

## FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY TO JUNE 2017

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Friends Of Kolkata's Elderly!



It is with great joy that we share the happenings of FOKE with you. As always we would like to begin with the happy news of the homecomings of our new members:

**Tara Singh:** was rescued on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2016 from the Amherst Street area by the Hive India rescue team. Tara was admitted to Hope Hospital and from there she was referred to FOKE. Tara says her son is deceased and her daughter is somewhere in Manicktala (Central Kolkata), but she was not able to locate the house when taken to that area. From what we can tell, she does not want to go back to her daughter or to any extended family members. Tara is physically fit and has had a cataract operation

while living with us.

**Manju Banerjee and Sikha Roy :** Arrived at Bhalobasha on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 from the Vidyasagar State General Hospital. They had both been admitted to hospital 4 or 5 years ago and then abandoned; nobody returned to discharge them and take them home.

When visiting the Vidyasagar State General Hospital with our members for treatment, we found that 4 elderly ladies were isolated in a so-called 'Septic ward'. No doctors visited them; nurses only went in if they were very sick; only ayas (private caregivers) took pity on them and extended required support now and then. Food was simply left on their beds alongside the bedpans, which were only cleaned once a day when the sweepers came along! For years they didn't see sunlight or the world outside that 'Septic room'.



FOKE officially wrote to the superintendent to request taking over the care of the ladies, within the hospital, and as per Dr. Fuad Halim's advise we took it on as a pilot project for a month; if it worked we would look after such abandoned men and women within the hospital premises which meant FOKE would not have any expenses on building maintenance, medical or other infrastructural recurring costs. We began by paying the private caregivers each day to clean the room, beds and to look after their personal wellbeing. FOKE supplied all necessary toiletries and snacks as required. We felt we could continue to do so without bringing them home, but we were mistaken as the personal caregivers had other patients to look after and these elderly women were given low priority. In the short time we had been involved, two patients had died in the room. After reviewing the situation, we realised that the standard of their accommodation and lifestyle was not acceptable for people in our care. After much consultation we decided to take the two surviving ladies, Manju and Sikha, home to Bhalobasha.



**Suprova Misha :** was referred to us by the locals in Thakurpukur. Suprova is a widow who lived by herself in a small shed, where the neighbours looked after her. However, with increasing age her walking was affected due to her hip pain, so the neighbours decided to move her into an old age home. Suprova's only son died in an accident at the young age of 21; and being the second wife of her husband, Suprova was never accepted by the in-laws. Her brothers are not willing to take care of her as they are not financially stable. Taking everything into consideration, we agreed to provide the home support to Suprova. Her medical treatment has started and she is well settled in Bhalobasha and happy with her daily prayers and reading.

**Rest in Peace:** Tara Dutta : *Tara's Journey:* by Elouise Hahn

“At the age of 16 Tara was forced to marry a 25-year-old man. After having two children she left her husband after becoming tired of his infidelity. She moved into her parents’ home with her two children and worked as a cook and a cleaner to earn money. Over the years her children grew up, built lives of their own and refused to let their mother live in their small homes. They lost touch. As a devout Hindu she worked in a temple cleaning the floors, until one day she fell over and broke her leg. In excruciating pain she dragged herself to the local government NRS hospital in Kolkata, where her leg was fixed after the staff took pity on her. This was to become her home for eight long years, lying on a metal trolley in one of the aisles. A place where her leg was fixed and her heart broken. I was asked by Sanghita to collect Tara from this over-crowded hospital. I remember hugging her and seeing little tiny cockroaches running up and down her arms and across her stained white and green sari draping over her skeletal frame. Underneath the trolley was a bucket she used as a toilet. What a brave woman she was to not giving up –to have continued the fight to live –even when her entire world crumbled down around her. Tara’s story bears heart-breaking resemblance to the millions of abandoned women around India –however, in this case there was hope through the vital work of FOKE. For the next few years Tara was given a home by FOKE at Charunibash.”



For the last two years Tara was moved to Bhalobasha for constant medical supervision. The cataract operation was not of much use to her as she deteriorated day by day due to old age. On Valentine’s Day 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017, she passed away peacefully in Vidyasagar Hospital. We were very fond of her sense of humour and fighting spirit.

**Non- Residents Programme:** Ganesh Banerjee was found begging on a Sealdah Railway platform in 2013. Because of his good, clean looks he stood out from others who depended on handouts. After the initial findings it was clear that



Ganesh had no choice other than begging as he was physically unable to do any paid job. He was grateful for the offer of 500 rupees per month and the regular medical supply for him and his wife. We supported him with two major operations of hernia (in Hope Hospital) and femur bone replacement (in NRS hospital). He passed away on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, after a long, painful fight and much suffering. His son and remaining family carried out the last rites as per custom.

