



# FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER : JULY- DECEMBER 2021

## From the editorial desk

Dear Friends,

The second half of 2021 has been an exciting, invigorating and impactful time for us. From uniting a long-lost mother with her sons to renovating the premises, from rehoming an elderly couple to welcoming new members and completing the COVID 19 vaccination course for all our members we have had a busy but very satisfactory innings.

Our beloved Ramlati who has been living at FOKE for over five years was happily reunited with her son in Delhi as has Lakshmi whose family was found in Hooghly district, a suburb of Kolkata. We will miss both of them dearly but are ever so happy for them. The family of Zubeida who has been with us since September 2021 was also identified and contacted but they have declined to take her back home for various reasons.

As always the cycle of life and death continues. We welcomed two new male members, Dipendranath Bhattacharya and Ganesh Ghosal in August 2021. We lost our beloved Bishu da (Bishwanath Bayen) who has been at FOKE since 2005 and the effervescent Tara Singh who was the life of Charunibash with her joie de vivre this year. We will miss them terribly. Both our homes, Charunibash and Bhalobasha have been renovated and revamped and are looking beautiful. The renovations in Bhalobasha include total revamping of the members room, new flooring, creating a new dinning space and building a prayer room. In Charunibash, we created activity areas as well as a room for visitors, along with rehauling of the electrical and plumbing systems and introduction of senior friendly fixtures. We are thankful to Concentrix Daksh Private Limited, Caring Hands Foundation and St. Mary's Lodge 75 GLI, for supporting us in this endeavour.

Regular readers may recall how we faced an uphill struggle to provide our members with the first dose of the Covishield vaccine in the first half of 2021. Happily, it was much easier to obtain the second dose as the district health authorities proactively supported our efforts. All our members and staff are now fully vaccinated. We have also taken care to ensure that visitors follow all protocols and that our members are as protected as realistically possible.

We are immensely grateful to Mr, Ambarish Nag Biswas and his dynamic and dedicated network of HAM radio operators who have mastery in the skill of tracing missing persons working in tandem with police and district administration officials.

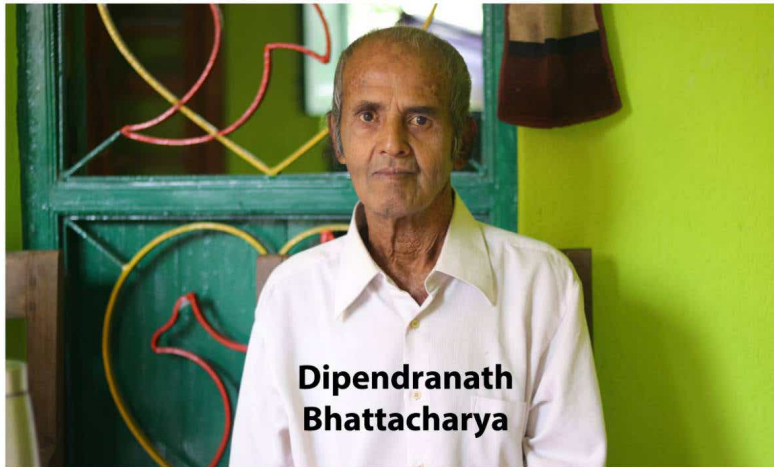
We remain thankful to God for showering His blessings on us and helping us on our path. We believe each one of you who support FOKE in so many ways have been chosen by Him to be a part of this very rewarding journey.

THANK YOU





## WELCOME HOME



**Dipendranath  
Bhattacharya**



**Ganesh  
Ghosal**



**Dipendranath Bhattacharya** and **Ganesh Ghosal** are two elderly gentlemen who were living in Vidyasagar State General Hospital in Kolkata, despite being discharged after treatment, because their families would not take them home. They came to FOKE on 26 August 2021. Both are unmarried and not on good terms with relatives and siblings. We visited their families subsequently and learnt that their past lifestyle and actions were not in keeping with their families culture and background. As a result both had been abandoned with no hope of returning. At FOKE however, they have settled down peacefully and fitted in with the rest of the household quite well.



