

NEWS

Issue #53

January 2012

for friends of asha

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

ASHA WISHES ALL ITS SUPPORTERS A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Join Asha in helping 500 slum children achieve higher education this year

Whenever Tarannum hears that there is an exam preparation or career counseling workshop scheduled, so eager is she to attend that she runs rather than walks to the Asha Community Centre in Zakhira. Tarannum is in Class XII, her last year of high school. Her family lives in an extremely noisy and polluted corner of Zakhira slum colony. Her father has suffered a disabling injury and is unable to work. Her two brothers are working but the family's total income is only \$120/£85 per month, hardly enough to support the 11 members living in a small hut less than 80 square feet in area.

The thing you notice most about Tarannum, Zakhira Team Leader Shiny remarks, is that she is always studying. She has been involved in the children's group and then youth group ever since Asha began working in Zakhira a few years ago. After becoming involved in empowerment activities, Tarannum's inner talents began to shine through. It was then that her desire to study and become something in life was awakened. She closely watched other girls in Zakhira like Priyanka and Pooja who were among the first in the slum to go to college. She was so motivated by their example that she will do anything to get there. No other person in her family has ever been to college.

Her family at first were against Tarannum continuing her education. After extensive counselling by Asha staff, they agreed not to oppose her going to college, but they expressed their helplessness in contributing financially in any way. But we see so much potential in Tarannum and would like to do anything possible to help her fulfill her dream. Everyone who meets her sees the look of great hope and expectation in her eyes.



Tarannum outside her one-room home in the slum



Asha students attending a preparation workshop

poorest students that cover tuition fees, new clothes for university and other expenses. Asha staff are there supporting the students throughout their entire journey.

But in the past 9 months, Asha has had to cut its budgets dramatically after losing around half its funding, when two Dutch organizations, who were supporting our work to the tune of €340,000 annually, suddenly ceased funding us. We are asking for your help to the maximum extent so we can meet the needs of all these Class XII children and have the joy of seeing them go on to higher education. It costs £450/\$700 per year to send one student to college. Asha has a goal of sending 5,000 children to University within the next 5 years. We really need your assistance if we are going to be able to achieve our target and turn this higher education initiative into a movement.

If you wish to donate for our children aspiring to college, please visit www.asha-india.org/getinvolved/donate

This year there are more than 500 children like Tarannum in Asha slums; students studying in Class XII who are full of enthusiasm and seize every opportunity to improve themselves and their education. All of them wish to do well in their board exams and aspire to go on to higher education later this year. We are hoping that we will have the resources to help them all.

Asha does everything possible to help a child like Tarannum to get to University. Tarannum is taking exams in March in Political Science, English, Hindi and History. Other students study business, science and mathematics. We provide supplementary books for studies. In addition we give sample exam papers and provide sessions for students in time management, study preparation and career counselling. After the students finish their exams, Asha helps them decide on a course of higher education and helps them through the tricky application process. We provide education scholarships for the



A group of slum students outside their college

Kiran's Letter

Dear friends,

I recently had the immense privilege of visiting Australia and New Zealand. I would like to thank the wonderful people of these countries for the warm welcome and generous hospitality I received there. I had the pleasure of meeting with a wide variety of people and sharing with them the conditions of the Delhi slums and the work of Asha among the urban poor. Among those I met with were the Hon John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Hon Quentin Bryce AC CVO, the Governor General of Australia, and the Hon Alex Chernov AO QC, Governor of Victoria.

The principal reason for traveling so widely and speaking with so many different people, from Government leaders to academics, is to spread, on a global scale, the message of hope and the importance of human rights that Asha brings to the slum residents of Delhi. Part of Asha's mission is global engagement and this means



Dr Martin with the Hon John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand at a private meeting in Wellington

advocating for wider policy and attitude change in the fight against poverty, both here in India and internationally. I believe that we must try and make a difference at all levels. At the same time as we are giving a vaccination to a small child in one of Delhi's slums, we are petitioning government representatives to make lasting improvements to the circumstances of the poor.



