

NEWS

Issue #40

October 2008

for friends of asha

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

College Bound! Asha's Education Revolution



From Delhi slums to Delhi Universities – some of the remarkable students Asha has helped to gain college admission

Remember studying for your final high school exams? The pressure of having to prove your knowledge at the culmination of many years of hard work? Now imagine trying to concentrate while surrounded by your six brothers and sisters, who also share the same bedroom. Imagine having to study without the proper books and with little guidance from your school teachers or parents, who, if educated at all, may only possess a primary school education. For many children in New Delhi slums, this is a daily reality. It's no wonder the idea of college admission seems out of reach – there are so many obstacles to overcome.

Believing that for too long poverty has been a barrier to higher education, this year Asha set out to challenge the idea that slum children cannot gain college admission. It is our firm belief that given the right tools and support, slum children can not only overcome the burden of their circumstances but study alongside their more privileged peers at Delhi's elite educational institutions.

Faced with the challenge of overcoming entrenched socio-economic problems, Asha began by offering free careers counselling to final year high school students, to demonstrate that there were tertiary options available to all students, regardless of their background.

The labyrinthine college application process, confusing to students from the most sophisticated of high schools, appeared an insurmountable challenge to students without a support system. To overcome this, Asha held workshops to guide our students through this phase. For those who believed that they would never attend college because of the economic burden it would place on their families, Asha offered scholarships to assist with the paying of fees and the purchase of text books.

It was with great excitement that we learnt that all 30 of the students we selected for the college application process were accepted into courses such as honours programmes in commerce, political science (government), history, geography and Hindi. The students were offered places at a variety of institutions including the prestigious University of Delhi, the National Airline Hosts Program and reputed film and animation training centres. In most cases the students were the first from their slum communities to continue on to tertiary education. To read more about these students please log on to www.asha-india.org.

New Zealand Governor-General visits Asha

Asha was honoured to host the Queen's representative to New Zealand during his recent Indian tour. On Wednesday 10 September, His Excellency, The Honourable Anand Satyanand, PCNZM, QSO, the Governor-General of New Zealand, visited development projects administered by Asha in Ekta Vihar slum colony.

The Mahila Mandal told His Excellency about living conditions in the slum and the improvements they have been able to make following intervention from Asha's women's empowerment programme. His Excellency commented that the women's achievements were "an inspiration".

The children's group then spoke to the Governor-General about their actions against child labour and early marriage. His Excellency then witnessed a demonstration by students from the computer literacy program. The Governor-General told the children that he was "impressed by their enthusiasm for learning" before presenting the children with books by a well-known New Zealand academic.

Through the visit, the Governor-General gained an insight into the life of the urban poor of Delhi and an understanding of the work Asha is doing to benefit these marginalised communities.



L-R, Mrs Polly Holborow, Mr Rob Taylor, High Commissioner Holborow, Dr Kiran Martin, Governor-General Satyanand, Mrs Satyanand and children from the Ekta Vihar Bal Mandal

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

Kiran's letter

Dear Friends,

When I began my work 20 years ago in August 1988 in Dr Ambedkar slum, with a broken table and a chair, little did I imagine that the seemingly impossible would happen. That children who were once skinny, naked, barefoot and playing on dirty garbage strewn streets, would one day go to university. I would often tell these children as they were growing up, that they were not worthless, useless and unwanted, as they had been led to believe, but that they were God's wonderful creation, bright and intelligent and deserving of the very best. And just imagine, today 30 slum children are studying honours courses in top colleges of the University of Delhi. We are on the brink of an educational revolution in the slums!

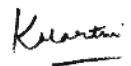
It is my belief that it is not enough to have dreams, but it is necessary to successfully articulate them. We can seek to overthrow the status quo, and work together towards a new world order that advances not with violence or bloodshed, hatred or revenge, but with inclusion, reconciliation and through a complete refusal to respect racial, class, caste, ethnic or economic barriers. In treating everyone with equality and respect, we show our primal kinship with all people.

This kind of revolution that God desires seems laughable to some, and for them it's hard to imagine anything more unrealistic. On the other hand, what other kind of revolution could possibly change the world? Perhaps what's crazy is what we are doing and pursuing instead – thinking, after all these millennia, that hate can conquer hate, war cure war, pride overcome pride, violence end violence, revenge stop revenge, and exclusion create cohesion.

