

NEWS

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for friends of asha

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

A Celebration of Learning

On Saturday, 8th August, a large audience gathered at the India Habitat Centre to celebrate one of the most momentous occasions in Asha's history - 177 young people from slums successfully gaining places at Delhi University and in other institutes of higher education.

The star of the show was Bina Kumari, a resident of Govindpuri slum in Kalkaji. She was not daunted by the presence of Mr P Chidambaram, India's Home Minister, or the many guests present as she stood on the specially-placed step that allowed her to reach the microphone. Bina spoke of her family's poverty and many problems, her struggle to get an education, and how Asha helped her to gain university admission and everything she needed for the course. She also spoke about the need for gender equality, and received resounding applause as she ended by saying, "with enough determination, no challenge is insurmountable".

Before this, Dr Kiran Martin had welcomed the guests and stressed why Asha's work in higher education was so important. She concluded that the evening was a night of equality, of advocacy and, "most of all, it is a night of hope: for these students, their families, and the countless slum children they will inspire".

Mr P Chidambaram, the Chief Guest, spoke of how Asha has succeeded in removing some of the barriers to fulfilling one's potential that are inherent in slum life. He said, "Asha cannot take the child out of the slum, but what it has done is to take the slum out of the child".

Mr Jack van Ham, General Director of ICCO, Netherlands, an important funder of Asha's projects, presided over the event, and he and Guests of Honour Professor Deepak Pental, Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, and David Hempton, Alonzo L McDonald Professor at Harvard University, all gave inspiring speeches that emphasised how much can be achieved with the benefit of education. HE Mr Rupert Holborow, New Zealand's High Commissioner, and Mr Mohan Tanksale, Executive Director of Punjab National Bank, joined the other guests on the dias.

The audience was delighted to see students, representing a wide range of colleges and courses, joining Mr Chidambaram, Dr Martin and the other guests on the stage as they received their scholarship certificates, and applauded the success of every student who was present. The students represented numerous Delhi University colleges and other institutions, and are enrolled on courses covering languages, arts, science and business.



▲ **Mr. P Chidambaram, India's Home Minister, Mr Jack van Ham, General Director of ICCO, Netherlands, and Dr. Kiran Martin, Founder & Director of Asha with some of the students**

Veena – reaching higher with help from Asha



Veena lost her father to a chronic disease when she was 14 years old. Her father's illness had propelled the family into financial chaos; medical bills soared and after his death, their debt increased with every passing day. Veena's two older brothers dropped out of school to work, and have been supporting the family ever since. An excellent student until Class 9, Veena's family's situation caused her to face a huge academic setback, and she came very close to dropping out of school many times.

She felt guilty for thinking of higher education as her brothers struggled to make ends meet, and she found it difficult to study as she spent most of her time tutoring younger children to earn money for her family. Asha helped Veena to complete high school, and to understand the long-term benefits of a university education.

Today, Veena is taking a degree in Tourism at the College of Vocational Studies, Delhi University, and hopes to get a good job when she graduates.

◀ **According to Veena "Nobody has done anything as much as Asha has done for me. Now I have a bright future"**

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

Small people with big dreams – Asha’s Child Advocacy programme

"It's important to be able to dream big for the future, and to have role models who have achieved those dreams - it's good to see so many young people here who dare to dream big despite their circumstances", said Ms. Julia Gillard, the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia. Ms Gillard spoke these words after she met Diwakar from an Asha slum called Kanak Durga, who made the journey from a neglected child with no dreams at all to a smart young man pursuing the Bachelors of Arts course at Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi University.

Children of all ages spoke that day and made us so proud. They spoke confidently, displaying maturity far ahead of their years - kids determined to make their slum and the world a better place. Perhaps Ms. Gillard realised this when she went on to say, "some of you should consider politics as a career, that's where you can make a huge difference!".

Almost everyone who meets children from our slums asks the same question – how have they come so far? The process starts with Asha’s Child Advocacy programme.

The programme has been running for many years, but it has never stopped developing. In Asha slum areas, children as young as 7 are well aware of their rights. They are taught to be responsible for their area from the start, and to set a good example. As they learn, they are encouraged to make sure that other members of their community develop awareness on health matters as well as social issues and problems that arise within the community.

The number of children in Bal Mandals in each area is usually a small percentage of each slum’s population, and yet they have a surprising amount of influence.



▲ Australia’s Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, with Diwakar, a student from Kanak Durga, during her visit

(continued ...)

