is in high school in Florida and Jen Sault (a Microbiology student from Quebec). They are all doing a great job of teaching English in various slum areas and some are also helping out with screening slum residents for symptoms of TB.

SAVE A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY! This year's Asha Day will be on Saturday, September 12th, in the beautiful surroundings of the Alpha Omega Winery in Napa, California. The event will be hosted by Congressman Mike Thompson and his wife Janet, and organized by Kailash Chaudhary of Chaudhary and Associates. As always, Dr Kiran Martin will be speaking at the event, and she and the hosts will be delighted to see any of you who can make it.

***There are all sorts of things you could do to raise funds for Asha. If you organize something interesting, please send us details and photos, and you may be in this space next time!***

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

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Alternatively, 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, MA 01730, USA. Email: [lhempton@hotmail.com](mailto:lhempton@hotmail.com). EIN #01557632.  
ASHA (USA) is a 501 (C) 3 registered charity.

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- I would like to become a Hope Giver and contribute \_\_\_\_\_ every month. My first contribution is enclosed. Please send me a form to organize a regular donation.
- 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 \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

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Tear Netherlands sent a film crew to document Asha's activities in Delhi's slum areas and the resulting programme was aired on national television in The Netherlands. We're very grateful to Tear Netherlands for highlighting Asha's work, as several prospective volunteers and supporters have been in touch with Asha after seeing the programme.

Asha supporters in Northern Ireland recently ran the Belfast Marathon and raised a lot of money and awareness of Asha's work in the process. Derek Simpson from the USA ran the Boston Marathon for Asha in April – well done to all our runners, and thank you!

We have Mrs Sheila Rowe to thank for enabling Asha to benefit from funds raised during a recital on 3rd May at the Holy Cross Church in Bearsted, UK. We're very grateful to Elaine Tate who offered to share the funds raised at the recital with Asha. The recital was entitled "Sing a Song of Sixpence" and featured songs performed by Elaine, along with Alex Ashworth. Poetry and prose readings were also featured, and the evening's entertainment was very well received by all.

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