



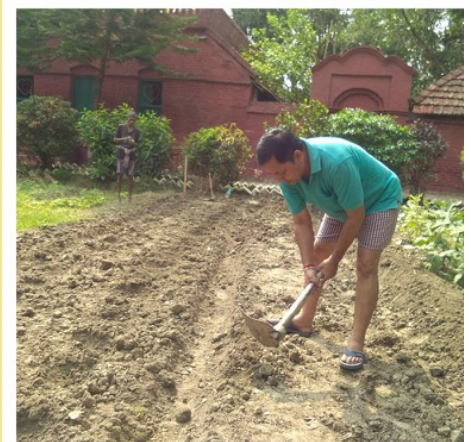
FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER: JANUARY - JULY 2018

The year 2017 ended with the loss of three of our beloved members, Momota, Manju and Shanti within a short time span. We were looking forward to some good news which came with the arrival of Sean and Lorraine Garvey on 2nd January. Their presence ensured that celebrations continued even after Christmas.

We are also happy to share that a new phase of FOKE has evolved naturally and is thriving with amazing personalities from different walks of life. Over the last few months we have met beautiful, young and energetic people who have shown great respect for our work and have embraced FOKE with immense love and commitment. Veda Aggarwal (our committee member), Arvind Balasubhramaniam, S. Rajeshwari, Radhika Singh, Jhinku Banerjee, Sunny Mukherjee, Mr. Barua, Oli and Swati Mukherjee, are a team who willingly support and participate in the outreach activities of FOKE. Veda introduced Arvind to us, and he took the initiative to introduce other interested people. They are in turn coming up with ideas for the development of our present students, as well as ex-pupils, in Madhubati. Every weekend the Charunibash home is buzzing with activities. The ex-students who are now vibrant young people are being encouraged to get actively involved with art, craft, cultural programmes and at the same time care for the elderly. The members enjoy the buzz and participate in all possible ways. It's like a fair in the house every weekend and the village home is turning into a community centre. Kanan Roy, a volunteer, visits Bhalobasha every Saturday just to spend time with the members and to talk to them. She helps by counseling in a very informal way.

A detailed write up on this new chapter, by S. Rajeshwari, is included in this newsletter.



THE BEDS NEVER REMAIN EMPTY FOR LONG

Three new members arrived and both homes have welcomed them with much love.



NEW MEMBERS



WELCOME HOME

SHYAMOLI BISWAS

Shyamoli was found at Majherhat railway station and was admitted to Vidya Sagar State General Hospital by the Railway authority on 19th August 2017. The local police station found no relatives and for seven months the hospital made provisions for her safe stay. On 3rd April 2018, on request of the Assistant Superintendent, we took her to Bhalobasha.

Shaymoli is homeless and says she has no one. Her family home is on the road to Madhubati but she is very reluctant to talk about it and does not want to return there under any circumstances. Shaymoli is a diabetic patient and hence needs monitored diet which she is surely not very happy with. However she is slowly realizing the need to list the food she eats and is settling into Charunibash. Currently she is engrossed in doing crochet and other small activities.

JAISHREE MAITY

On 12th April Jaishree was rescued from Kalindi bus stop under Lake Town PS. Jaishree's coming home is miraculous. On request of an NGO we went to rescue a lady from Lake Town bus stop who had been seen there for months or maybe years. The day we went to collect that lady we didn't find her as she moved away; but we accidentally saw Jaishree instead, at the next bus stop. Within a week we found every detail about Jaishree and with the help of the local auto driver and a rickshaw puller who looked after Jaishree, we lodged the GD in Lake Town Police Station and took her home. Jaishree came willingly with us to Dr. Fuad Halim's Nursing Home where her medical file was prepared. She will need a hysterectomy operation in due time when she is healthy enough. Jaishree's daughter and son-in-law used to come and meet her at the bus stop only to take away the money which she collected from begging. Jaishree however is not keen to see her daughter at all. She is well settled in Bhalobasha with her little fights now and then with Athai!