The Hon Quentin Bryce AC CVO, the Governor General of Australia, meeting with Dr Martin in Canberra

I consider this as one of Asha's most important goals and I want our supporters to know that, by assisting Asha, you too are a vital part of our advocacy work. Not only are you helping a child to college or enabling a poor family to take a business loan, whether you give a small donation of few dollars or pounds or a larger donation, you are part of a wider effort to help all people in slums have more opportunities to eliminate poverty on a sustainable basis. Almost 95% of Asha's funding comes from the support of individuals like yourselves and I cannot stress enough that it is your small donations that are driving our work and making a difference in the larger fight against injustice.

As we start the new year, I am uncertain of the challenges that coming 12 months will bring. But I ask you to stand beside me and Asha in solidarity and with a strong conviction as we face these difficulties. I am sure that with God's help we can face the most enormous of challenges and achieve all things that are in our hearts.

With my warmest wishes for the New Year,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kiran Martin'.

Kiran Martin

To visit Asha is to discover that there is hope

Those of us who live in relative comfort and affluence are not without challenges. One of these is to reconcile our lifestyles with the images of poverty which we see on our TVs. We know that we must not ignore injustice, hunger and disease. But how can we connect with those in need? Can any of us really make a difference?

In 2001 Dr Kiran Martin visited my church in Northern Ireland. Her story touched hearts and stirred a resolve to do something practical. Some men with building skills responded to the need for a clinic in one of Delhi's slums – and so our journey with Asha began.

Ten years on we have returned from our sixth visit to Delhi's slums, this year doing building work in Ambedkar Basti and teaching in Mayapuri. In both we encountered those who were poor materially, but rich in courage and resourcefulness and, as before, our lives were touched. It still amazes me that we can walk into the heart of a slum, with an Asha worker,



Gareth with a child at Mayapuri slum colony

disturb a man washing himself outside his door, a baking chapatti on an open fire. And all this in the busy contorted passageways between houses. It's a privilege to be welcomed where tourists can't go, to be invited to sit in a home, offer prayers for a man with asthma, a child with epilepsy.

To visit Asha is to discover that there is hope – the ill need not go without medication, the voice of the poorest is listened to, a child will be helped with her education, clean water will be there at the end of the lane. And we have been invited to join in this work.

As we come home we see the ripples spread among friends and churches. Asha is good news – it is good news to the poor and to those of us seeking an effective way to share our lives and resources.



Dr Martin with Gareth Williams and Barney Graham, Co-Leaders of the Ballymena Builders Team

By: Gareth Williams, Chairman Friends of Asha (Ireland)

A journey of hope for Mayapuri rag-pickers

Upon entering Mayapuri slum the immediate sounds and smells, the odours of grease, smoke and burning rubber and the noise of a thousand hammers, can be overpowering. And yet while carefully picking a way through the scrap dealerships, the automotive shops and the small factories, amidst piles of rubbish and spare parts and men working on rusting metal wrecks, it is impossible to miss the small children darting among the heaps of trash. Hair unkempt and barefoot, kids as young as 5 sift through junk, looking for spare bits of metal in the dirt and trash mounds. These they sell on to scrap dealers, handing the money over to their parents. For these children, there is no school or play, no hope of a better life. More than 80,000 people work as rag-pickers in Delhi and at least 20 million children are engaged in child labour in India.



A small child at Mayapuri trying to find something worth being sold in a heap of rubbish

However for a group of 10 year old boys gathered at the Asha centre in Mayapuri, there is a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel. The kids describe their lives before they came to Asha. They started work at 6 am in the scrap heaps and finished only by evening, foregoing school, rest and even meals. But a rag-picking child can earn up to 200 rupees per day (\$4/£2.50), as much as an adult daily labourer, so sending their children to work is too lucrative for most parents to turn down. But it's a dangerous profession. The children often hammer out metal before selling it, and the boys in the centre showed numerous wounds and scars on arms, legs and feet that were the result of accidents.

But when the rag-pickers of Mayapuri met Thresi, the head of Asha's Community Programme in Mayapuri, their lives changed dramatically. Some had occasionally gone to school but had sparse attendance or had dropped out when their parents pressured them to work. Thresi started encouraging them to come to the children's group at the Asha centre. She motivated them to return to school, counselled parents and spoke to school principals to get them readmitted. Now all 15 boys in the group are going to school.



