



Partners in Aid

Newsletter

Partners in Aid Ltd
ABN 50 006 946 550

PO Box 42, Narre Warren LPO
VIC 3805 Australia

Phone: 03 9704 6315
Email: admin@partnersinaid.org.au
Web: www.partnersinaid.org.au

June 2010

Visit to All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU), Kolkata, India

Anne-Marie Maltby

I was delighted to be able to have the opportunity to visit ABWU in February at the tail end of a trip to rural West Bengal. My only previous visit was in 2004 when I dropped in to take photos of the sponsored girls for Joy Handley. I had not yet even joined the (then) Action Aid Australia board but I was so impressed by the ABWU that I wanted to become involved and help them in whatever way I could. It was therefore really pleasing to return six years later with a bit more knowledge and to meet so many of the women that Joy and I have liaised with in the last few years.



ABWU Open Day

Joy visited ABWU for a longer period a few weeks after me and will write a more comprehensive report for the next newsletter. I wanted to write about some of the things that I found interesting including areas not supported by Partners in Aid. We will send out the girls' reports with photos on Joy's return.



Much of my time at ABWU was spent looking around and meeting as many people as possible and getting a better idea of how things work. The women were extremely friendly and helpful and many different people showed me around and described what they do.

Remedial Class

Please help us spread the word about Partners in Aid by passing this newsletter on to family, friends and colleagues once you have read it.

Thank you.

Overall things are looking very good at ABWU. The team there does a fantastic job and are very happy to be associated with an organisation with such credibility. Although many of the staff such as teachers and house mothers are paid, most of the administration is done by volunteers who all work long hours, many six days a week and I am in awe of their dedication. I was able to take photos of nearly all of the sponsored girls and several of the older ones asked if I could find them sponsors.

When girls first arrive at the home, they are not immediately housed in the general dormitories. The girls may not be from West Bengal so may not even speak Bengali. Despite the care given, many of them find the new environment to be very challenging and have trouble adapting. It is a strange place for those who have only lived on trains or train platforms and only ever had what they could beg, scrounge or steal. Even children from extremely abusive situations are often severely homesick. Many also have severe psychological issues which may not be obvious at first so they stay in a secure area where they can be closely monitored. The 'house mothers' in these areas are well trained and the girls also attend 'art' sessions where they are assessed. I hadn't realised how difficult it can be to manage these girls when they first arrive at the home.



Child Counsellors at ABWU

I also visited the remedial education section which Partners in Aid supports. There are two forms of remedial education provided. One assists girls who are struggling to keep up with their work. The other is a separate small classroom for children of all ages who have never been to school or whose psychological problems or behaviour mean that a 'normal' school isn't possible. There is another small side room where they work with the most disruptive children.

Children from the surrounding slums may also be cared for here and it is hoped that all will eventually be able to get an education in the general school environment. The children looked like a handful! They had been colouring in pictures and were very keen to show me and have their photos taken.

From a theoretical viewpoint, there are actually two children's shelter homes and each has their own superintendent but in reality they are run as one. Only the dormitories are separate so that they don't have problems with government inspectors. The reason for the two homes is that children are covered by different Acts of Parliament depending on whether they are total orphans, abused, neglected or destitute.

The Swadhar project is a separate area of ABWU for victims of trafficking. They are given intense counselling and free legal aid and attempts are made to bring the traffickers to justice. Most have been working as prostitutes from a very early age and can't remember any other life. This means that many find it difficult to adjust to the idea of a 'normal' life. It was interesting to meet many of these girls and see the craft work that they are learning to do. Ironically, some of the most successful jobs have been hairdressing and beauty therapy as the girls have experience in these areas and enjoy them. It has been found that one of the important parts of rehabilitation is to find things that the girls enjoy doing and given them a sense of accomplishment.

We discussed trying to improve the timeframes for feedback on the sponsored children. We have always tried to take the 'Indian factor' into account as well as the heavy workload of the volunteers but I hadn't realised some of the other factors involved with the frequent long delays. Children with families are sent for visits if the family situation allows it. Sometimes they don't return from these trips for many reasons. It's more of a problem in country areas where there may be no family member able available to chaperone the child back to ABWU. They know that someone from ABWU will eventually sort the return trip out so sometimes they just don't bother.

Occasionally children will just disappear and it isn't known where they have gone and if they are coming back. Child protection will normally always do a home search before girls finally leave ABWU. We are also not notified that a girl has left the home until they have been resettled for a three month period. Until that time, they remain on the ABWU books.

When girls leave, they are given the phone number of someone (usually one of the staff that they trust) that they can contact if there are any problems. If they are 18, which is the legal age for operating their post office savings account, they are given access to their own account containing a small amount of money. This is where gifts from sponsors are deposited. If they are not yet 18, they are notified that they will be able to access the account once they reach that age.

