



NEWS for friends of asha

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

The achievements and ambitions of the Peera Garhi students

INSIDE THIS ISSUE :



Governor of Victoria visits Asha

Page 2



Women from Kusumpur fight for better roads

Page 3



Christmas celebrations in Delhi slums

Page 5



David, the Peera Garhi area Team Leader (centre), with (l-r) Tarun, Varsha, Premlata and Sulekha, local college students



A typical lane in Peera Garhi slum colony

For young people in Peera Garhi, college education has opened up a world of new possibilities. Varsha plans to join the Indian Foreign Service, travel the world and learn new languages; Sulekha wants to become a lawyer and Premlata a researcher. Anil, a recent graduate, has secured a job at a large multi-national company.

“What she'll learn, she'll eat”, asserts Anita Sharma, the proud mother of Simmi, a college student from Peera Garhi. In the small room that the family of four share, Simmi declares that she wants to become a police officer and provide safety for young girls.

Many slum dwellers see university as an unrealistic dream. But, four years ago, the Asha mobile health bus started visiting Peera Garhi. Alongside providing healthcare services, the bus serves as a hub for Asha's education projects in the area.

Numerous challenges stand in the way of higher education. Despite Varsha having one of the best exam results in her area, her parents wanted her to get married after high school. With encouragement and later financial support from Asha, she managed to persuade them otherwise.

Financial difficulties at the time of Premlata's college admission might have prevented her from going, had Asha not stepped in and paid most of the fees.

Alongside providing new career opportunities, college offers personal development for the young people of Peera Garhi. Tarun used to think that a girl's place was at home, but today he is an Asha ambassador and encourages girls to opt for college. The girls have found a new independence travelling outside their area by themselves.

The students of Peera Garhi have defied every challenge thrown in their way to escape the cycle of poverty they were born into, and are growing into confident, skilled and ambitious young people. Asha plans to build a permanent centre in the area. The walls are already in place, but funding that was promised has not been delivered yet. Once this centre is completed, students will have a permanent space to study in, as well as full-time support from the Asha team!

The health benefits of the practice of gratitude, and ways to practise



Dear friends,

Following on from my previous reflection on the power of gratitude, I would like to share my thoughts on the health benefits of gratitude. The consistent practice of gratitude has remarkable effects on our health and longevity. We have a much better sense of well being, much lower anxiety and depression levels, and higher levels of optimism. We also feel much more socially connected, and much less likely to be angry. Our sleep quality is much better. Our resting Blood Pressure is lower. Rigorous scientific research has demonstrated that our levels of good cholesterol (HDL) are raised, and those of bad cholesterol (LDL) go down. Furthermore, our serum creatinine levels are also kept low, keeping our kidneys in good shape.

One of the best ways to practise gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal. You can write 5 things you are grateful for every day, and then notice the effects on your health and happiness levels over time. In fact, you can decide to do this as a family, and keep gratitude lists together. You can also write a gratitude letter to someone who means a lot to you. Kids can be encouraged to write gratitude letters to their teachers or mentors. I think it's very powerful when you go to the person and read out the letter you have written. When you do this, it establishes a meaningful social connection, and that leads to an experience of joy. With kids, you can encourage them to tell you three things they are grateful for every night before they go to bed. Throughout the day, they will keep thinking of the things they are going to talk about.

The practice of gratitude is therefore a skill that can be acquired through training, and yields wonderful results! With my best wishes.

Kiran

Dr Kiran Martin

Governor of Victoria visits Asha



Mr Chernov addressing the women and students at Kanak Durga

On 17th February, Asha was delighted to host a visit from Hon Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria, and his wife, Mrs Elizabeth Chernov. Together with members of the board of Australian Friends of Asha, they visited Kanak Durga slum colony.

The delegation heard from women who narrated their journey towards empowerment, whilst students shared stories of their experiences at university and work. Mr Chernov thanked the

community for their warm welcome, and promised to be back again soon. He remarked, "It is spectacular to see the women who have taken care of this Asha community, and the students who have developed so well. All I can say is it's inspirational and I congratulate everybody."