**Zubeda's** story is one of pain and rejection. She was referred to us by Hive India Foundation and Lake Police Station and came to live in Bhalobasha on 9 September 2021. She is however unhappy and restless and weeps incessantly asking to be sent back to her home in the state of Assam, almost a 1000 km away. Our counselor Mr. Nirmal Sarkar put in stellar efforts in gathering data from her incoherent recollections and putting it together in a legible form. We tried various ways to find her family and were eventually helped by Mr. Ambarish Nag Biswas and the network of HAM radio operators who not only traced her son but also tried to convince him to take her back. Sadly the son is from a financially unsound background and does not have the means or indeed the inclination to take her back. We are exploring ways to help her including identifying a home in Assam who may be willing to take her in, since that will help her be amongst people of a similar cultural background.





## REST IN PEACE

Biswanath Bayen, our Bishu da, has a very long and loving relationship with FOKE. He was one of the builders when Charunibash was being rebuilt in 2005 and then became a staff member who retired some years ago. However despite being unwell, he kept coming to Charunibash and visiting us whenever he could. Bishu da's legacy lives on in Charunibash, literally in every brick of the house.



**Tara Singh** passed away on 3rd September after a lengthy battle with illness. She was a natural entertainer who loved music and dance. Her zeal for life was infectious and no one could be sad in her company.



## ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS

**Charunibash:** The construction, expansion and overhaul have been completed at Charunibash. A special prayer and ceremony, known as Griha Pravesha (auspicious entry) was conducted as per the wish of the elderly residents and staff members. Thank you, Concentrix Daksh for their tremendous

support. We thank Caring Hands Foundation for helping us with extra building work in Charunibash which were not part of initial planning.

**Bhalobasha:** Renovation work began at Bhalobasha in November 2021. Our members now have freshly painted rooms, lovely marble floors, a joyful dining space and a new prayer room. All of this has been made possible by the generous support of St. Mary's Lodge No. 75, G.L.I (Freemason). We remain deeply thankful.

**Ration Cards:** We applied for and obtained ration cards for all our members in the first half of 2021. The cards have now been activated and we are able to obtain small quantities of government subsidised food rations (rice, lentils, sugar, salt) which have helped us to enhance the nutritional content of our members diets.





**Rama Pal**, a teacher at the Charunibash follow-up school resigned and has moved on.



Two new teachers **Soma Pal** and **Sangita Bayen** were recruited in November 2021. Sangita is our ex-student who is undergoing teachers' training and is pursuing a Bachelor's degree at college. Both are valuable additions to our team.



**HAPPY  
ENDINGS**

**Ramlati**, whose real name is Rama Devi comes from a respectable background. She had a loving family including two sons and a daughter. Ramlati was caught up in a family dispute of sorts, resulting in her being misled and put on a train by her own brother, while her children were informed that she had died of a sudden heart attack. She somehow reached Kolkata where she was found living on the streets in a mentally and emotionally distressed condition. She had been living at Charunibash since 2016. Her children were overjoyed when they found out from the HAM radio operators network that their mother was alive and well, her children were overjoyed. Her son Kishan rushed to Kolkata immediately and the reunion of the mother and son brought tears to the eyes of all those who were present. Kishan stayed overnight at Charunibash, completed all formalities at the Lake Police Station on 23 November and took his mother back with him. Ramlati is now happily settled in Delhi with her sons and daughter.



**Lakshi** was a young widow who lived with her brother and brought up his children, a boy and a girl with great love and care. They grew up, the girl got married and Lakshi stayed on with her nephew Sanjay. One day, Lakshi went missing while travelling from her nephew's house to visit her niece. She was found in Kolkata city in a distressed and incoherent condition, rescued and treated at Sambhunath Pandit hospital from where she was referred to FOKE by Hive India Foundation who managed her hospital. She came to FOKE on 13 November

2021 and settled in soon enough but was anxious and eager to return to her nephew's house. Based on the information she provided, the HAM radio operators' network managed to trace her niece and nephew within a few hours. They were elated to learn that she was safe and came to collect her the very next day. All police formalities were completed at Gariahat P.S. and Lakshi is now happily back in her nephew's house.





## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

### Non-residential support to the Sabar Community

The Sabar people belong to the Munda ethnic group tribe. During the colonial period, they were classed as one of the 'criminal tribes' under

Criminal Tribes Act 1871, and suffer from social stigma and ostracism in modern times. One such group lives in Kaikala village in Hooghly district in conditions of extreme poverty. Among them are 11 elderly persons who have been suffering from abandonment, disease and extreme poverty. FOKE in collaboration with a local voluntary group named Kaikala Chetana have adopted these 11 elders and are trying to improve their living conditions by providing them with monthly food rations, clothing, blankets and basic medical interventions. We are also supporting other individuals from the community based on their circumstances and need.



### Durga Puja Special



FOKE got together with the BN Singh Foundation and Pratyay, a women's empowerment initiative run by the Joynagar Police Station, to distribute 550 sarees and 300 lungis to poor people in Joynagar municipality in South 24 Parganas. This area has been battered by climate change over the past two years and has faced three major cyclones, Bulbul, Yaas and Amphan which left lakhs of people devastated. They lost everything including the roof over their heads, and hence there

was no question even of them buying new clothes or celebrating Durga Puja. This was the primary reason for selecting Joynagar as the location for this event. The distribution was conducted smoothly, with great respect, managed by police officers and civic volunteers. It was heartening to see the positive energy and good relationship between the police and locals. We extend our appreciation to Mr Indrajit Basu IPS, Mr Atanu Santra, Officer in Charge of Joynagar P.S and his officers and Ms Kakali Ghosh Kundu, Officer in Charge of Baruipur Women's P.S for their untiring efforts to not only maintain law and order in this area but to also actively reach out and help people in need in so many different ways. We thank our donors Rajesh Buxani and Michael Hopkins for their generosity.





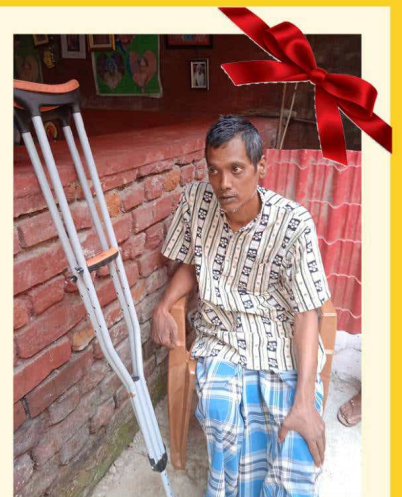


### Update on the Mukherjee couple

Mr. Ashim Mukherjee and his wife were rescued by us in 2018 from Howrah Railway station after we saw a social media post about their homeless and penniless condition. We tried to accommodate them at various homes in Kolkata but they faced adjustment issues and could not stay. Eventually, Dr Abhijit Dam agreed to let them live at his hospice, Kosish in Bokaro, Jharkhand. Their stay there was supported by a well wisher of FOKE. However this year, the Mukherjee couple was asked to leave Kosish as well. Unwilling to give up, we have now found them accommodation at Nivedita Bhavan, a government run shelter in Bariupur, South 24 Parganas. This shelter is run in a novel way, as residents have to contribute to the running of the home either through service or by working and contributing a nominal share of their earnings. This model seems to be working for the Mukherjee's as Mr Mukherjee has begun to earn some money through selling incense sticks and contributing to the management of the home. Mrs Mukherjee too has involved herself in the cooking and cleaning activities of the home. We are keeping an eye on their conditions and are hopeful that they will settle down and live here peacefully. Special thanks to Ms Ashima Dey who coordinated with the home authorities and arranged for them to be taken in.