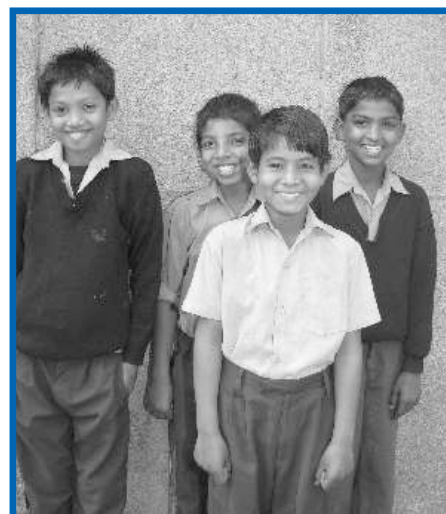
Rag-picking children typically start at a young age and work in appalling conditions

their clothes clean, as a matter of self-respect and as the number one way to prevent illness. The effect is calmer and more responsible behaviour as well as improved performance at school. Now the students are able to articulate that they don't want to be rag-pickers and scrap dealers forever. They have ambitions like joining the police and army after school. One boy, Abhishek, says he wants to attend an English language school. The kids now understand the importance of studies and are determined to continue with their education.

This is a rough and tumble gang, but they are also by nature bright, sincere and anxious to please. When asked the things they most enjoy, the boys list simple pleasures like eating their favourite foods and playing with their friends, but additionally every child said that studying and going to school was one of their favourite things. They eagerly show the arts and crafts that they have made in the Asha children's group and describe how much Thresi has helped them; how she is like a mother to them.

Thresi explains that beyond motivating the children to go to school, she also encourages them to improve their hygiene, to bathe and keep

The boys still face many challenges in their lives. Aadesh says that his mother doesn't want him to go to school from 12-6pm because he misses half a day of work. She only permits him to go if he has worked all morning. Another child, Sunil complained that he was hungry because his mother hadn't given him breakfast and



Aadesh, Abhishek and their friends get ready to go to school

others chimed in that they often go without food at home on certain days. Fortunately, lunch is provided at government schools, so the boys get at least one nutritious meal per day.

Thresi knows that her struggle to help the rag-picker children of Mayapuri is by no means ended. She is still up against some of the bitterest poverty in Delhi and parents who are illiterate and unaware of the merits of education. She said she used to be disheartened, afraid that all her efforts would go waste. But the success of children like these has given her new strength and determination. 'My ambition,' Thresi firmly states, 'is that one day 100% of children in Mayapuri slum will go to school and that many will go on to university.'



Thresi leads an awareness session at the Mayapuri resource centre

If you wish to donate for our community programme in Mayapuri, please visit www.asha-india.org/getinvolved/donate

Impressions of Asha

At Asha we are privileged to have friends and supporters from all over the world who have pledged their support to Asha in many ways. A few of them share their thoughts on Asha here.



We gathered a team of different medical practitioners from our local hospital. Now the idea is to leave sustainable skills; there's no point in parachuting people in if we can't teach the locals. But it's always true that coming to a place like Asha and India changes us and I think all of us have undergone amazing change. We just hope that we can go back, pass on the message of what we've learnt and support the ongoing work of Asha in the future.

Dr Louise Dolan, Consultant Rheumatologist from South London Healthcare Trust

(Left) Dr Louise Dolan examining a patient at the Asha Polyclinic

I look back thinking why did I not go to Asha from almost day one and start to work with the kids in Zakhira? I said to them I was going to speak at an Asha function and what do you want me to say? One of my brightest students said, 'I think you have to tell them that we're respectable.' And I thought, it's an extraordinary thing to say; for most of us this isn't something we would say. But these kids who have so little, they want you to know they're very good people. They're respectable people, they deserve our time and for me it's been a great experience working with them.

Mrs Margaret Varghese, English Teaching Volunteer and wife of the Australian High Commissioner to India



Margaret with community members at Kusumpur slum colony



Dr Martin with Prof Rob Moodie at the Nossal Institute for Global Health

We were very lucky to have Dr Kiran Martin talk with our staff at the Nossal Institute. What was particularly striking in Kiran's presentation was the focus on building relationships of value and warmth, not only with those that would benefit from Asha's work – but also with those, such as slum lords who might fear that they would be disadvantaged. Kiran said "I wanted to speak to what was good in the man" which reminded me of the line in Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "Success" – "to see the best in others".