We supported the medical treatment of **Molina Prasad**- a street dweller, in Dr. Fuad’s Nursing Home. She suffered from chronic infection in her stomach and her last days were very painful.



**Bhola Mirdha and Nurjahan Bibi**, an elderly couple from the slums of Tangra, both had cataract operations. Though the operation in the Government hospital was free, FOKE assisted them with hospitalization, food, travel, and medicine costs plus moral support.

Presently we have 3 elderly ladies, Kalyani Adhikary, Mita Dey and Manju Halder on our pension and medical programme. There are 2 on our daily food programme and 3 more on our medical programme.

**Medical Updates:** Beginning in December 2016, Dr Solanki, a psychiatrist from PG State General Hospital, has been visiting both homes every second month. These visits are having quite an effective result as he has been fine-tuning the medicine doses for each member as per requirement.

**Hashikhusi** had her cataract operation. Presently she is undergoing treatment for Deep Vein Thrombosis in Dr. Fuad Halim’s Nursing Home. Champa is also collaborating with the government hospital for further medication and admission as this is a costly treatment. **Momota** was hospitalised twice this term due to her low appetite and weakness. Shanti had a fall and was admitted to Hope Hospital.



**Tara Singh** had her cataract operation. Khudiram was admitted to Hope Hospital for a medical check-up. **Kalyani Das** was also admitted to Hope Hospital for orthopaedic and physiotherapy. **Kiron** is a chronic asthma patient but she has improved and has also been detected with gallbladder problems but will have the gallstones removed by surgery only when all her other pathology test reports are normal. The doctors are reluctant to operate the gallstone for **Binapani** as the condition of her heart is unstable. **Shefali** survived the stroke and is still bedridden, but has enough mobility to sit up and use her left hand to feed herself. All the members are under constant medical supervision.

**FOKE's Network:** A second chance in life! This young boy Altab, was identified in a very poor condition begging for food from a food stall in Sealdah. His hands were affected with leprosy and his left leg was very badly infected with open wounds. Instant networking with Hope Hospital and Child-Watch, helped us rescue him and after a few days in Hope Hospital he is now in a home for rehabilitation. When his step parent didn't want him he chose to walk away and this is how he ended up at the railway station. He now wants to study and work. The smile on his face was priceless when we visited him. This was possible due to good networking and the prompt action taken by all concerned! Thank you to everyone involved.



**Legal Proceedings:** Advocate Ms. Setu Das Roy, the Honorary Legal advisor of FOKE, held a meeting with Kalyani's daughter and son-in-law. After exchanging legal letters and discussion, the daughter and son-in-law have taken on the responsibility to secure the pension for their mother. Ms Das Roy ensured that they perform their basic responsibilities towards their mother. However, Kalyani is still in Bhalobasha as the daughter cannot take the responsibility to bring her mother home.

**Birthday Celebrations in Both Homes:** Beginning this New Year we have started to celebrate the birthdays of our beloved members. Most don't know their date of birth so we nominate the date that they joined FOKE as their birthday. In Bhalobasha we celebrated the birthdays of Jenny, Maya Rani, Kiron. Sushila, Bubai, Michael and Bela (the staff also celebrated their special days); In Charunibash we celebrated the birthdays of Shefali, Nemai, Sathi, Kalpana, Tara Singh, Momota Parul and Bhubaneshwar.



**Wedding celebration:** Bubai who worked in Bhalobasha from a very young age got married on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. All the members and staff of Bhalobasha prepared him for the wedding; Bubai is loved by all as both his parents passed away & everyone in Bhalobasha played an important role in creating a great wedding atmosphere around the home!



**Staff Appreciation:** As part of our annual programme and with the sole intention of giving the staff a fun time, we arranged the staff appreciation day on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Aqua Retreat has an ideal location on the river bank and was loved by all. A brief staff meeting was followed by fun, games, food and just relaxing, which made it special for everybody. Each staff member received a token of appreciation and prizes for the games they won! The new staff members Madhumita Mondal and Saira Bibi were officially welcomed into the FOKE family in the presence of everybody. Madhumita expressed her joy and thanked FOKE for welcoming and giving her the opportunity to serve the most neglected.

**Staff Farewell:** We also took the opportunity to officially bid farewell to Janaki Jana and Raghavendra Majumder and thank them for their dedicated service. Both Janaki and Raghavendra gave speeches and expressed their sadness in saying goodbye. It was emotional for all and everyone present made it very special for both with a few words, hugs and tears!



