

NEWS

for friends of

asha

Issue #36

October 2007

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

ASHA TAKES ON A NEW SLUM



A queue forms at the mobile clinic

Until a few months ago, the 1500 residents of Coolie Camp hadn't heard of Asha even though they desperately need all the help that we can offer. The slum is situated in an otherwise affluent area of South Delhi, but all the worst problems associated with urban poverty can be seen there.

Families of around six people live in one-room huts with no privacy and hardly any room between them. There are no water pumps as the ground is not suitable for digging wells and the government have not responded to the obvious needs of the community. There is one toilet block that is shared between all 1500 people, and drainage is non-existent. The lanes between huts are dusty and fly-covered in the summer and prone to flooding in the rainy season. In many areas rubbish is piled up as far as the eye can see. Preventable diseases such as typhoid, cholera, TB and diarrhoea cause deaths regularly as people are not aware of how they can be avoided.

Many of the residents work as labourers. Those who are skilled can earn around £2 per day, but daily work is not guaranteed. Most labourers are unskilled, and women earn least of all.

There are 225 children under the age of five in the slum. Our staff have reported that hardly any of them have been immunised against disease and that the majority of them are malnourished. The state of the children reflects the harsh reality of life in the slum. As a large number of families have two working parents, children are regularly left to fend for themselves, or older children must leave school in order to look after their younger siblings.

Asha staff have spoken to many people in the community to understand the range of problems that they face. Stories such as Sunita's are all too common in places such as Coolie Camp. She has three children who survived infancy, but her most recent child was not as lucky. Sunita was not aware of the need for health checks during pregnancy and gave birth to a boy who was severely malnourished. A untrained midwife helped Sunita to deliver the baby at home and cut the umbilical cord using a dirty blade. He developed a severe infection and died at just 19 days old.

We're determined to stop this cycle of poverty and ignorance from causing more deaths. A mobile clinic is already visiting Coolie Camp twice a week and our staff members are making sure that community members are aware of its presence. Gradually, people will begin to understand the various ways in which they can prevent disease and increase the likelihood of their children surviving. Once interested women and children have grouped into Mahila Mandals and Bal Mandals, knowledge can be spread more rapidly and they will keep watchful eyes on the welfare of others.

As our medical interventions begin to improve the residents' health, Asha staff will continue to concentrate on training and education to make people more aware of their rights. In years to come we expect to see the people of Coolie Camp living in homes that are their own and taking responsibility for their futures with the sense of dignity and pride in their community that is so apparent in other Asha slums.

Can you help us to transform lives in Coolie Camp? If you're able 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.



Unhygienic surroundings

Interview With Mahesh Masih, Asha staff member working in Coolie Camp

How bad are the conditions in Coolie Camp?

The sanitation is terrible. Rubbish has built up everywhere and there are only ten toilets for all 1500 people. Immunisation coverage is very poor and there is no access to healthcare so a lot of people are suffering from illness and disease.

What do you think is the biggest challenge for Asha in this area?

It's a challenge to get people to work together to make improvements, as there isn't much sense of unity at the moment. We've got a lot of work to do to make people aware of their rights and what can be achieved if they work together. Also, many of the teenagers take drugs and inhale solvents.

What results can we expect to see first?

The community had tried to get local politicians to visit, but nothing happened – we've now got politicians to go and walk around the slum and see the problems people are facing. The local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) has promised to get a water tanker to visit the area and to get other improvements made. People's health will improve once they are given basic training and we are targeting 100% immunisation for children under five – this can be achieved relatively quickly.

How receptive do you think the community will be to receiving help from Asha?

Most people are keen and are looking forward to change. We've held a public meeting and introduced our staff, and made lots of house-to-house visits. We made sure we visited the slum lords first to avoid a negative reaction from them.



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

Profile Of Gyanwati, CHV at Kalkaji

Gyanwati calmly sits and tells us the tragic story that lies behind her becoming a CHV sixteen years ago. Kalkaji became her home after she had travelled to Delhi from her village in a rural area. She admits that she knew nothing about health as she had never gone to school. She settled in Kalkaji in South-East Delhi with her husband and baby son. At the time, there was no water in the slum and so each day when her husband was at work she had to leave her baby alone while she travelled for several hours to get as much water as she could carry. He was less than one year old when he became ill with diarrhoea. She was scared to give him water or milk as she thought it would cause more vomiting and diarrhoea. She took her son to a hospital, but it was too late and he died.

Grief-stricken but also ashamed, Gyanwati refused to leave her house for several months. Soni, a supervisor at Kalkaji, met Gyanwati whilst doing rounds in the slum and tried to persuade her to join the Mahila Mandal (women's group). At first, she declined, but when she started attending the meetings she enjoyed them, and she then took an interest in training sessions on health issues. It is easy to imagine the horror and disbelief that she describes feeling on the day she learnt how easy it would have been to treat her son's diarrhoea with oral rehydration solution (ORS). Gyanwati trained for many months to become a CHV, but she knew that most people in the slum knew as little about health as she had done and wanted to avoid further needless deaths. She started visiting people in her area and advising them even before she had completed the training course and received her medicine box. With quiet determination, she says that in the last sixteen years, only one child in her area has died as a result of diarrhoea. She said that she feels very sorry for the family of that child, but she is determined that there will be no more.