Her talk was a very clear exposition of the role that peacemaking and non violence play as integral parts of good health. And lastly she spoke of her own journey – "I was so sure when I started and I am full of doubts now". For those who study leadership, Kiran so profoundly manifests the rare and paradoxical combination of fierce resolve and humility, which Jim Collins the author of "Good to Great" describes.

Prof Rob Moodie, Chair of Global Health, Nossal Institute for Global Health (University of Melbourne), on a talk given by Dr Martin at the Nossal Institute during her trip to Australia this October

As always when we come to Asha, we have received so much more than we ever could give. From the smiling waves and faces of greeting from the children on our arrival to the warm hugs of the staff and volunteers, it truly felt for me like coming home. The children's eagerness to learn English through games, songs and conversation has humbled many of the team and caused them to think about their own attitudes to learning. In all that we have seen, we have learned so much about India and about ourselves.

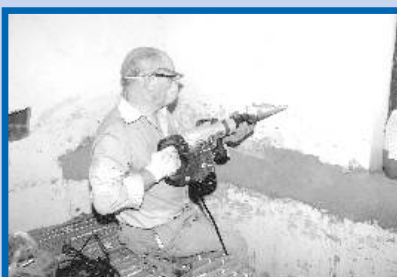
Ms Toni Bassett, Team Leader, Ballymena Academy Team, Northern Ireland

(Right) The Ballymena Academy team brightened up the walls at our centre in Tigri slum colony



It has been really good to get to know people living in the slums and gaining insight into the lives of slum dwellers. It makes you feel both fortunate, but also responsible to help give others a fairer chance. It has been great to see all the many ways Asha works in the slums, empowering people and improving lives.

Ms Bethany Hamilton, Volunteer, UK

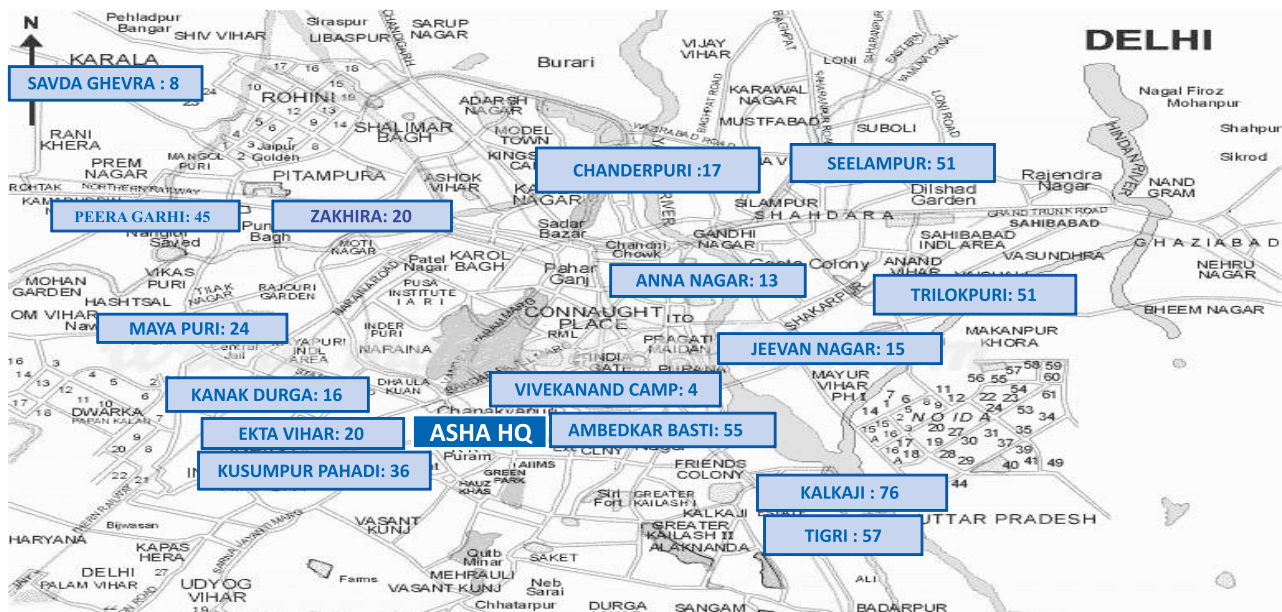


(Left) Ballymena builders redesigned and rebuilt our community centre at Dr Ambedkar slum colony