### Non-Residential Support extended

Our non-residential support of medicines, food or dry rations is also being extended to families where the earning member is unable to provide the basic needs. Manas Roy, a priest by profession is a long time associate of FOKE. He used to perform the last rites of our departed members as also conduct the annual Saraswati Puja. Manas recently found that he has developed tuberculosis of the bone (bone TB) and has now lost mobility due to the illness. We are helping him with monthly food rations, medical equipment (crutch), medicine and assistance with hospital visits. His daughter is our student who has her daily meals in Charunibash.



### Non-Residents' Medical Care



Jagorani is a civil society organisation working in Kes-topur, Kolkata. Over the past few years they have become a valued partner of FOKE and we deeply appreciate the good work they are doing. We were glad to assist them recently in rescuing a destitute lady named Malati from Dum Dum railway station and sponsoring her treatment costs at Dr. Fuad Halim's nursing home. Malati has now been taken into Notun Ghar, a home run by Jagorani where she is recovering rapidly under their care.





## Follow-up school



We have revamped our long running student support programme with the help of Behala Sujon, our networking partner. They have now named this education programme "Happy Classroom".



We are delighted with the progress and impact that this initiative is already showing and are especially thankful to Mr. Piyali Sen of Behala Sujon whose active participation has made all the difference. At present we have 35 students in Bhalobasha and 50 in Charunibash. Regular academic study, evaluations, guardians' meetings and tailored extracurricular activities have become the mainstay of the programme. We try to involve our elderly members in the activities from time to time as well. Munmun, a local to Bhalobasha, volunteers in teaching arts/crafts and also helps the youngest students.



The most rewarding experience of this term has been seeing our ex-students getting involved in the Happy Classrooms initiative. Anisha Sen Majumder taught the preschool students for several months till she returned to school after lockdown. Sanju Roy, another of our ex-students, did a work scholarship in Charunibash before he returned to his boarding school. Sanjay Bayen (Biswanath Bayen's youngest son and our ex-student) is now a student of class IX and a talented artist. Once a week he teaches our students and earns to contribute to his family. Sangita Bayen, one of our most talented and energetic students, has returned to serve in Charunibash school as a full-time teacher.



## Tailoring Unit



Two batches have completed their training in tailoring and all the trainees are working from home and slowly becoming financially independent. We awarded them with certificates on 8 December 2021 which is the official birthday of FOKE. We will start a third batch once we have adequate numbers of registration.



## Medical Camp



Sri Sathya Sai Aarogya Vahini celebrated the 96th Birthday of Sri Sathya Sai Baba by conducting a medical camp for the children, members and few villagers on 14th November 2021 in Charunibash. As it happened to be Children's Day, there were gifts for every child from the organization.





## CELEBRATIONS & FESTIVITIES



### Festivals

Durga Puja, Diwali, Lakshmi puja, and Christmas were celebrated with much zeal in both homes though there was no organized outing due to Covid restrictions. Christmas was also celebrated with much joy with the children at the administrative office.



### Special Days

Independence Day, Teachers' Day, Children's Day, World Elderly Day, Rakshabandhan and the birthdays of our members were all celebrated enthusiastically at both homes. Teachers were felicitated by their students on Teacher's Day, and on Children's Day it was the children's turn to be entertained by their teachers. On World Elderly Day there was a special performance by the students for the elderly members. In Bhalobasha, students got little gifts for the members.







## FUND RAISING IN SYDNEY

Kerry Luxton, our member of the advisory committee, organised an art exhibition to raise funds for FOKE. This is what she had to say about the experience.