WELCOME HOME

DASHAMI

We are still to find out her full name. Dashami was found near NRS hospital, from where HIVE - India rescued her and admitted her to NRS hospital. She was later transferred to Bangur State General Hospital, from where we discharged her and took her home to Bhalobasha on 9th June 2018. We are still unable to understand the dialect Dashami speaks. It seems she comes from the tea estates where she worked as she has the beautiful tribal look. There were clear signs of abuse and malnourishment when she was rescued. Hopefully we will find some information about her in due time. In the meantime she has come out of the fear and is mingling with others. Thanks to HIVE India for giving Dashami another chance in life.



WISH TO RETURN

REKHA ROY

At more than 85 years, Rekha came from an ashram in Nagrakata, North Bengal, because she could not pay for her stay. Rekha travelled by herself and came straight to the Chief Ministers Office (CMO), under Kalighat Police Station. Rekha said that she had lived most of her life in Kalighat and claims to know the Chief Minister well! Rekha needed medical support for her eyes and was admitted to the government hospital by HIVE India. With reference from HIVE India, we welcomed Rekha on 8th December (the official birthday of Fokeer), along with a house full of guests - representatives of the Human Rights Commission, who happened to visit us that day, and as always a cake to celebrate her homecoming!

Within a couple of days Rekha wanted to go back to Nagrakata and refused to stay in the house. With support from HIVE India we took her to different families she claimed to know around the Thakurpukur area, but no one wanted to take her responsibility. Thereafter we requested the Kalighat Police station to connect her with the ashram and within two days the representatives arrived and returned her to the Ashram where she was happy to be.



OUR LIMITATION

Hope hospital referred a patient, Lakshmi, to us. We willingly took Lakshmi home on 24th March 2018 but unfortunately we had to return her a few days later. Lakshmi was not able to recollect her past and showed signs of forgetfulness and insecurity. We were neither able to control her movements, and nor were we equipped to provide the special care she required. Knowing that Lakshmi needed long-term psychiatric treatment we requested Ishwar Sankolpo (a unit for the mentally challenged) to consider her for treatment and residential care. We prepared Lakshmi and took her to Ishwar Sankolpo where the doctor checked her and said she needed special care; however, Ishwar Sankolpo caters to only younger patients they couldn't admit Lakshmi who was above 60. To our great disappointment we had no choice but to return and hand over Lakshmi to Hope Hospital. However, we are sure Lakshmi will find a better home where she will be well looked after and cared for.



KIRON ROY
RIP 19.03.18

Kiron came to us from the NRS hospital. Due to her acute COPD and asthma, Kiron's son and daughter were not able to provide her medical support on a long-term basis due to their poor financial condition. We kept her under strict medical supervision. However, the inevitable happened and she was admitted to Vidyasagar State General Hospital with acute respiratory problems. Sadly, she passed away early morning on 19th of March. Thankfully the son and daughter carried out the last rites though Kiron missed seeing her son and daughter one last time in the hospital before she died.