(Right) Teaching students from the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne with school children at Kalkaji slum colony



A Map of Asha High School Students Aspiring to go to University



There are 508 students in Asha slums in their last year of high school and aspiring to attend University. This is a map of Delhi showing Asha areas and how many aspiring college students are in each. Many of you have been to one of these slums. You may personally know some of these students. With our current funding crisis, Asha doesn't know if we will have the funds to help all of them, but we really don't want to have brought them so far for nothing. We hope that you will come alongside us and raise funds so we can send all these children to college.

News In Brief

ASHA WOMEN'S GROUPS STEP FORWARD TO HELP PEOPLE IN THEIR SLUMS

To overcome the problem of inadequate lighting at Zakhira slum colony, the Women's Group of the slum liaised with authorities to get street lights installed across the slum. They also had the authorities construct drains to prevent flooding during rains.

Mahila Mandals in Seelampur, Kusumpur, Trilokpuri and other slum colonies have also been regularly helping out elderly and seriously ill residents by providing them with nutrition and food support when their families are not able to manage.

The groups also find some time out to enjoy together. Mahila Mandals at Seelampur and Trilokpuri slum colonies recently organized joint lunches where women from different social and cultural backgrounds shared meals together. The group at Zakhira organised a trip to Agra for everyone.

In both work and leisure, the Asha women's groups promote equality, justice for all and peace through community harmony and helping those in need, truly a practical expression of human rights.



Women's group at Dr Ambedkar Basti providing food supplies to an elderly lady



Asha Children's groups conducting a rally for education rights

ASHA CHILDREN'S GROUPS ORGANISE RALLIES AND HELP THE ELDERLY IN THEIR SLUMS

Asha children's groups are designed to empower young people in slums by improving their communication skills and self confidence and instilling the habits of good citizenship and responsibility. The kids in these groups engage in fun activities while helping their community at the same time.

Members of children's groups from all Asha slums organised health and education rallies to raise awareness amongst people of the community. The children's group in Jeevan Nagar rallied against drugs and alcoholism, and the children from Zakhira, Anna Nagar and Coolie Camp organised sanitation drives in their slums.

During Diwali, the children decorated and sold clay lamps known as diyas to raise money to give the traditional Diwali sweets to the poor elderly folks living in their slums. In Dr Ambedkar Basti, the children also donated food for one month to an old lady abandoned by her family from their monthly contributions.

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.

In the US, a student group led by Shivani Patel from New York University organised their annual Garbha, (a traditional Gujarati dance) and donated all the proceeds to Asha. The event was a big success and the students also spread Asha's message of giving hope to the people of the slums.

In the UK, people have been literally sweating to help Asha! Peter Barbour participated in a race called Survival of the Fittest in London, a 10K event that started and ended in Battersea power station, with 16 army-like physical challenges in-between. And Francis Martin ran the Salisbury Half Marathon to raise money for Asha college students in preparation of coming out next year to Delhi as a volunteer.

***There are all sorts of things you could do to raise funds for Asha.
If you organise something, 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 ASHA 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, you can donate online or via check.

To donate online, please visit our website at www.asha-india.org/getinvolved/donate and follow the simple steps to make your payment via a secure server. This is the simplest and most cost-effective way for us to receive your donation.

If you want to donate by cheque please fill in your details below, write a cheque made payable to "**ASHA COMMUNITY HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**" (*cheques must be in this name*) and post it to us at:

The Administrator, Asha Society, Ekta Vihar, RK Puram Sector 6, New Delhi - 110022, INDIA.

Posting named checks 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 _____

Zip code _____ State _____

How we will put your money to work

- **\$20** - will support a children's computer literacy programme at one slum for three months
- **\$40** - will guarantee a child full medical care and vaccinations for the first year of its life
- **\$100** - will provide a student with new clothes for university
- **\$150** - will support the activities of a women's group for six months
- **\$510** - will train and equip a Community Health Volunteer with medical supplies for one year
- **\$700** - will cover all university expenses for one child for one year

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