***"2021 has been an extremely difficult year for fundraising for FOKE in Sydney. In association with the local art society, I helped organise '12 x 10', a charity art sale to benefit women in need. Half of the profits went to FOKE, the rest to a local women's refuge in Sydney.***

***Artists were given 12" x 10" canvas panel boards to paint anything they wanted, and then donate them to the sale. The paintings went on sale over a 2-day period, for AU\$100 dollars each. There were paintings from both prominent and emerging artists.***

***Altogether more than 150 artists made donations. For me, the best part of the whole thing was seeing the generosity and feeling the warmth of people within the arts community. Very few said no. At the opening of the sale people queued for up to an hour, as our space was restricted to 30 people at a time due to Covid restrictions. The paintings were displayed on the walls and sold on a first come first served basis, no presales, no reserves.***

***It was an exhausting process for me, but the result was about AU\$14,000 going to FOKE and I assume the same amount going to the other charity. Now to put on our thinking caps for the next fundraiser."***



## VISITORS & VALUED DONATIONS

We thank the charity groups –Dishari, Sharadiya group, Sukantapalli Apanjan Welfare Society, Neer, Sukanto Palli Aponjon Welfare Society, Ketoki, Only Ladies group, for visiting, sponsoring lunches and showering the members with gifts and household requirements.

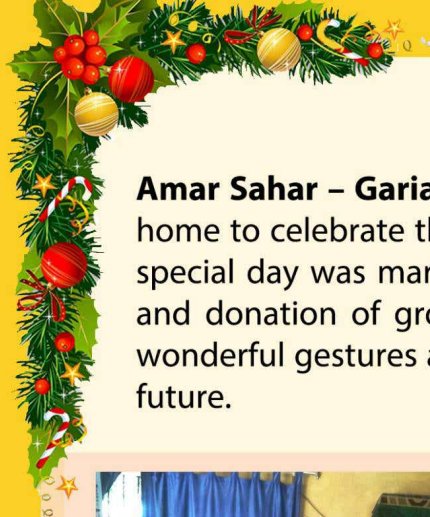
Nupur Saha, Sanjay Sarkhel, Chanchal Kayal, Chandrayee Saha, Shyamoli Ghosh, Jhilli Roy for celebrating their birthdays.



We thank Raja Das, Anil Michael, K. Bhattacharya, Priyashee Saah, Rama Chatterjee, Golok Debnath, T.B Chakraborty, SipraDey, Uma Manna, Banani Guha Neyogi, Biren Biswas, Sujata Kotriwal, Manash Kr. Basu, S. Mukherjee, and Papri Das for visiting, sponsoring lunches and donating in kind.







**Amar Sahar – Garia** was very kind to include our Charunibash home to celebrate the first birthday of their organization. Their special day was marked with a cake cutting celebration, lunch and donation of groceries for the home. We appreciate their wonderful gestures and wish the group all the very best for the future.



### Memory Donations

We thank Raja Ghosh & Aparajita Sengupta, Shampa Bhattacharya, Iliya Das Mukherjee, Soma Ghosh, Prabir Nath, Sadananda Goswami, Uma Manna, Champa Chowdhury, Anuradha Dutta, Piyali Sen, Keya Basu for remembering their loved ones with us.

### Asset donation

We are very grateful to Mr. & Mrs. Sinha for donating us the microwave and a geyser for Charunibash, to Ms Seema Sarogi for donating the microwave for Bhalobasha and to Ms Rajni Dhanuka for donating a second hand five seater sofa set for Bhalobasha.

### Blanket donation and distribution

The year is not complete without the distribution of blankets amongst the most needy. For this kind act we have Mr. Pradip Arora to thank. Warm blankets were distributed among the Sabar Community, locals around Charunibash and Bhalobasha, and amongst many in different parts of Kolkata and around. Thanks to Kaikala Chetana for helping us with the distribution among the Sabar Community.



All those who have been mentioned and many who have not been mentioned are remembered and acknowledged for their unhesitating support, efforts and commitment during what is undoubtedly a most challenging period of our lives. We pray for strength and solidarity to overcome this situation.

May everything that is beautiful, meaningful and joyful be yours during this festive season and throughout the coming year. May our lives be a gift to God by the way we live in this New Year.

With warmest regards and prayers  
FOKE Team