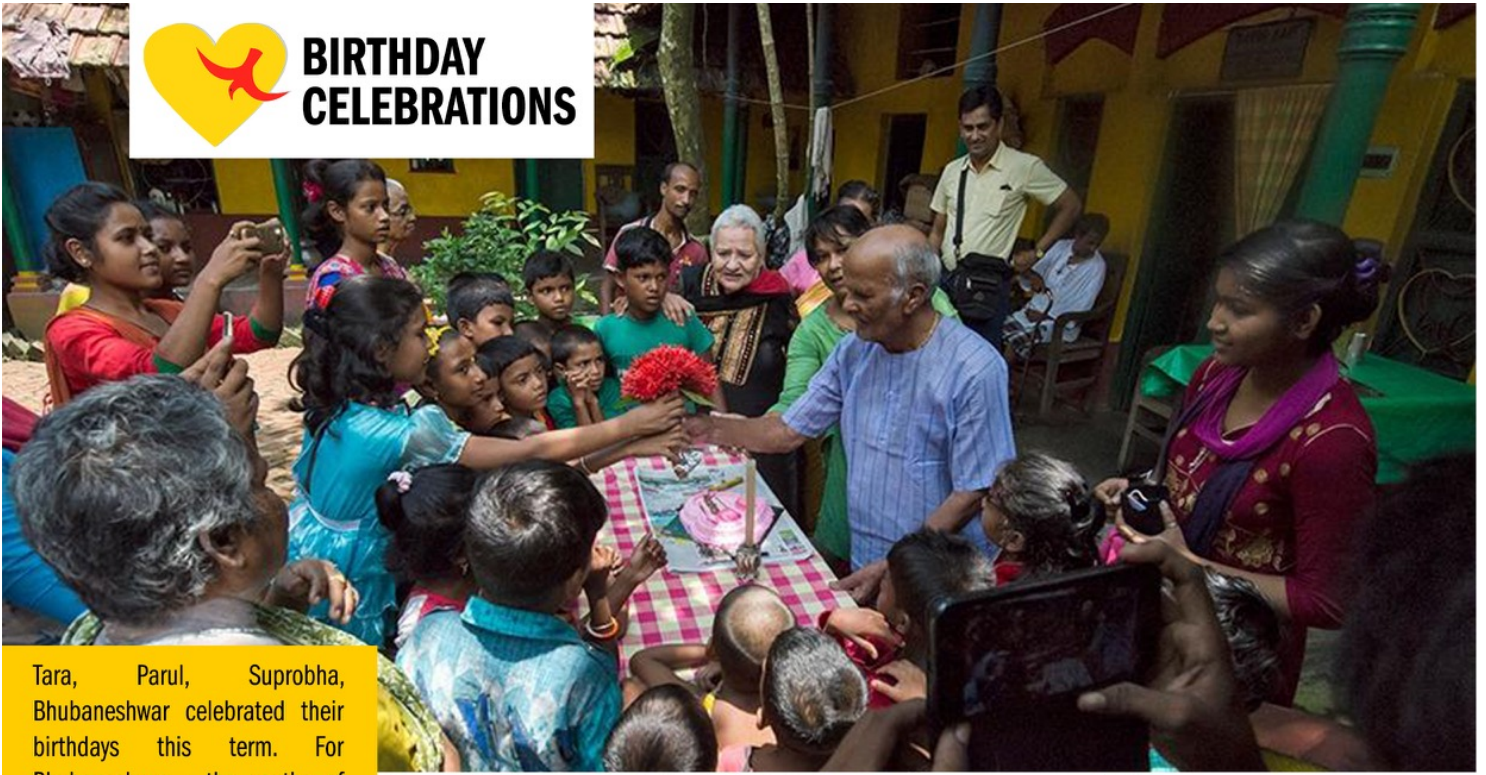
SIKHA ROY
RIP 26.06.18

Sikha Roy passed away at the Vidyasagar State General Hospital on 26th June 2018, from where she had been taken home to Bhalobasha on 31st March 2017 along with Manju Banerjee. After years of a miserable life in the septic ward of the hospital, Sikha came to us at the very last stage of her life. Much was taken away from her in life, but never did we hear a word of complaint from her. Sikha, a very warm and loving lady, gave us the joy of her company only for 15 months. Her smile and blessings will always guide us through. We carried out a prayer ceremony on 28th June in her memory. Rest in Peace Kiron and Sikha.





BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS



Tara, Parul, Suprobha, Bhubaneshwar celebrated their birthdays this term. For Bhubaneshwar - the youths of Charunibash performed dances and there was cake for all. The homecoming date of the members is celebrated as their birthday, as none are able to recollect or even aware of their date of birth. For all our members we know that a birthday celebration was never ever a part of their growing up. We are glad to give them those moments...



GIFTS FOR THE HOMES



We received Django- a pet dog as gift from Radhika who was very courageous to bring Django on a flight, all the way from Delhi, to Bhalobasha. He is only about 5 months old now and enjoys the space in Bhalobasha. Thank you Radhika, we know it was not an easy task for you but you really did it!!