We were hoping that we would be able to find the first person sponsored by (then) 'For Those Who Have Less' as it was believed that she had returned to live in the Old Age Home. No-one knew who it was and I think it may be too long ago for them to find out.

I now have a much greater appreciation of the problems faced by the ABWU staff and the abilities required to manage girls from such difficult backgrounds.

Partners in Aid donations had been allocated for purchase of batteries to use during power outages. At this stage, they have not been purchased and they are deciding whether to go with a solar option. This would suit Partners in Aid given our emphasis on sustainability.



Welcome Party at ABWU Open Day

The main purpose of my trip to India had been as a dentist with a health team in an institution called Anandeniketan and also in local rural villages. Anandeniketan houses several hundred psychiatric patients as well as physically and mentally handicapped adults and children so I got to see firsthand some of the terrible results of child abuse and poverty. The contrast with ABWU was huge and it was a great pleasure to see the happy, clean and well nourished ABWU girls and know that they are being given chances in life that the Anandeniketan residents could not dream of.

Coincidentally there was an American dental team visiting ABWU for the first time, who had set up with dental equipment and were seeing a lot of the girls. Next time I visit, I want to ask more about the dental health there and perhaps do some toothbrushing lessons. The teeth I saw in the villages were terrible and could be improved a lot by a simple improvement in brushing technique so that the gums get cleaned.

Our supporters and child sponsors should feel very proud that they are making such a significant contribution to the lives of very vulnerable and disadvantaged women and girls.



Children lining up for their first Open Day



Girls waiting to have their photos taken



Yoga class

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Over 37% of India's population live below the international poverty line (US\$1 per day).**
- **The national literacy rate is around 65%, but is as low as 50% amongst females in rural areas.**
- **Less than 40% of adolescents attend secondary school.**
- **According to the World Bank, on average 25% of teachers are absent from school at any one time.**
- **A study of government primary schools showed that 59% have no drinking water and 89% have no toilets.**

Medical Support for SEDS Sponsored Children in India Project Co-ordinator - Lyn Pickering

Since 1995 many children have passed through our SEDS sponsorship program and gained an education and learnt other skills to help them move forward. Currently there are 180 sponsored children. A number of the children, both past and present, have undergone treatments for a variety of ailments including poor nutrition, poor eyesight, a few minor surgeries and the occasional major surgery. Common medical conditions have been dealt with quickly.

The more costly work has been carried out by Doctors on children like Aparna who had a bulbous eye removed, the result of polio which also afflicted her legs and the two girls Mownika and Harika who had dreadful burns after a gas bottle exploded and killed their father. Aparna has now gone to live at a Blind School but returns 'home' to SEDS for holiday visits. Mownika had corrective surgery to her badly burned foot and is now attending College and walking without a limp. Harika has had several visits for skin grafts, and today is a healthy, happy young girl. These surgeries were supported by a medical fund set up some years ago, whereby Doctors gave much of their time free to help the children. That fund is now empty.

Nowadays each child has medical insurance which covers trips to the hospital, small items like glasses, creams and medications and some minor surgeries, but this insurance does not cover the more expensive items. **The Doctors are still giving some of their time free of charge**, and support two free Health Camps each year to check all the sponsored children.

Sponsorship at \$240 per child per year is not sufficient to cover the cost of some medical necessities or for any major procedures. A small number of the children on the SEDS sponsorship program currently need YOUR support to pay for some of their treatments. If you have a little to spare, with your help we can build up the medical fund again to help these beautiful young people.

Thank you.

SEDS Tank Desilting Gears Up Early

High levels of local interest and getting in ahead of heavy rains has meant that tank desilting in the Ananthapur District has begun early this year. Staff at SEDS have capitalised on the strong interest from villagers who must contribute half of the funds to desilt their large water tanks and must also agree on the size and location of the work.

SEDS also moved a step closer to Gold Standard accreditation for the biogas units they are producing, with a stakeholders' meeting earlier this year. Villagers, who will benefit from the units, were able to ask questions about the project. These units will use cattle manure to create gas for cooking and a by-product of fertiliser for local crops. Gold Standard Accreditation allows the sale of CERs (Carbon Emission Credits) at a premium price to benefit locals.

Bangladeshi Projects Success Stories

Project Co-ordinator - Roger Hughes

Jamuna River Development Project (JRDP)

Kohinur Begum

Kohinur Begum lived with her husband Sultan Khan and their two daughters in a small cottage in a village called Char Nischintapur, in a very remote area of Kazirpur Thana in Sirajgonj District. This char (sand bar) is in the middle of the Jamuna River, in an area where river erosion is common. The erosion occurs on one bank and the char rises on the other side. Poor nutrition and lack of food were a normal part of daily life. Kohinur worked as a housemaid in the home of a wealthier family in the area.