News in Brief

LIGHTING UP THE SLUMS

We're very grateful to Jeffrey Field of the University of Pennsylvania for providing Asha with solar lights. They will be distributed in a number of slum areas – some will go to students, who often need to study in the evenings when the slum environment is quieter, and one or two will be used in Asha clinics or resource centres.

A TESTING TIME FOR BAL MANDAL CHILDREN

All Bal Mandal children recently took part in a quiz that tested the knowledge they had gained as a result of their regular meetings. Staff are now planning further ways to make learning fun, including new quiz questions being posed where the children can go and find out the answers for themselves.

NAPA VALLEY FUNDRAISER

The Napa Valley Asha Day Fundraiser on September 12th was a success as always. Congressman Mike Thompson introduced Dr. Martin to an audience of about 100 people from Napa County and the San Francisco Bay Area who were gathered at the Alpha Omega Winery for the event. Dr. Martin made a power-point presentation in which she shared the momentous event "A Celebration of Learning" that was covered by newspapers from India, UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

The donations raised in Napa Valley will go a long way towards helping the young people from Asha slums who are attending college.

L to R: Congressman Mike Thompson, Mrs. Janet Thompson, Dr. Kiran Martin, Mr Kailash Chaudhary, and Mrs. Gisela Chaudhary

VOLUNTEERS

A big thank you to Jade Brewer, Jane Grey, Sophie Leng, Hazel Clark and Sara Beech who have done a great job of teaching children English in various slum areas over the past weeks and months.

IMMUNISATION COVERAGE IMPROVED

With so many other new activities to be involved in, Asha staff have had to work hard to ensure that long-term targets are met. We are pleased to report that immunisation targets are still being reached for the immunisations against tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, typhoid and hepatitis B.

CAREER WORKSHOPS FOR A NEW YEAR

This year's batch of Class 12 students have already been able to benefit from workshops run by Asha. They have started discussing potential courses and careers that would suit them, and are looking forward to discovering more in future sessions.



News in Brief – continued..

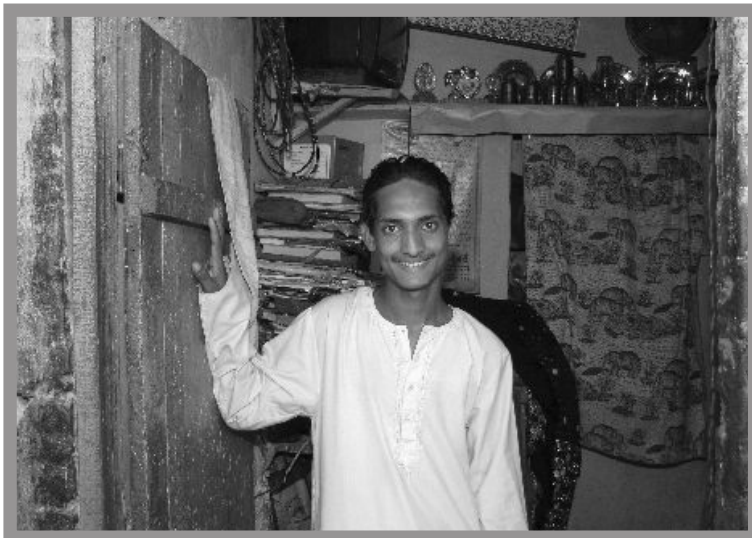
CHILD MORTALITY RATES AND ASHA

Unicef recently reported that although child mortality (the number of deaths of children under 5 out of every 1000 live births) is decreasing, South Asia continues to have worryingly high child mortality figures. The child mortality rate in Asha slum areas (29.71) is markedly lower than that of India (76), demonstrating the difference that good, affordable healthcare and community education can make. The queues at Asha's polyclinic, slum-based and mobile clinics show how clearly Asha's health message is being heard, and we expect to see child mortality reducing further as a result.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION INCREASING

Asha staff are currently busy helping residents of many areas complete loan forms for various reasons, as many more can benefit from the newly-available financial services. In addition, people who already have bank accounts (particularly senior school pupils, university students and Mahila Mandal members), are being shown how to operate ATM machines, and work is continuing to encourage the habit of saving in slum communities in general.

