

# Action Aid Australia Ltd

[www.actionaidaustralia.org.au](http://www.actionaidaustralia.org.au)

## **Building beds and building relationships at Kolkata Paul Knowd**

Calcutta or should I say Kolkata. Known for what? Hardly a tourist 'must see'. Calcutta is known for two things. Mother Teresa and poverty. I've been to Calcutta twice now for a total time of three months. Last time I worked in the All Bengal Women's-Child Welfare Home. (ABW-CWH) The first thing that I noticed was two great steel gates that hide the home from the rest of the chaos known as Calcutta. Behind those gates is a different story. Inside the compound there are a number of multi storey buildings and I usually a heap of kids of all ages playing different games. On thing I did learn quickly is that ABW CWH offers hope. Something severely lacking in Calcutta. It offers hope, because it offers a future for the children. Block printing, sewing and other skills are taught to the girls. These skills are a ticket out of the poverty trap.

I was introduced to the ladies who run the home. A lady was staying where I was, and she invited us to have a look at the home. After speaking to the ladies who run the place, I felt that in some way could offer to help. So I made a silly statement. 'What is your greatest need here?' I asked. 'A drain is needed Paul, to get rid of the water', was the reply. 'The Monsoon rains come, then the mosquitoes and malaria follows; many of the girls always get malaria'. I thought about it for about two minutes, looked at the task and said ok. Actually the truth was that I was just following one stupid question with a stupid answer; trying to save face really!

I got busy trying to get tools to build the drain. Trying to purchase tools and building materials in Calcutta is an experience in itself. I don't know any Bengali or Hindi, so going to the 'hardware shop' was an experience in itself. It took me a whole day to realize that pushing in is more than ok, actually it's necessary! After some time the guys at the 'hardware shop' got to know me pretty well. We even 'spoke' about the world cup that was going on while I was there. Cricket and patriotism seems to bridge the language barrier. Much to my relief I finished the drain. And it did work. Amazing! The fight with the rat was worth it. And playing in the sewers of Calcutta is not much fun. I had developed a reaction to my anti-malarials and had to stop taking them, and here am I working in the sewers of Calcutta. Madness!

With this 'win' under my belt, and my confidence peaking, I revisited my stupidity. 'Now what is your greatest need' I said. "Well Paul" the response came. 'We need legs put on all the beds in the place!'. "How many beds are there?" I queried. 'About two hundred', I was told. I did the maths. That's 800 legs and 1660 bolts. Need a drill, extension cord. Do they even have power.....? So we sanded, planed and fitted legs to every bed in the place. It took about three weeks I think. I even got electrocuted in the process, but lived to tell the tale.

I could tell you many many things about the home but let me, if I may tell you one thing. Actually the most important thing. And we should know that the most important things are never things – people are the most important thing.

The children are indeed beautiful in the truest sense of the word. I sat and laughed with the kids. They tried to teach me Hindi; unsuccessfully. I tried to teach them some English, which

they picked up remarkable well. They asked me endless questions about Australia. They laughed at my face that sometimes turns red when I was working. After we finished work each day we would go and play with the children. They were fabulous. They touched me in such a way that I doubt I will ever be the same again. The many faces whose names I could never remember let alone pronounce still bring a tear to my eye. If the purpose of life is to learn to love then the girls were excellent teachers.

On our last day there we bought an ice cream for all the kids and the house mothers. It was our farewell gift. It was one of the most magic days of my life. As I walked out of the compound, fighting back tears, I turned back one more time. What I seen I will never forget. A crowd of kids standing there waving at me, reminding me to come back.

I said another silly statement before I left. You think I would have learnt by now! I told the ladies that I'm coming back. Maybe to help remodel the kitchen, maybe just to ask what is their greatest need. I plan to get back there early next year. Maybe you can come to?

## **All Bengal Women's Union Child Sponsorship**

Please help these girls continue with their studies and aim at better future. If you are interested in sponsorship please contact Action Aid.