A very good steel Almirah was donated to Charunibash by Mrs Jaya Roy, a friend of Rajeswari. Thank you Mrs. Roy for going to all the effort, to get it repaired; it looks totally new and fresh with the new paint.

ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS

During this term we had our last general meeting for the year 2017-18 on 24th February 2018 and the first general meeting for the year 2018-19 on 19th May which was attended by Kerry Luxton. The second general meeting is to be held on 11th August 2018, while the AGM will be held on 25th August 2018. The annual report for the year 2017-18 is being designed voluntarily by Veda.



**STAFF
DAY!**



To celebrate a day with the staff and to make it special for them we went to a hotel near the riverbank. The day started with a nice breakfast followed by games, lunch and more games. Awareness of a clean environment, waste management and a pledge against usage of plastic was added to the day. Sujata did a good job with her presentation where even the hotel staff learnt something. The day ended with suggestions, sharing and gifts. Thanks to Swarna di for sponsoring all the gifts for the games.

NEW INITIATIVE

Supporting an Old Age Home for the Destitute in Bodh Gaya

Bodh Gaya is a town in the state of Bihar and an important pilgrimage destination for Buddhists. It is where Buddha attained enlightenment. We (Kerry, Rajeswari and Sanghita) visited during the first week of June. Our intention was to spend time with 3 local NGOs, to visit the famous Bodhi tree and the many monasteries, even perhaps find enlightenment, in our spare time. One project was an old age home for the destitute, sheltering 12 ladies and 3 men, but with very few resources. Veda Rugwuetinip, the founder of this home is struggling to finance the running costs of the place. The home is built with mud and bricks, with exposed asbestos roofing and in the midst of a barren land. Even the beds are mud blocks with just a cloth covering the top. There is no electricity. We only hope that it can withstand the monsoon!!!

The members living in this home share similar stories to our Foke members. We brought about a month's supply of rations for them, which were very gratefully received. We felt that it was a genuine place and one that we would want to extend FOKEs support to in the future. We promised to return with more resources and help. A return trip is planned for 28-29 July (the team will consist of Adrienne, Aaron, Rajeshwari, Jhinku and Sanghita) to help with the cleaning and general organising of the house, along with sponsoring a decent lunch for all. We also intend to bring saris, male garments and further rations for them. Hopefully we will continue to support them for some time as it is the only home for the destitute in Bodh Gaya and Veda is dedicated and passionate about the welfare of those in her care.



OUTREACH





YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & TRAINING

We are very happy to welcome the ex-students of Madhubati follow up school – the new youth group in Charunibash. When we met and discussed things that they would like to learn professionally, most came with the request to learn tailoring along with nursing, teaching etc. We did a shortlist based on their timings in school and college and helped 6 girls to enroll for tailoring, from May 2018. We thank Rajeswari for sponsoring the admission fees; it was decided that the students will contribute ₹20 while FOKE will contribute ₹80 towards the monthly fee.



Presently the number of students in Bhalobasha is 20 and in Charunibash 50. During this term there were 2 parents/teacher meetings. Internal evaluation of children was also carried out.

The FOC sports on 14th January were attended by the students of Bhalobasha.

The annual sport in Madhubati was on 23rd January which we celebrated with the flag hoisting - remembering Netaji's Birthday. Children had different races and sports activities and there was ball in the basket for elderly members and musical chairs for the staff. 10 children from Bhalobasha also participated.

The annual sports in Bhalobasha was held on 26th January which was organized on a minor scale as the space is small. However it was still enjoyable specially when the elderly members where throwing the balls into the basket. There was a unique game for the parents too!! And of course there were prizes for everyone! Thanks to Miriam (FOC member) for sponsoring the cost of the prizes for the sports.

Students in Bhalobasha also performed for Rabindra Jayanti and the success of the programme goes to the voluntary group "Chollis theke Ashi" (meaning: from 40 to 80 years old). The beauty of the programme is that the FOKE female staff also performed.



OTHER ACTIVITIES



ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS PROGRAMME

On 10th March Sujata Nandi conducted an awareness programme in both homes for the students and their parents/ community. The main agenda was making them aware of waste segregation and the use of sanitary cups in place of sanitary napkins. The idea is new and will probably take some time for the woman to change their mindset.