**Updates on Outreach activities:** Medical camp: On 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017 our Medical Co-ordinator, Champa Chowdhury, arranged a medical camp with the doctors of the Indian Public Health & Hygiene Association. The follow-up school children of both centres were provided a general medical check-up alongside the members and staff in Charunibash and Bhalobasha. The doctors were satisfied with the way the medical files for the members were maintained. The children were advised mainly to maintain their hygiene which can help combat several illnesses. Teachers met parents separately to address identified issues along with suggestions and advice.



#### **Follow-up Schools in Charunibash and Bhalobasha:**

Charunibash (Madhubati): In January we admitted 10 students into Nursery class. A total of 45 students ( 20 boys and 25 girls) are attending from class I-IV. We were unable to continue the morning Nursery session due to the resignation of two teachers, so the Nursery is presently accommodated in the afternoon session.

Teachers conducted regular home visits, parents' meetings and unit tests along with regular classes for 2 hours per day, 6 days per week. The students who need extra help stay back after regular class to bridge the learning gap.



Activities with the elderly are a regular part of the curriculum. In Charunibash, Swati Mukherjee helps a few older students every evening. This evolved naturally and it is surely a win-win situation.

Bhalobasha has 13 children (6 boys and 7 girls). We are still attempting to increase the numbers. The children attending the centre come from families who are struggling financially. Like the children in Charunibash, the students in Bhalobasha celebrate all the special occasions with the members and staff. The birthdays of our members are also celebrated with the children. Parents meetings with the kind help of Mrs. Minu Mondal ( w/o Biplab Mondal-Bhalobasha's Assistant Manager ) were conducted with emphasis on child abuse, mental wellbeing, health and regular attendance.



**Celebrations:** Netaji's Birthday, Republic Day, Saraswati Puja, Raksha Bandhan, Rabindra Jayanti and, Mother's Day were celebrated in both homes. The school children celebrate with all the residents and staff making it more enjoyable and meaningful.

**Annual Sports Day:** The Annual Sports Day was held in Madhubati, and for the first time, also in Bhalobasha. It was so much fun and even our elderly members had their games of throwing a ball in the bucket and received their respective prizes. The presence of our wonderful friends from Calcutta Calling made it even more special.

The students from Bhalobasha were happy to participate for the first time at the Annual Rajib Ganguly Tournament organised by Friends of Calcutta- Ireland.





**Self Help Groups:** The formation of the fourth new group is progressing. Each group has their individual bank account at the local bank, Bangiya Gramin Bikash Bank. During this period 18 group meetings were held. The current financial situation of the three established groups is shown below:

| Name of SHG | Date of formation | Total members | Monthly subscription | As on June 2017 | Bank loan received: |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| PRNOTI      | MAY 2008          | 14            | Rs. 30/-             | Rs. 64,240/-    | Rs. 40,000/-        |
| JYOTI       | MAY 2008          | 14            | Rs. 30/-             | Rs. 64,560/-    | Rs. 40,000/-        |
| MINOTI      | JAN 2009          | 14            | Rs. 30/-             | Rs. 55,380/-    |                     |
|             |                   |               | TOTAL                | Rs.1,84,180/-   |                     |



**Case Study:** Jharna Paul's husband works as a potter and his income is not enough to spend on anything beyond the daily needs of the family. Jharna took a loan from the SHG to build a new concrete house as the mud house needed constant maintenance during and after every monsoon. The expenses for maintenance increased every year. This loan from her own group has enabled Jharna to build their new concrete home. For Jharna and her family, this is a big achievement.

**New initiatives:** The administrative office is also providing educational support to a few local children who reside in small shanties on the pavements in the Moulali area. To help us in this work we have the help of student volunteer teachers. We are very grateful to Kasturi Jharimun—an ex-Loreto Sealdah student - and her friend Priyanka Paul for finding time from their busy schedule to help out twice a week. The students are all very eager to learn.

**Sunderbans:** As a pilot programme we have started a Women's Empowerment programme in a tribal village situated on Bali Island in the Sunderbans. 10 women are producing paper bags with our initial support of Rs. 2500/- which Kerry Luxton very happily sponsored and was witness to a new beginning. The role of FOKE is that of a facilitator where the intention is to empower the community to move forward by their own efforts.

**Support to NGOs :** With help from Sean Garvey we supported two NGOs, namely Kajla Janakalyan and Little Star School, with school bags and study materials worth Rs. 15,000/- and 10,500/- respectively. Both of these organisations are working in remote areas of West Bengal. It is always a joy to share resources with good organisations who are trying hard to reach out to poor students in the rural areas.