**Lakshmi** is a 17 year old girl who seeked shelter at ABWU following the death of her father and neglect by her family four years ago. Before entering ABWU, Lakshmi showed much promise at school, passing the Middle School leaving exam in 2006 and joined other school for the Higher Secondary Course. Unfortunately her employers were unhappy with her continuing with higher educations levels and she was asked to leave. ABWU has given her much needed shelter and she is now continuing with her studies with the aim of doing Nurses' training. Lakshmi now needs support to complete graduation followed by occupational training.

**Puja** is a 13 year old girl who comes from a very poor family and has been subject to abuse from her grandmother, aunts and uncles following her mother's suicide. After running away and being found by the police she was transferred to ABWU in February. Puja is described as a soft spoken, well mannered girl and very much involved in her education. She is in need of support to complete her higher secondary level followed by occupational training.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** **THURSDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2007**

The meeting will be held in FITZROY this year to give some of our Melbourne City and Western suburbs people the opportunity to attend a meeting should they wish.

**VENUE – Fitzroy – the office will advise details when booking in.**

**Time – 8 pm**

Please advise the office of your attendance for catering purposes.

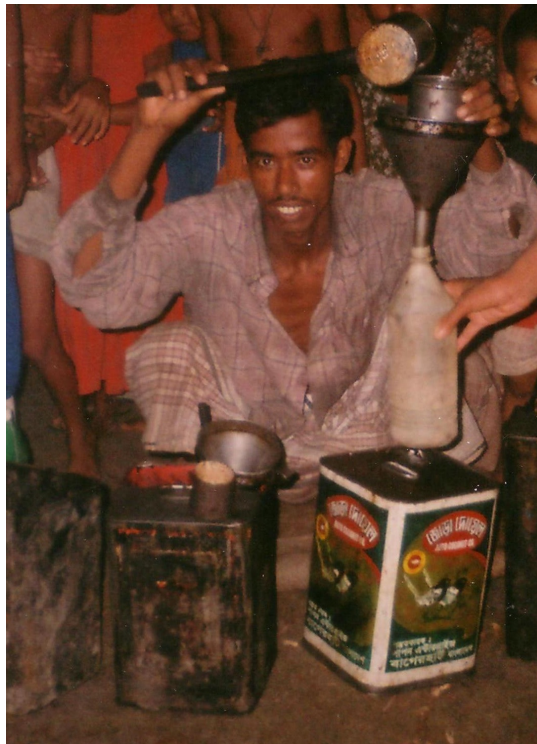
Phone – 9704 6315

Email – [lipickering@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lipickering@bigpond.net.au)

Abdur Rahman (35 years old) lives with his wife and three sons in Jajira (located in the Sirajganj district of central northern Bangladesh), a small village situated on a *char* (sandbar) close to the Jamuna, one of the mightiest rivers on earth. Char dwellers are extremely vulnerable due to the annual flooding of the river which destroys homes and crops and to washes away huge tracts of land.

Prior to his involvement with Symbiosis, Abdur was illiterate. He is also 'functionally landless', which means that although he owns the land that his small house stands on, he has no land for growing crops. Consequently he is forced to look to other means than farming to try to provide for his family. For Abdur, going door-to-door selling cooking oil seemed like the best alternative. Although he did this for years, he was never able to sell enough. So when crises struck his family, he was forced to take loans from the local moneylender. The interest rates on these loans were exorbitant, so it was a great struggle for him to make repayments at the same time as looking after his family. This led him into a downward spiral of debt that only deepened the poverty in which he and his family lived.

Things began to improve for Abdur after becoming involved in the Jamuna River Development Project. Abdur was in the first group of men to join a men's self-help group named 'New Life'. To begin with, the twenty men commenced Functional Education, a literacy and numeracy course that also raises awareness about health, nutrition and various social issues. After several months of functional education, Abdur and the rest of the group began to participate in Peer Savings, where each group member deposits a small amount (usually 5-10 cents) per week into a common fund. Eventually the group had enough capital to begin giving loans to group members for income-generation activities. Abdur was keen to expand his oil business, so applied to the group for a 500 taka (AU\$10) loan. Through project income-generation funding, project staff were able to provide an additional 5000 taka (AU\$100).