DENTAL CAMP

Doctors from the dental college hospital organised a dental camp on 29th May for the villagers as well as the residents of Charunibash. This was part of the 'World No Tobacco Day Campaign' by the Indian Doctors Association West Bengal State Branch. As it was arranged at a short notice the beneficiaries were not as numerous as we would have liked. 48 outdoor patients, our members and staff were checked and some of them are being taken to the Diamond Harbour hospital for follow ups.



STUDENT PLACEMENT

For the first time Tania Dey - a student of Journalism and Mass Communication from Viswa Bharati University did her placement with FOKE. She stayed in Charunibash and Bhalobasha and was permitted to involve herself with all the outreach programmes as well as with the daily in-house activities. A certificate for her work was issued from FOKE.



On 18th February 2018, Sujata Nandi – who is now well involved with FOKE trying to make the homes plastic free, observed her mother's first anniversary by sponsoring lunch in Bhalobasha.

Our teacher Soma, also remembered her father-in-law and sponsored the lunch for all residents in Bhalobasha. Thanks to her husband Sankar Banerjee for being part of this service.



On 3rd May 2018, Mr. Parthapratim's mother's first death anniversary was commemorated with the members in Bhalobasha. Mr. Parthapratim sponsored the lunch and also gifted each member with bed sheets for their personal use. Thanks to Raju Gyne for referring him to FOKE.



On 22nd June 2018, Mrs. S. Sen - retired English language teacher of Loreto Sealdah celebrated the birthday of her beloved husband who passed away only few months back. We prepared a small prayer service where children sang and recited poems while Suprova dida read from the Holy Gita. There were food packets with loads of items for all and bags of clothes in very good condition. Mrs. Sarkar - Retired teacher and Vice Principal, also accompanied her which was a huge honour for us. Thank you, Mrs. Sen and Mrs Sarkar, for your very kind donation and especially for visiting and honouring our meager efforts to care for the elderly. Keep blessing us.



FRIENDS, WELL WISHERS, AND VISITORS

Sean and Lorraine visited us from 2nd-14th January. Though it was after Christmas, they brought gifts for everyone as always: luggage bags for each members to keep their belongings and the staff received cash gifts too. Thank you to Sean, family & friends for your very generous donation to FOKE.

Saaz Aggarwal, Veda's mother was very kind to take time out during her short trip to Kolkata. Veda guided her to both homes and Mrs. Aggarwal made a kind donation to FOKE.

On 12th Jan, members of FOC-Ireland visited Bhalobasha. It was a pleasure to welcome Fr. Vincent and all the other members of FOC after many years.

On 20th January, Linda and her group of teachers and students from Prague, Czech Republic, visited with the sole intention of experiencing the model of mixing old and young people in the FOKE old age home setup. They experienced the children coming for extra educational support in the homes and the way they interact in the daily life of our elderly members. Our homes, which are not institutions, provide good opportunities for the generations to mingle.

Audun and Petra from Norway also visited with the same intention - to see the involvement of the children in the homes. They experienced the Saraswati Puja on their visit which was organized by the children along with all in Bhalobasha. Audun with permission from FOKE and the concerned members published the works of FOKE in Norway's local journal.

On 28th January, Mukto Dhara voluntary group returned to Charunibash with gifts of pillows, covers, bedcovers and wheel chair. Papiya Das and Tapan Das - founders of this group - celebrated their marriage anniversary and happily sponsored the lunch for all. It was such a nice gesture.





Gai Brydon from Australia visited both homes on 2nd February and gifted the ladies with dresses made by her friend Catherine from Global Drive education - gifted dresses made personally for the members in Bhalobasha, which they loved. She also made a kind donation to FOKE.

On 11th February "Parash" a voluntary group of nearly 45 members visited Charunibash to enjoy a picnic which involved our members and staff. There was a lavish lunch, for all cooked fresh by professional cooks, on the premises. We are thankful to Parash for their gift of the monthly ration for the home and choosing our home to spend their special day.