Gyanwati preparing to train women at Kalkaji

Another shocking story follows as Gyanwati tells us of a baby that a sweeper found in a rubbish dump in her slum. The baby was a girl, and had been put in a polythene bag along with her umbilical cord and placenta still attached. Worms had found their way into the bag, and it was incredible that the baby hadn't suffocated. The sweeper panicked when he found her, and was going to leave the baby there. Gyanwati heard about this, and immediately went to the rubbish dump and retrieved the girl. She took her to the Asha dispensary, and the other CHVs of the area gathered there. The doctor gave her a tetanus shot and told the group how to care for her, and the police were called. A childless woman from Kalkaji desperately wanted to adopt the baby, and as all the women had been involved in saving the baby's life they wanted her to stay in their community. At the moment, the police won't let her be released from the hospital where she was admitted, but Gyanwati assured us that she will continue to visit and keep trying to persuade them.

It is this kind of compassion and resilience that has helped Gyanwati to save countless lives during her time as a CHV. She tells us that she is not motivated by money, and is extremely happy with her work. Watching her in action, whether bringing young TB patients or elderly and destitute couples to the Asha dispensary for help, nobody could fail to be impressed by her transformation from an ignorant young woman into a respected and tireless worker for her whole community.

News in Brief



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR MM WOMEN

The Treasurers of the Mahila Mandals from all Asha slums gathered at the Asha training centre for a session run by our Accounts staff. They learned more about maintaining ledgers and cash books, billing and other important aspects of accounts, and had the chance test their knowledge during a practice session afterwards.

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS

In the last few months we've been grateful for the help of Michael Wallace, Philippa Coleman and Nicola Parker (teaching music, English and craft), Phil Mullins (a medical student working in clinics and with the children), Sarah Oppenheim (teaching dance) and Sonam Velani (training women in microfinance schemes). We welcomed visits from Arjun Suri from Harvard and Andrew Moore and Richard Evans from the UK.

SESSION RUN ON CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

Volunteers Madhuri Martin and Sonam Velani ran a session for 18 adolescent girls from Zakhira about violence against women, how women can protect themselves and also how victims of violence can be helped to get justice. A film was screened about sexual harassment and during a discussion afterwards the girls explained their understanding of rape. They were surprised to learn that rape can be committed by people that are known to them, making it a particularly valuable and enlightening session for the group.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

Residents of many Asha slums celebrated India's 60th Independence Day with colourful ceremonies, speeches from special guests and lots of music. The Indian flag was hoisted and the National Anthem sung, after which the crowds enjoyed cultural programmes with various songs and dances performed by willing volunteers.

TEACHING WORKSHOP FOR ASHA STAFF

A teaching workshop run by Dr Christine Burnett, Asha's Ireland co-ordinator, helped to strengthen the abilities of Asha staff members who have teaching responsibilities. It was a valuable opportunity for them to build on their skills and to get advice on aspects of teaching where they may have lacked experience.

STREET PLAYS IN MAYAPURI AND ZAKHIRA

On 30th August, a theatre group helped children from Mayapuri and Zakhira slums to stage street plays in their communities. The plays were centred around the importance of education and stressed the fact that parents should stay involved with the education of their children, even after they have been admitted to school. A feedback session followed each play where the audience could give their views and ask questions. The plays drew large audiences with around 200 people attending each one, making the initiative a great success.

FAREWELL TO OUR ENGLISH TEACHERS

A farewell lunch for our English teachers was a treat for the children of Kalkaji, Tigri, Dr Ambedkar and Kanak Durga slums. They got to show off their new-found English speaking skills as Freddy Martin interviewed them, and some got the chance to speak to the entire group and thank their teachers for the chance to learn English. Both the children's English and their obvious sorrow at saying goodbye was a credit to the skill and dedication of Laura, Rob and James.

HEPATITIS AND TYPHOID CAMPS HELD IN SLUMS

Many people who live in slums are not vaccinated against these serious diseases and so Asha organised Hepatitis/ Typhoid camps to maximise the vaccination coverage in slum areas. They were a great success with a large number of residents coming forward to be vaccinated.

Relief Programme Helps Those With Nowhere Else To Turn



An elderly couple at Kalkaji

are unlikely to get well, but they are able to eat and know where they can go for help.

If you are able to contribute to our relief programme, please turn over to see how you can donate

Asha's programmes are geared towards empowering communities and enabling them to take responsibility for their own health, families and surroundings. However, conditions even in Asha slums are such that some people are much worse off than others and need extra help. Around 20-25 of the most needy people in each of Asha's slums receive relief money until they can get back on their feet; this aid often continues for 6 months, and sometimes longer.

Beena from Mayapuri is one example: her husband died of TB five years ago, and she has 4 children between the ages of 6 and 14. Beena also has TB, is unable to work and was struggling to look after her children. Now, she receives financial help and nutritious food from Asha, and the Mahila Mandal women are taking care of her. She is taking medication and should be well enough to start work in another two months. She firmly believes that she is only alive because of Asha.