Through these loans, Abdur has transformed the way he conducts his oil trading. Now, instead of going door-to-door, he has established a stall in the local bazaar. This has enabled him to dramatically increase the volume of sales and the overall profitability of his business. Even with the monthly repayments on his loan, he is earning more money than before and so is better able to care for his wife and children. As well as the success of his business, he feels proud to be able to read and write now. He is very happy with the improvements in his life and he feels grateful to Symbiosis and project staff.

## **What is WORLD FOOD DAY?**

**Lyn Pickering**

World Food Day is the 16<sup>th</sup> day of October each year, and is nominated as a day when people around the globe pause to consider the needs of those who have so little, and hopefully do something about that need. I wonder how many people out in the wider community stop and really think about the needs of others, let alone spare a thought for the marginalised people of the world. Many of our readers are generous in their giving to worthwhile causes over the whole year, not just on an appointed day.

Each year I talk about World Food Day and give you some different ideas to arrange your own activities, or invite you to one of our two arranged events – a dinner at Bayles or a luncheon in Bright. There are so many simple things to do which do not require much effort. However your consideration of doing something a little different and making a donation will make a huge difference in the life of a needy child, a destitute woman, or a local community who just need some positive direction to help themselves to make a better life for their families - **Action Aid Australia does not offer a handout, but rather a hand up.**

### **Some ideas for you to consider (tax deductible)**

- \*SCHOOLS – Dress Free Day – a gold coin donation (\$2 and over)
- \*Donate what you would spend on a meal
- \*Supply food for your work colleagues and request a donation
- \*Family dinner – one family to prepare the food, and invite your relatives for the meal and ask for a donation
- \*Coffee morning – Scones with jam and cream and other delights – again with family friends or work colleagues.

Please send us a note if you were involved in an activity to raise awareness of World Food Day, and we will use it in our Newsletter, with your permission.

**All funds raised will be used in project work in India and Bangladesh.** If you have a specific request for your funds raised, please advise when sending money in. Please also advise us of the names of people for receipting. Names of people and addresses can be sent in, or you may choose to collect all receipts and pass them on.

Two special functions for world food day have again been arranged this year – a luncheon at Bright, and a dinner at Bayles.

## BAYLES DINNER

The food is all donated, the meat is home grown on the farm at Bayles, and all the food is home cooked.

**Saturday November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

6.00pm for starters, Main meal to commence serving at 7.00pm

**\$30.00 per person** (tax deductible receipt issued)

**745 Boundary Drain Road, Bayles**

Menu: Finger Food Starters, Roast lamb, beef & pork, Baked potatoes, salads. Vegetarian options available. Variety of desserts  
Drinks: soft drinks provided, byo alcohol

**RSVP: Friday November 10th, 2007**

**Andrea Pickering 5997 7629**

Lyn Pickering 9704 6315

lipickering@bigpond.com.au

(a map will be sent out to those interested in attending.)

## BRIGHT LUNCHEON

**For the 7th year in a row Patrizia Simone of Simone's Restaurant in Bright will be donating her beautiful food to raise funds for "Joy's Girls" at All Bengal Women's Union, Kolkatta.**

**12 Noon, Monday November 19th**

**Bright RSL, Camp Street Bright**

**Cost: \$20**

Joy will be assisted by some of her loyal friends in Bright. Joy would LOVE to see some AAA supporters at this annual event...so if you are planning a trip to beautiful Bright around that time please book in by contacting the office (who will put you in contact with Joy)  
This function is ALWAYS fully booked out so get in quick!!!

The recent mail has brought me profiles of new children who were all classified as being the most urgent in need of support to remain at school. The VO (Village Organisation) and the local teachers have all been instrumental in putting the names of these beautiful children forward for sponsorship.

Kowsalya is an eight year old girl in Grade 4 at school and lives with her mother and twelve year old sister. Her father deserted his family when she was a baby. Both girls attend school but it has been a struggle for the mother to feed her two children and send them both to school.

Sandya is seven years old, and lives with her mother, grandmother and 11 year old sister. Her mother is now six months pregnant with her third child. Tragically her father was killed in a road accident recently. The mother has been attempting to support the family and keep the two girls at school which is becoming increasingly difficult.