Thanks to Perpetua and Paula from Ireland for their visit to Bhalobasha. Perpetua is an old friend of FOKE and for Paula it was her first visit. We thank them for their kind donation too.

On 16th Feb - 12 students & 4 teachers from Colaiste Aoine School Ireland, visited Charunibash and had an enjoyable time with lots of sharing. The students had the opportunity to see the follow up school and the day ended in a joyous 12-12 draw in football with the Irish against the home team of the follow up school boys.

'Melbondhon Trust' came back this year to celebrate the Holi Utsav in Charunibash. There were songs and dance and every one enjoyed the performance; children & members danced too. The lunch was sponsored and the students received stationary items and food packets.



**FRIENDS, WELL WISHERS,
AND VISITORS**





FRIENDS, WELL WISHERS, AND VISITORS



Post Holi celebration was also organised by Champa with a group of devotees, who cooked in Bhalobasha themselves and fed the members and staff.

‘Chollish theke Ashi’ – group visited Bhalobasha with gifts of Night dresses and study materials for the children. The group is eager to do more.

Saturday 3rd March was lovely in Charunibash as Thomas Csaba, a French Classic guitarist played a small concert for the residents and children. The music was melodic and the guitar sounded beautiful! Thanks to Veda for making this happen.

Margaret Jenssen, from Holland visited both the homes. She enjoyed Madhubati as it was her first visit. We thank her for sponsoring the medical van cost.

Dr Abhijit Dam - a specialist on paliatitive care - was kind enough to visit us and check members in both homes. We value his medical advice.

Thank you Swati Mukherjee for your kind visit and gifts of teaching-learning material for both the follow-up schools.

Kerry, as always, shopped for beads, threads and other craft materials from Burra Bazaar which she left for the members and the youth so they can continue to make the items. Kerry had few classes with the youth and shared ideas which were both fun and productive. The FOKE office was painted by Kerry and it now has a fresh look. Thanks also for bringing the blankets donated by “Wrap With Love” all the way from Australia! At home you work hard for fund raising too. Thank you Kerry for loving FOKE and for taking so much effort.





Subir and Nibedita Bhattacharya, friends of FOKE and family, celebrated their marriage anniversary in Charunibash. They cooked for all which was enjoyable. There was high tea and cake cutting ceremony on their return to Bhalobasha. That way all the members were involved in the celebration!



SHARING THE JOY OF SPECIAL DAYS

On 8th June two of our members - Binapani and Ramlati - from Bhalobasha, had the honour to inaugurate a Cultural Programme organised by Behala Asha Cultural Society. Thanks to Raju Gayne for thinking differently and inviting us. It was surely very special for Binapani and Ramlati.

Shubham Mondol celebrated turning nineteen in Bhalobasha. It was a double celebration for his birthday as well as for his good results in his Class XII board exam. The female staff received handmade jewellery as gifts from the family, while every member got a chocolate from Shubham as special gift. Lunch was cooked by an external cook, which gave a free day to the staff. Thanks to Mr. Debangshu Mondal and his family for their gesture.



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Saraswati puja, Holi and Bengali New Year's Day were celebrated in both homes with much enjoyment. Thank you Sunny Mukherjee for organising a fabulous Poila Boishak evening at Bhalobhasha with your band Abohobhikar.



CELEBRATIONS





VOLUNTEERS

It was on 15th April, Bengali New Year's Day that I first visited both the FOKE homes. My brother Arvind had been telling me so much about FOKE & Sanghita di that when he planned a whole day program, I just couldn't say no.

I have had a fair experience of volunteering with different NGOs and somehow in most places, I have found that commercial mindedness often overshadows the humane aspect of it. But there was something different about FOKE. Was it the happy smiles of the residents who had seen some really tough times in life? Or was it the warm open arms of Sanghita di & the Maashis who ran the homes welcoming us as if it was our own place? I don't know, but I just connected with the place specially Madhubati.