Meet another of our inspirational students



▲ Salimuddin – now a Political Science student

Salimuddin was born in Seelampur slum colony, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods of Delhi. For most of his life, Salimuddin's family has only been able to afford one meal per day, often being forced to make do with just bread and salt. Salimuddin's father suffers from epilepsy and is unable to work. As the eldest of 4 siblings, Salimuddin has worked multiple jobs since the age of 12 in order to provide for his family. One of his past jobs involved stripping the plastic covering from scrap wire for recycling, earning only Rs. 2 (about US\$0.04 or £0.03) per kg.

Striking the balance between school and work has been a constant struggle for Salimuddin, as his family's lack of money forced him to continue working during his Class 12 Board exams. Unable to find time during the day, Salimuddin would study on his roof under the light of a candle at night. "Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine being able to go to college one day. I was so sure that I have to start working full-time immediately after school ended" he said.

Asha staff had to do a lot of work to convince Salimuddin's parents that it would be worthwhile for him to enter college. He is now in Delhi University's Shyam Lal College

and studying for an honours degree in Political Science. Salimuddin walks around with a huge smile on his face these days, for he knows that he has taken the first few steps towards a better life for his family and himself.

Bikers travelling overland to Asha

Two Asha supporters are a few weeks into an epic motorcycle ride from Weston Super Mare in the UK to Delhi in aid of Asha as well as Weston Hospicicare. Simon Chegwyn and Richard Evans are keen bikers and have spent a lot of time preparing their bikes - a Honda Transalp and a Royal Enfield respectively - for the journey, and are paying all their own costs for the trip.

They are also equipped with cards, a banner and plenty of stickers to make sure that everyone is aware of the reason for their efforts. You can follow their progress, donate or leave them a message by visiting www.delhibikechallenge2009.com. We look forward to greeting Simon and Richard when they arrive early next month, and hope that Asha will gain new supporters as people meet them along the way.



(... continued) Small people with big dreams – Asha's Child Advocacy programme

The Bal Mandal children made a great contribution to Asha's recent success in getting 437 children (212 boys and 225 girls) admitted to school for this academic year, which started last July. They continue to ensure that their peers attend school, and approach school headteachers or children's parents when there are attendance issues, or when other problems arise. Over the last couple of years, Bal Mandal children have formalised their work in taking care of the elderly residents of their areas and have increased their work to make the slum environment more pleasant, and yet they still find time to enjoy the Asha resource centres and to work hard at school! Many areas are having to form new Bal Mandals as there is so much interest from children who would like to join, and the groups need to remain a manageable size.

Continual training is necessary to keep the knowledge of Bal Mandals up to date - in the last 3 months, the children have been trained on smoking, alcohol abuse and their consequences, child marriage and child rights, child labour, and the importance of protecting the environment. These topics help them to complement the work of the Mahila Mandals (women's groups), and they reach more people within the communities than the women would be able to do alone. The children are a credit to their families and communities, and are sure to be the same as adults.

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 fortunate to have had several UK supporters who have gone to a huge amount of physical effort to raise funds for Asha recently. In July, Luke McCullough, Amy McCullough, Will Tenbroeke and Sarah Compson completed the 3 Peaks Challenge - climbing Ben Nevis, driving 7 hours to Scafell Pike, climbing that, driving a further 5 hours to Snowdon and then climbing that too....all within 24 hours.

Paul Wratten, Mark Barnes and Colin Barnes also undertook an extremely tough physical challenge for Asha - trekking over the 15 highest peaks in Snowdonia within 24 hours. Disaster struck during the challenge, as after the team set off at 12am, walked for 12 hours and were on course for an 18 or 19 hour finish, Mark had a bad fall, breaking some ribs. The walk had to be abandoned, and it was lucky that Mark wasn't more seriously hurt or killed. The team had already done a great job of fundraising, and they are hoping to attempt the challenge again next year. Our thanks to them and all our challenge fundraisers for their bravery!

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.

Alternatively, you can visit www.asha-india.org/HowYouCanHelp/Giving.aspx to donate online in a choice of currencies.

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 _____

County _____

ASHA CURRENCY CONVERTER

- **\$35 - will provide full medical care and vaccinations for a child's first year of life**
- **\$80 - will provide course books for a college student for 2 years**
- **\$165 - will provide the treatment needed to put 10 TB patients on the road to recovery**
- **\$165 - will pay for books for a 16-year old until he/she finishes school**
- **\$300 - will pay to train a CHV and equip her for 1 year**
- **\$820 - will cover university course fees for 3 years**

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