In the evening, Asha and the Australian High Commission hosted a joint reception to honour the Governor. The event was attended by many Asha supporters.

Nine students from Asha slums were presented with awards to recognise their achievements in high school exams, during internships and as Asha Student Ambassadors.

Mr Chernov, Dr Kiran and acting Australian High Commissioner, Mr Bernard Philip spoke about the close ties between Australia and Asha. Babita, an

Asha Student Ambassador from Dr Ambedkar slum colony, then had the entire audience almost in tears as she narrated the journey of her life, concluding with the happy news that she has managed to secure a job in a prestigious research institute.

With the continued support from the High Commission, and the people and government of Australia, Asha hopes to reach many such landmarks with its students in the years to come.



Shubham from Kusumpur slum colony receives the class 12 topper award from Governor Chernov

Women from Kusumpur fight for better roads

Kusumpur Pahadi, an Asha slum colony, sits in the heart of Delhi. Like other slum colonies, this area has narrow lanes with roads that are rapidly deteriorating. Apart from problems such as stagnant water and unhygienic surroundings, the poor state of the roads is making it hard for the residents to commute.

Kusumpur also suffers from water shortage, and the community relies on government-issued water tankers for a regular supply. However, these are unable to deliver water to some parts of the slum due to the terrible condition of the roads. Block-D of the slum colony is the worst affected section with water tankers unable to reach its population of over 1,200 people.

“The residents have to walk through a long stretch to reach the water tankers, and then carry water all the way back. All the family members leave their work and

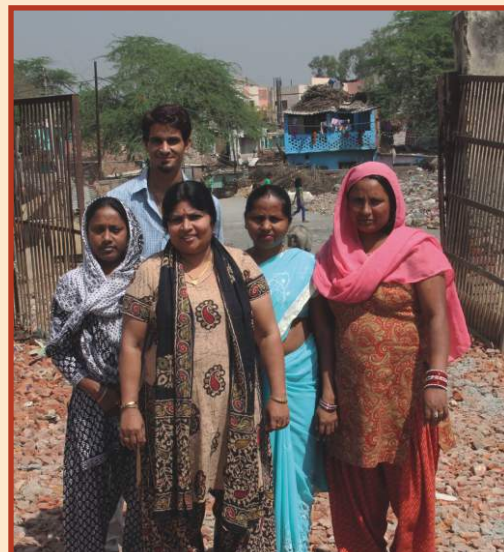
rush to the tanker,” recounts Pushpa, Asha Team Leader in Kusumpur.

After regular discussions during *Mabila Mandal* (Women's group) meetings it was decided to take this issue to their local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and request his help.

“We faced a lot of objection from some community members as it would stop their business of selling water to the people who had limited access to the tankers and also from other political parties. But we were determined to not give up” shares Sharda, a resident of Block-D, Kusumpur slum.

The MLA received the *Mabila Mandal* with much respect and promised his support and prompt action. Early March, the construction began.

With the progress in construction work and involvement of the MLA's team, the *Mabila Mandal* women feel proud that all their hard work is paying off.



Women from the *Mabila Mandal* and Asha team members at the road construction site

Helping Sunny regain his health

“I wish I had not been drawn towards various other medications, and had instead followed the correct advice from Asha staff,” Sunny confesses.

Sunny, a young resident of Dr Ambedkar Basti slum colony, has been recovering from Tuberculosis (TB) with regular Directly Observed Treatment Short course (DOTS) and has regained a positive outlook on life. But things were not the same a few months back.

Late last year Sunny started feeling weak and complained of consistently high fever and fatigue. He was unable to go to work and started staying at home.