This couple from Kalkaji are both elderly and in very poor health. Their children are grown up and married, and hardly ever visit. The wife is severely anaemic and has to care for her husband who is suffering from dementia. Asha is providing their medical care, has helped the husband to apply for a pension and is also giving them extra money and food each month. They

Asha's Success With School Admissions This Year

In most slums, education is the last thing on people's minds. Slum children get some help from the government with books and uniforms, but still have to pay school fees. People who live in such poverty see schooling their children as a waste of precious earnings, and also the loss of an extra pair of hands around the house. If children go to school at all, 40% drop out by the age of eight. Gender discrimination is also rife; many parents feel it is a waste of time educating girls who will just grow up, get married and then join their husbands' households and benefit them instead.

Asha staff, Lane Volunteers, Bal Mandal members and others made great efforts to get local children admitted into schools before this year's deadline of 31st July. They noted children who did not go to school and the reasons for this. They would then approach the children, speak to their parents and sometimes enlist the help of local headteachers. In some slums, rallies and street plays were organised to educate the whole community about the importance of schooling, and about children's rights to education.

In total, 865 children were admitted to school who would otherwise be working, babysitting for siblings or just roaming around their slum. An education will provide an opportunity for these children to break out of the cycle of poverty. Some will even go to university, others will earn decent salaries, and all will benefit from the confidence that comes with knowledge.



A Right-To-Education rally at Jeevan Nagar

The Adolescent Health Programme Is Expanded

Asha's Adolescent Health and Social Development Programme is growing in both scope and success. It raises awareness and enables adolescents to become responsible adults, adopt healthy attitudes towards life and make better decisions.

Young people between the ages of 10 and 18 attend workshops on topics such as physical, social and psychological changes during adolescence, menstruation, masturbation, HIV/AIDS and STIs, mental health, peer pressure, preparing for married life and so on. These sessions are remarkably successful; one team leader reported teaching 57 adolescents in their area.

Those displaying leadership qualities and good communication skills are then chosen as Peer Educators. They receive further training and take over from staff members, teaching other adolescents about issues that are relevant to them. In a country where many of these issues are the subject of much confusion and are often taboo, these adolescents have taken a brave step by volunteering to tell their peers the facts about sexual health, changes during adolescence and problems that people might encounter as they are growing up. Children and young people are often confused or misinformed, but often hesitant to approach their elders. They are usually much happier to speak to Peer Educators about such topics.



An AHSD group at Zakhira

August 2007 was a focus month for the AHSD programme, and an evaluation exercise carried out in various project areas produced very encouraging results. A questionnaire was used to assess the perceived value of the programme. In addition to the regular group of adolescents, feedback was also received from new boys and girls eager to benefit from Asha's interventions. Sessions were conducted separately for boys and girls.

When the group was asked if they had any prior knowledge of ASHA, many of them said that since ASHA started work in their community they had made use of recreational and other facilities at the children's resource centre, and some had become members of the children's groups. As expected, those who were part of the Bal Mandals had greater levels of awareness and also had knowledge of lobbying activities. A marked difference in responses was evident between responses from school-going children and those who didn't go to school (who were present in smaller numbers).

When in discussion groups, some members displayed initial hesitation when talking about topics such as reproductive health or sexually transmitted diseases, but subsequently they became comfortable. Some other group members were surprisingly confident in discussing more sensitive issues, even in the presence of a male team leader in one of the sessions.

As many as 25 young people participated in a single evaluation session. Following the success of this programme, a more intensive contact programme has been outlined so that people's enthusiasm remains high and the numbers do not dwindle.

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.

This year will see a repeat of the immensely successful Napa Valley fundraiser at the Alpha Omega Winery on 22nd September. The event will be hosted by Congressman Mike Thompson and his wife Janet, and Kailash and Gisela Chaudhary and Chaudhary & Associates, Inc., have once again generously pledged to cover the expenses. The guests will enjoy a wine-tasting session and an Indian buffet in addition to a silent auction and a talk from Dr Kiran Martin. A large amount of money has already been raised, and we're very grateful for the generosity and help of everyone involved.

On Tuesday 1st May, 250 pupils from Methodist College, Belfast, held a sponsored Tai Combat session. The students, all 12 years old, were raising money to provide Vitamin A supplements and measles vaccinations to prevent blindness in children from Kalkaji at a cost of £1 per child. Their aim was to raise £3000, enough to treat all the children in that slum. Amazingly they beat their target, raising £3,339! They were delighted to have Dr Kiran Martin attend the College assembly to receive a cheque. Well done to all involved!

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 Desmesne Avenue, Holywood, County Down, Northern Ireland, BT18 9ND, UK. Email: christine.burnett@gmail.com

Charity Registration No. XR 37459

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 _____

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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: lhemp@hotmai.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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Full name & title _____ Organization (if any) _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip code _____

State _____

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- \$40 will provide a child with full medical care and vaccinations for the first year of its life
- \$100 will provide basic health education to 150 people
- \$350 will equip a Community Health Volunteer for one year, including all medical supplies

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