Knowing about the follow up school, I asked Sanghita di if we could do a drawing competition and yoga and meditation session for the children. She instantly agreed and gave me a free hand to plan and execute it as I wished. That was my first event and it was so well received that I had the confidence to continue planning for them every weekend. The children are very talented and keen to learn, and I really look forward to my weekends.

Summer holidays came as a boon and we planned many activities like storytelling, children's movies, play-dough modeling, football, paper craft, etc. in Madhubati. We had lots of fun too with ice cream and jhal muri parties. Meanwhile Sanghita di reconnected with the follow up school's ex-students to plan some activities involving them. It was a memorable meeting where I was very happy to see so many young girls coming forward and sharing their aspirations. Going with the flow many activities were planned and are now in the process of getting executed. I would like to share a few: we arranged sponsorships for tailoring classes for six girls, photography session with Jhinku, a 'Spoken English & Communication' workshop was conducted by Radhika Singh from British Council, Kerry bought a lot of raw materials for making fashion jewellery and also taught them to make a few samples, and now all focus is on practices for a beautiful event on 15th August.

There are several plans going on in my head now to work with the community at Madhubati. I keep bombarding Sanghitadi with them. She patiently hears me out and guides me to those which are currently feasible. The rest are parked as seed ideas for when the time is opportune.

In the last week of June I had stayed over at Madhubati during the weekend and it suddenly struck me that I had known this place for hardly over two months yet this feels like home. Meeting some amazing like-minded individuals like Veda, Jhinku, Sujata, Radhika, Jhinuk & Rajibda, Baruada who shared their expertise to make a positive difference for FOKE has been a learning experience. It has been a wonderful journey so far and I look forward to adding more such amazing spirited souls to this list.

I pray that the organization spreads its wings further & soars high as we continue to build on the good work done so far !!!

S RAJESHWARI



2018-6-



VOLUNTEERS



Over the last thirteen years I've watched FOKE blossom, bloom and continue to grow due to the strength and hard work of the committee, staff and members. This year, the only word I can find to describe it is thriving. The hard work of running the homes continues with dedication and love, but there is definitely a new energy present as well. The efforts and enthusiasm of the new 'young' members (about half my age) is felt by absolutely everyone. I feel as though I have made lovely new friends and look forward to seeing the latest news about their activities on Facebook, WhatsApp or the FOKE website.

I was very happy to be caught up in the new energy and as a result my work this year was a little different. Firstly, I painted the office using washable paint, which I'm sure the local kids will test thoroughly. It probably seems an odd thing for me to do, but I think it demonstrated that you don't need specialised skills to be a volunteer. And of course, girls can do anything. It also meant that I got to know the local children more; they would pop in to do homework, play with the educational toys or just ask for a vitamin tablet (they thought they were chocolates but were packed with supplements).

During my visit I stayed over at both homes and loved sitting on the verandah at Charu Nibash with the members, watching the kids come in for class, or just a dog wander in for a walk with Nimai. The dog seems to enjoy the walk, but I am amazed that he allows Nimai to lead him by the ear; it looks weird, but who am I to say.

Working with the senior kids was very enjoyable. I showed them techniques such as paper mache and recycling saree fabric into jewellery with threads, then gave them the materials to make their own versions. Hopefully they will have their own style ready for sale in the near future.

At Bhalobasha I cooked my version of a Bengali chicken curry for the members and staff. They were gracious in their thanks, describing it as 'interesting' or 'different'; I'm not giving up though.

Several times during my stay, it crossed my mind how lucky I was to be where I was, and how unique the experience is. If anyone is contemplating a volunteering tripdo it, you won't be sorry.

KERRY LUXTON



2018-6-15 11:57



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THANK YOU!

This episode of FOKE is very happening and positive. We thank each of our friends for putting their trust in FOKE and its potential. The active youth in Madhubati have shown their growing interest and we are keen to help them follow their dream. We thank each and every one of our friends who give up their weekends to take this forward. We appreciate the time, thought and resources each one of you invest in these activities. We are blessed with many well wishers and friends in Kolkata and abroad, who continue to support the cause – please know you will always stay in our prayers.

God bless all.

Love and Regards from all in FOKE.