Let us think long and deeply about the meaning and message of this revolution, and be willing to sacrifice our time, our intelligence, our money and our energy to be a part of it. Each day can then be a beautiful page in the book of our lives.

I invite you to be a part of the process of restoring these lovely children from the degradation and humiliation they have faced through generations. I need your help to make that happen through your generous contributions and your prayers.

Thank you so much for all your support. With my warmest wishes,



Dr Kiran Martin
Director & Founder



Napa Valley Fundraiser
L-R, Mr Jeff Schechtman, Mrs Gisela Chaudhary,
Mr Kailash Chaudhary, Dr Kiran Martin

News in Brief

VOLUNTEERS

5 Harvard students completed their stay in India in August but not before having a special meeting with India's Finance Minister Mr P Chidambaram. Liz Lunn and Ruth McKibbin visited from Northern Ireland to continue their work with slum women participating in cottage industry craft. For a copy of the catalogue of craft contact info@asha-india.org. Laura and David McCulloch spent 3 weeks teaching English in Kalkaji. Laura was returning after previously teaching at Asha for 5 months. Rachel and David Burke visited from Northern Ireland and spent 2 weeks teaching English in Kanak Durga. Anurag Gumber taught at Zakhira, as did Benjamin Morley, who also taught at Mayapuri. Dan Pooley, from the City Life Church in Southampton, returned with a team of 6. While in India, the team conducted workshops, held a sanitation drive and hosted a trip to the cinema for 180 slum residents!

ROTARY VISITS ASHA

The Rotary Club of Delhi Southend paid a special visit to Asha on August 23 to provide medicines and equipment. The ceremony was preceded by a Rotary meeting that featured talks from Dr Mrinal, a New York based nutritionist, and Freddy Martin, Associate Director of Asha. Following the presentation of the Rotary donation, members joined Asha staff to travel to nearby Dr Ambedkar Basti. The excursion allowed the members a first-hand insight into how their donations will be used to improve treatment at the health centre, as well as a glimpse into the lives of the local people. While at the centre, the Rotarians were able to witness a nutrition education session conducted by a visiting specialist.

FOCUS ON TUBERCULOSIS ERADICATION

September saw a special focus on TB eradication by team leaders in the slums. While TB rates are in decline in Asha slums, the disease is still a major health risk. Like the common cold, TB spreads through the air. When infectious people cough, sneeze, talk or spit, they propel TB germs, known as bacilli, into the air. A person needs only to inhale a small number of these to be infected (www.who.int). According to the World Health Organisation, South East Asia (including India) has the highest incidence of TB infection in the world. Asha centres are accredited providers of the World Health Organisation endorsed Directly Observed Treatment Short-course. Our Community Health Volunteers actively seek out TB sufferers and bring them to the centres for testing and treatment. Throughout the 6 month treatment period, the CHVs also follow up on patients who miss appointments and encourage them to bring in their families for testing.

NAPA VALLEY FUNDRAISER

On September 20, a luncheon was hosted by US Congressman Mike Thompson and his wife Janet, at the Alpha Omega Winery in Napa Valley, California, to raise funds for Asha. As in previous years, the event was generously organised by Kailash Chaudhary of Chaudhary and Associates. As guests enjoyed a delicious Indian meal, Asha founder Dr Kiran Martin spoke about the organisation's achievements over the past year. The afternoon also included a silent auction and the chance to sample some Alpha Omega wines. Thank you Mike, Jan, Kailash, Gisela and the other organisers for all your support of the work of Asha over the years.

SEE ASHA VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE!

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

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

Interview with Polly Holborow - Asha volunteer and wife of the New Zealand High Commissioner to India



Polly with her students

How long have you lived in India?

My husband, two of my three children and I arrived in January this year.

Why did you decide to volunteer at Asha?

I had the opportunity to visit Asha and meet some of the children who impressed me immensely with their character. I felt very humbled by them because, even though they were disadvantaged, they were doing community service. I wanted to make a contribution. I wanted to give them the opportunity to practice their oral English skills informally and to develop their confidence to mix with people from beyond the slum.