At the time, Sunny's pregnant wife was receiving regular check-ups from Asha's Community Health Volunteer (CHV) and it was on one of these visits when CHV Meena noticed that Sunny was in great pain. She advised him to consult the doctor at the Asha Polyclinic as soon

as possible. But Sunny was adamant that a visit to a roadside quack would suffice.

Meena repeatedly counselled Sunny on a regular basis and ultimately coaxed him to consult a specialist doctor. He was diagnosed with P u l m o n a r y Tuberculosis and

DOTS medication was started immediately. However, Sunny was uncomfortable taking the medication and didn't stick to his treatment regime. The excitement of his son's birth made him neglect his own health further.

When Meena visited the family for a regular follow up, she learned about Sunny's negligence and deteriorating health, and urged him to continue with the DOTS medication. But Sunny would not listen.

Determined to help Sunny and his family, Meena and the local Asha team members persevered, and finally their efforts bore fruit after almost a month of daily counselling. Sunny finally stopped all other medications and resumed DOTS.

Initially Meena accompanied him to get his medication but today Sunny is himself ensuring that he adheres to the treatment. His health has improved significantly and the family is relieved. Sunny now regrets wasting two months and prolonging his illness through delaying the treatment.



Sunny, with his mother and child

IMPRESSIONS OF 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.

When I first came here, there was water lying everywhere, there was dirt, there were wires hanging down, the ceilings inside of the little houses coming down... I marvelled that a child could study in that particular environment. Now it's so different, it is so much like a little city. And one thing that transforms this community from my perspective is to have security of tenure, security of where you live. Because before this happened, before Kiran came, you had no security of where you live because people could take your property away from you. You've demonstrated that women are so strong when they are given the opportunity to participate in creating a community. Congratulations!

Hon Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria, Australia



Asha student ambassador, Nihal, welcomes Mr Chernov at Kanak Durga slum colony



This is our 2nd year visiting India with a group of postgraduate students from Monash University. We were fortunate enough last year to go to Jeevan Nagar slum and meet with Sweeta and Anita and all of the volunteers and children at the centre. We were welcomed with open arms and we didn't want to leave. Immediately, I started talking with my boss about how we can get another group of students out to India again the following year to work with children and teach them English through different mediums of arts and craft, singing, dancing. We are so honoured to be part of the Asha family and we look forward to coming back again year after year to receive those wonderful hugs - the power of touch is what we're taking away with us this year.

Rhian Adlam, Monash University, Australia

(In her address at the Music Concert organised to thank Asha volunteers)

It is great to be back in the Asha family here in Delhi. As a school teacher, one of the most important things that I do is to bring young people to India and I know they will also grow and benefit so much from being touched by the friendships that they will make at Kalkaji.

I can remember meeting Shabnam, a girl in Kalkaji High School 5 to 6 years ago. On the verge of despair, because she was a very bright girl and wanted to go to university but her parents didn't see the point of sending a girl to university. But Asha persuaded the parents. Now she has a BA and is studying for her MA. She wants to be a lecturer and I am sure that she will achieve that. A very determined young lady is Shabnam.

**Ruth McKibben,
Methodist College Belfast
(In her address at the Music Concert)**



I am really proud of the relationship that we have had with Asha for a couple of decades. And the reasons for that are obvious to anyone who has seen them in action, worked with them or experienced visiting the communities they work with. I have visited a number of the communities myself and it really is an inspiring experience. They help people to help themselves and for me, I think, the most important thing is that all of this is grounded in a very strong sense of human dignity. In a very strong sense of all of us being equal as human beings regardless of our background, and the recognition that talent exists not just in the affluent neighborhoods, it exists everywhere. It really is a magical formula that definitely explains their success not just here in Delhi but across the world.

**HE Feilim McLaughlin,
Ambassador of Ireland
(In his address at the Music Concert)**

Music concert to thank Asha volunteers

On 12th February, the Sri Sathya Sai Auditorium in Delhi was filled with much joy and Dr Kiran took to the stage to render a collection of old Bollywood classics in order to thank volunteer teams from Monash University, Australia and Methodist College, Belfast, Northern Ireland for their support. Irish Ambassador, HE Feilim McLaughlin, and Australian Deputy High Commissioner, Mr Bernard Philip, were Guests of Honour.