Babu is an eight year old boy. He lives with his mother and thirteen year old brother. His father died three months ago. His mother understands the need for an education for her children to go forward, but she is still coming to terms with the loss of her husband. There is a grandmother who is attempting to help and support the family.

Sravani is eleven years old, the youngest of two girls whose parents died of Hepatitis B. They live with their Aunt and Uncle and Grandmother. The uncle is disabled, and the Aunt is currently training to be a health worker, being funded by her parents. They wish to maintain the girls education, but require support to do so.

Vijaylakshmi is 8 years old, the youngest of two girls, now living with her grandmother. Her mother died when she was a baby, the father is mentally ill and has left the village. The Grandmother struggles to look after herself. Her twelve year old sister has commenced tailoring classes with the support of the VO, and help is requested for Vijaylakshmi to attend school regularly.

Padmavathi is an eleven year old girl with a six year old sister who live with their grandmother. The parents both deserted the girls six years ago when the younger girl was only a baby. Grandmother has sought help for the girls to both attend school regularly.

Please consider giving one of these children a chance to attend school regularly and receive some much needed extra support and care.



## **In Memory of Mrs. Rosemary Gibson**

This year has seen the passing of several of our long time supporters, who made a big commitment in terms of their voluntary time to keep the office of Action Aid Australia functioning. Some of our long time supporters will be saddened to hear of the passing of Mrs. Rosemary Gibson. Husband Jim, also an Honorary Director during the 1980's with Rosemary, has advised us that she passed away on 11<sup>th</sup> May this year.

Rosemary was sponsorship secretary for The All Bengal Womens Union during her time on the Board. Another wonderful Action Aid Australia volunteer lost, but also remembered for her work for those who have less.

## **Congratulations to Bec Reeves**

Bec successfully completed her Degree earlier this year, and is now taking a few months off until next year when she will commence her second Degree. In the meantime Bec is back in India and about to travel up to SEDS to spend the next few months working as a volunteer with the SEDS team in health care, and dealing with the child sponsorship program. She has been studying Hindi and seems very happy with all things Indian.

Ian and I spent time with Bec and her mother Cheryl recently talking about India and this forthcoming trip. We expect Bec to gain from this further work experience. She is a girl with a big heart and a willingness to help others. Some of you may remember the article Bec wrote in our September 2006 Newsletter after her return. We look forward to hearing about her experiences at SEDS in due course.

### **THANK YOU**

To everyone who bought the Entertainment Books. This is a Action Aid Australia fundraiser, with a percentage of all books sold put towards Action Aid. Your support is appreciated. Also thank you to Liz and Robin Zlonzak for folding the newsletters ready for mail out.

#### **M & K PRINTING**

**For all of your printing requirements,  
talk to KEN  
at M & K Printing, Vesper Drive Narre  
Warren.  
Telephone – 9704 8500**

#### **COMPUTER INITIATIVES**

**Tim Moore  
03 9707 4850  
Berwick**

**ACTION AID AUSTRALIA – REMITTANCE ADVICE**

**I would like to help Action Aid’s work in the following way:**

- **Make a general donation : \$\_\_\_\_\_**
  
- **Support Village Communities in project activities**
  - Bangladesh (Symbiosis) Vocational Training for Women TTIS
  - India (SEDS) – Watershed Management Project
  - India (SEDS) - Womens’ Self Help Groups
  - India (SEDS) – School Development
  - India (SEDS) – Medical Fund for sponsored children
  - India (ABWU) – Special projects
  - India (ABWU) – Medical Fund for sponsored children
  
- **\$25.00 Membership – 01/07/07 to 30/06/08**
  
- **Information re Bequest (Tick the box)**
  
- **Begin a Child Sponsorship in :**
  - India ( ABWU) - All Bengal Womens’ Union in Calcutta)**
  - India (S.E.D.S.) in Central Southern India**

**The cost to sponsor a child for :**

- |                    |                          |                      |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 month = \$20.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 months = \$110.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 months = \$55.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12 months = \$220.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Title : \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Please advise if receipt to be in a different name to the sender.  
All gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt issued)  
P.O. Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, 3805