**Local well-wishers sharing a special day with members & local donations:** In recent times we have been receiving quite a few requests from friends, acquaintances and locals to celebrate their special days with the members and staff. To make their birthdays or marriage anniversary more meaningful, we are happy to provide such opportunities in our homes. Visitors coming with a special intention make our staff and members happy too, as they feel appreciated to be included as part of the community.



We thank Seema Shastri who found us on google search and decided to donate medicines and celebrate her daughter Keiya's birthday with us. Seema made kind donations financially and brought medicines, sweets etc for the children of the follow-up school. Thanks, Seema, to you and your family for supporting our work.

Dinesh Bharati and Shusila Bharati, locals living near Bhalobasha, celebrated their marriage anniversary with little gifts and food for the members. We provided a cake for the celebration and they were touched.

In Charunibash the local carpenter, Arun, invited everyone to his son's first birthday. Some staff attended the ceremony and he was very kind to send over lunch for everybody. It is such a lovely gesture and we thank him for the

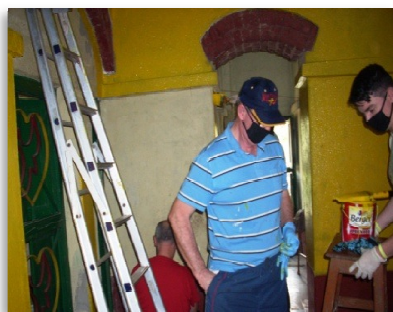
We were very touched when the accountant of Hope Foundation Hospital, Mr. Rabi Dhara, requested us to provide a special lunch to the members and staff in Bhalobasha in remembrance of his beloved mother on 13/04/17. Mr. Rabi and his wife served lunch to everyone and made it memorable. Thank you, Rabi.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Mr and Mrs Dasgupta donated clothes and grocery items to Bhalobasha in memory of their beloved grandma's birthday.

Sujata Nandi, a FOKE friend, donated many clothes which will be useful not only for the members but also for others in need. Thanks, Sujata.

Mr. Dasgupta from Behala donated several packets of diapers, medicines etc in memory of his beloved wife.

**Visitors and Volunteers:** On 1<sup>st</sup> January a group called "Sudhu Amra Kojon" comprised of housewives, visited Bhalobasha and gifted mosquito nets, adult diapers etc for the homes. They are a lovely group trying to reach out to various organisations and support their work.



John Alexander and his friends visited Bhalobasha and Vidyasagar Hospital and kindly made a donation.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January Michael, Alan, Brian, David, Pat, James, Charlie, Ken and Kieran visited Charunibash and helped with the painting of the walls.

On 26<sup>th</sup> January members of Calcutta Calling were present at our Annual Sports Day and it was very nice of them to help with the food parcels. Alan Kenny sponsored the costs of the food items. Thanks to their combined efforts in making it all happen so beautifully.

In February Anup Gyne and his wife Mojca Gyne, the founders of Piyali Ashar Alo-NGO /school, visited both homes and gifted us with toothpastes and stationery items for the students.



Roisin, an Irish volunteer, visited both homes taking time from her schedule to volunteer with Hope Foundation.

Edel, Kevin and John from Friends of Calcutta -Ireland visited Charunibash for a night to spend time with staff and members.

Raju Buxani and his friend Gurjit visited Bhalobasha and everyone had a great time.

Margariet Jenson from Holland visited Bhalobasha for the first time and was very generous with her donation.

Kerry Luxton was in Kolkata for more than two months and visited both homes and gifted all the staff with a token amount and had gifts of jewellery for each member. Kerry enjoyed Holi at both homes and also paid Rs. 1500 to the members' fund in Charunibash from the sale of the necklaces made by them.



On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2017 The Classical Guitar Group entertained all with songs and music in Bhalobasha. The children danced while the young artists sang which was so enjoyable. Thanks to Veda Aggarwal for her lovely idea of arranging an entertaining evening for the members, staff and children. It made their day!





On 15<sup>th</sup> April – Bengali New Years Day, MuktoDhara a group of well wishers were very kind to visit and generously donated the toiletries for both homes and nighties and gifts for members in Bhalobasha.

A group of devotees cooked lunches for both homes and performed devotional songs to celebrate the Holi with all our staff and members. The festive of colours united us all.

### Repair and renovation:

#### Bhalobasha

The entire water pipeline to the toilets and washrooms were changed with new pipeline because the old ones rusted and the flow of water was badly affected.

A new electric meter box was put in place and a cabinet was made for the water pump.

#### Charunibash



A new cable connection was installed in Charunibash for the television.