Asha Student Ambassador Ajay from Kusumpur Pahari slum, as well as representatives from the volunteer teams, spoke about their experiences with Asha. The talks concluded with HE McLaughlin and Mr Philip reflecting on the long-standing association between their respective countries and Asha.

Nearly 300 guests attended the concert. Dr Kiran's performance so enthralled the audience that they were cheering for each song amidst roaring applause.



Dr Kiran with the guests of honour lighting the lamp in the traditional Indian manner

Students gear up for their first professional endeavour

Throughout February, Asha was preparing students under its Higher Education Programme for upcoming internships. These provide valuable work experience and are often the first opportunity for students to be part of a professional environment. A day of workshops was delivered by Mr. Sidharth Malhotra, Asia Regional Training and Development Advisor at the British High Commission. Similar sessions were conducted in the following weeks by Asha's Internship Coordinators Louise Wilson, MarieFe Donaghue and Anurag Paul. The workshops were attended by around 200 students and covered the nuances of writing a resume, body language and Do's and Don'ts of job interviews.



Mr Malhotra delivers a presentation on interview techniques to Asha students

Kiran Gera prepares to cut the ceremonial ribbon with members of children's group



Asha inaugurates refurbished centre at Anna Nagar

Asha's community based centre in Anna Nagar was in a dilapidated state until a team of volunteers from Ballymena, Northern Ireland, spent a week refurbishing the building, together with the community. On December 17th, Asha's Programme Manager, Ms Kiran Gera, inaugurated the refurbished centre, amidst speeches, theatre and dances by local women and children. We are grateful to the supporters from Northern Ireland for all their help!

Asha children perform at eminent music school

Students from Asha slums gave a beautiful dance performance at the 75th Anniversary Celebrations of Bhaatkhande Sangit Vidyalaya, a prominent centre for classical Indian music in Delhi. The event took place at the Alliance Française Auditorium on January 17th. The children were thrilled at the opportunity to perform in a packed auditorium before such an appreciative audience.



Asha children show off their talent at the event

Christmas presents from Santa



Christmas celebrations in the slums

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, Asha celebrated Christmas with children's groups in slums across Delhi this December. The annual Christmas parties are a special time when the kids, forgetting their poverty and deprivation, can freely enjoy themselves. The parties included food, drinks and cultural performances ranging from dance to drama and singing. The children were thrilled to meet Santa who presented each of them with a gift.

Friends of Asha

If you want to contribute to the lives of poor slum dwellers in Delhi, then you can become a Friend of Asha. Join the Asha family, which exists to help the downtrodden and oppressed to 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.

Dr Kiran and Asha Student Ambassadors had the opportunity to meet with Prof. Francis Clooney, Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School. The students welcomed him with garlands in a traditional Indian manner and shared their inspiring stories with him. Prof Clooney generously hosted a dinner for everyone at a five star hotel and it was the first time the students had dined in such a location. There was plenty of laughter and joy as everyone exchanged inspiring tales of transformation and achievement.

Thank you Prof. Clooney for your kindness. We all enjoyed seeing you after such a long time.

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 could feature in this space next time!



Prof Francis Clooney with Dr Kiran and Asha Student Ambassadors

Supporters from anywhere in the World can donate directly to Asha

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 cheque.

To donate online, please visit our website at www.asha-india.org/getinvolved/donate

To donate by cheque, fill in the form below with your complete details, make a cheque payable to "Asha Community Health and Development Society" and mail to:

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 _____

How we will put your money to work

\$60 will cover one college preparation workshop for 30 children

\$95 will provide a student with new clothes for university

\$130 will buy books for one child for one year

\$425 will pay the university tuition fees for one child for one year

\$950 will cover all university expenses for one child for one year

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