Why is it important for your students to improve their English conversation skills?

It's important because I see it as one of the things that can mark them out in a very competitive India. English skills are a way for them to have an economic future.

What would you like your students to achieve?

Although many of them have good written English, they don't often have the chance to hear natural English modeled or to speak English outside school. We spend a lot of time talking together.

What do you enjoy about teaching?

The students are wonderful. They are hungry for knowledge, experience and opportunity, and to understand the world.

Slum students now online

A generous donation of computers by the New Zealand High Commission first sparked the idea. What was it that Asha could offer children from the slums that would truly bring them opportunities in life? Something that wasn't provided by local schools but was of great educational and vocational value. From these musings Asha's computer literacy classes were born.

The classes, run by skilled local teachers, are conducted at all Asha centres. The curriculum is designed to teach students computer skills including a basic knowledge of computer hardware as well as an introduction to MS Word, Excel and Power Point.

While some local schools do have computers, students are often prohibited from using them or find that the equipment is already broken and unusable. Asha's computer literacy students have greatly enjoyed the small class sizes, with only two people sharing a computer at any time.

The latest and most exciting addition to the computer literacy syllabus is access to the internet. Broadband internet connections have now been installed at Asha centres, not only allowing students to learn how to surf the net for information, but also providing them with the opportunity to create their own email addresses. Students have already been using their new accounts to email Dr Kiran Martin, Asha's Director, with their thoughts and praise.

At the conclusion of the eight weeks, students undertake a proficiency test before receiving a certificate to mark the successful completion of their course. The large number of students attending the classes attests to the popularity of Asha's computer literacy program.



Enthusiastic students enjoying their new internet access

Bal Mandal children improve the environment



Bal Mandal members planting trees to revitalise their neighbourhood

During recent weeks Asha has been seeking new ways to motivate and encourage members of our children's groups, the Bal Mandals, to become involved in solving local environmental issues.

As part of their involvement with the Bal Mandals, the children already hold weekly sanitation drives in their individual lanes to ensure that the slum is kept as clean as possible.

Among the new environmental improvement initiatives debuted in September, children have been encouraging households to keep garbage bins in order to reduce the build up of rubbish in lanes. The children have also been ensuring that the water in air-coolers is not left stagnant. This important step helps prevent the spread of illnesses such as dengue fever and malaria.

With the motivation of the staff of Asha, many children have also started to grow plants in simple pots at their homes; an activity that is not only very enjoyable but also encourages the children to take on environmental responsibility.

With India facing enormous environmental pressures, it is increasingly important for the next generation to take significant steps towards addressing environmental issues. By raising awareness and showing that everyone can do something to improve their natural surroundings, the Bal Mandal children are leading the way.

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.

Dan Pooley, a long-term supporter, was sponsored to drive a classic car from Southampton to Scotland to raise funds for Asha. The car was nearly 50 years old and had been off the road for 26 years. After some restoration work however, the car and Dan were ready for their journey. The 1500 mile adventure was a great way to combine fundraising with an existing passion.

A cake stall raised funds for Asha on a Sunday at St Stephen's Church, East Twickenham. Michael Wallace staged the sale between services as part of his general fundraising prior to working in India as an Asha volunteer.

A team from Southampton raised considerable funds for Asha by organising a meal and cinema trip for 200. Guests were invited to a large curry house for an Indian buffet before adjourning to a local cinema to watch a private screening of the new "Indiana Jones" film.

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

- **£15** can buy a student stationery for one year
- **£30** can purchase course books for one year
- **£55** can provide a student with new clothes
- **£170** can cover university course fees for one year

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Address _____

City _____ Postcode _____

County _____

Only if you wish to Gift Aid your donation:

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 Charity Registration No. XR 37459

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American Society for Health for All (ASHA)

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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.
- I want to contribute particularly towards _____
- Please keep me informed about **Asha's** activities. My email is _____

Full name & title _____ Organization (if any) _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip code _____

State _____

ASHA CURRENCY CONVERTER

- **\$25** can buy a student stationery for one year
- **\$50** can purchase course books for one year
- **\$100** can provide a student with new clothes
- **\$300** can cover university course fees for one year

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