Special thanks to Michael for giving a complete facelift to Charunibash, with new vibrant yellow paint sponsored by Vincent Jones.

Electrical maintenance was carried out as white ants had affected the switch boards, especially in the kitchen. A new bed for the room upstairs was made.

The vegetables grown in Charunibash are shared between the two homes throughout the year.

The maintenance of both buildings and the surrounding areas goes on throughout the year.



**Fund Raising Initiative:** Pobalscoil Neasain is a community school in North Dublin, Ireland. There are 740 students from age 12-19, a teaching staff of 60 and 6 Special Needs Assistants. Over the last couple of years staff member Adrienne Millar Conroy has been involved with FOKE and has been telling staff and students of the work being done to support the village children. This year the school held a day of "non uniform" to raise funds to assist funding FOKE teachers' salaries and to create a greater awareness among the students of the work of FOKE. The Principal, Mr. McKenna has stated that in coming years they would like to continue to support FOKE and to develop the relationship between Pobalscoil Neasain and FOKE.



**Fundraising in Sydney :** In January, Annie and Dave Irving hosted and provided a delicious meal for twenty of their friends. All guests were long time supporters of FOKE and were happy to make a generous donation, as were Annie and Dave with the hard work that went into the preparation. Each guest received a gift of beads made by the members from Charunibash. Apart from their beauty, the beads were a symbolic link between the two communities and very much appreciated.

In June, a fundraising lunch was held in benefit of FOKE. The generous hosts were Paul and Lenore Robertson who invited their friends and neighbours to hear about the work of FOKE and to experience a Bengali meal (albeit a foreigners' version). It was a sunny day and guests could see the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the distance, so all in all a very pleasant day was enjoyed.

For the third year running, ladies from Avondale Golf Club knitted warm and colourful rugs in the 'Wrap with Love' style. Each member gets to choose the pattern that appeals to them and next year we hope to distribute some to recipients of our Outreach activities.



### Administrative news:

Retirement: Raghavendra Majumder , our driver, and Janaki Jana, our cook in Bhalobasha, retired on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

Recruitment: A new cook Aradhana Singh joined in Charunibash on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and Geeta Singh moved from there to Bhalobasha.

As required by law we have submitted the names of all our members with their details including date of admission, General Diary number and background details to Lalbazar and Bhabani Bhavan (The West Bengal Police Head Quarters).



The staff Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance (ESI- Medical insurance) are in place and each staff member will receive free medical treatment under the ESI scheme and the Provident Fund benefit on retirement.

The FOKE office is now open daily. It's a meeting place and a lot of networking takes place from the office, be it admission of children in residential homes, schools, job placement or identifying elderly members who need support. It is also a hub for local children who come for tuition or to do their homework.

On 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016 we had our last general meeting for the financial year 2015-16. Kerry Luxton was present at the meeting. On 20<sup>th</sup> May we had our first general meeting for the financial year 2016-17. Michael Hopkins was present at the meeting.

### Donations for the FOKE Administrative office:

Mr. Punit Agarwal donated a new air conditioner for the office and Mrs. Swarnalata Das sponsored the cost of the laptop. Kerry Luxton donated a notepad to use outside the office as and when required. Michael Hopkins sponsored the cost of the lights for the office. Thank you all for your very kind thoughts.

We are glad to announce the new FOKE website [www.foke.in](http://www.foke.in) . We hope that you all will have a look at it and share your opinions of the website. We have taken another small step to involve volunteers and students for placement. Everyone, either at home or abroad can stay connected with the small efforts of FOKE. We also invite you to see our facebook page Friends of Kolkata's Elderly, which can be accessed from the website 'contact us' page. If anyone would like to make a comment or write a few words we can publish it in the blog page. Please feel free to write.

A special thank you to Yagvalgnak Bandopadhyaya, a student of B-Tech in civil engineering, for voluntarily designing the website without any remuneration! He worked very hard with the designing for more than 6 months alongside his busy schedule in college. Thanks to Kerry for her constant guidance in creating the website.

Thank you for the kind visits of all friends and well-wishers. We thank **Friends of Calcutta and Margariet Janssen**, for sponsoring the running cost of the medical van. We thank each and everyone for their various gifts and donations to the homes and the office. We thank all the staff members for their dedicated service, especially Bela, our nurse in Bhalobasha, who willingly cooked for nearly two months till we found the replacement after Janaki's retirement. Thanks to all of you for your continued support and good wishes.

*Kindest regards and prayers*

The FOKE- Team



*Love and care makes it all happen: Sikha and Manju were removed from the misery of the hospital to the love and care in Bhalobasha.*