One day Kohinur met with Symbiosis field workers, Saleha Begum and Juran Pasa, who informed her about the adult literacy (Functional Education FE) and savings group activities of Symbiosis Bangladesh. She joined one of the FE groups, studied attentively and successfully completed the FE course. She also became a member of a savings co-operative called Pubali Women's Group, Nischintapur, depositing five Taka (eight cents) per week. As well as learning how to read and write and save money, Kohinur has also learnt about many other issues including women's rights, child health, and environmental development.

Kohinur took a 5,000 Taka (\$84) loan from the co-operative, enabling her and her husband to start agricultural work. In the first year they cultivated about two thirds of an acre of land, and also commenced vegetable gardening in their yard. In the first year she made good profits, and currently has savings of 2,460 Taka (\$42). She is very regular and disciplined in her savings.

Kohinur no longer works as a housemaid; she works in her own kitchen garden and rears poultry. Her husband works in the field and sometimes fishes in the river. They now have two sons and their two elder daughters study in the school run by Symbiosis JRDP. The family is self-reliant, respected by the community and a source of advice for neighbors. Kohinur is grateful for the positive changes in her life as a result of her involvement with the Symbiosis programs.



Kohinur Begum and family

Jajira Pre-School

Jajira is a densely populated village of around 2,500 people, most of whom are illiterate and living in poverty. Almost every family has four to five children and the education facilities for children are very limited and a long distance away. The village has a primary school with facilities for a limited number of children, and some students at the school are outside the primary level age range.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Around 40% of the Bangladeshi population live below the international poverty line (US\$1 per day).**
- **The national literacy rate is around 40%.**
- **Only 50% of children who enrol in primary school complete their primary education.**
- **57% of girls become mothers by age 19.**
- **Less than 10% of women receive any paid remuneration.**



Jajira village pre-school

Symbiosis works closely with groups in Jajira village and most members have small children. After discussions with group members and other local people it was decided to open a pre-school within this area. With necessary support from the local people Symbiosis opened a pre-school in a rented house and employed a teacher. The teacher was trained by Symbiosis staff to work with their curriculum. The pre-school commenced with 30 places, has become a model for best practice in the village and has been unable to meet the demand for places from the community.

Technical Training and Low Skills Jobs Training Program (TTIS)

Shahinur

Shahinur lives in Khude Bormi village, located in Gazipur district. The literacy level in this area is poor, particularly among women. Shahinur and her husband have one son and a daughter. Her husband is a day laborer on irregular work and earning a very low income, making it very difficult to support the family.



Shahinur

Shahinur wanted to help her husband and received sewing training through the TTIS project. She is also a member of the trust and savings group, and took out a loan of 20,000 Taka (\$300) to buy a sewing machine and cloth to start a tailoring business. The tailoring business has gone well and enabled Shahinur to support her family with her husband. The initial loan was repaid through monthly instalments, and Shahinur subsequently took out a further loan of 10,000 Taka (\$150) from Symbiosis to expand. Now she is happy, self sufficient, no longer dependent on her husband and is sending her children to school.

Ajhar Hossain

Ajhar Hossain lives in Khudebormi village in Gazipur district. Due to illness he was unable to continue his work, and with low levels of literacy could not maintain a desk job and became unemployed. He felt shame and frustration that he was not able to provide for his wife and three year old daughter, and became desperate to find a job which was compatible with his physical limitations.

Ajhar met TTIS trainers Maina Based and Tarun Kumar and asked why Symbiosis allowed only women to receive sewing training and why men aren't able to participate. The trainers explained that men are also welcome and a few had already received training from our project, even though the main focus is on women as they are marginalized and ignored by the community. He continued to express his interest and wanted to join in the sewing program with women.

TTIS project staff agreed that Ajhar could join, and from the outset he was very attentive in class and learned the skills quickly in comparison to the other trainees. After completing the three month course, he bought a sewing machine and started working from his house, collecting orders from other local areas, and charging less than other tailors. Through the training Ajhar now has a profession suited to his physical abilities, is earning money and supporting his family, which would otherwise have been impossible. In the future he plans to open a tailoring shop.



Ajhar Hossain

World Food Day Dinner Raises \$5000!

The annual World Food Day dinner was held again this year, with a move from November to the more 'stable' weather month of March. The night saw downpours, floods and the worst storm in years (thankfully Bayles did not receive the hailstorms!!) which provided some challenges to organisers and visitors alike.

We were thrilled that over 80 enthusiastic souls braved the elements and joined us for the dinner, and helped us to raise over \$5000. A huge thank you to our regular diners and our new visitors for your support and patience in light of the weather constraints - we really appreciated the good humour and spirit which was shown by all in slightly challenging conditions.

While visitors did not have a chance to walk around the farm due to the weather, the highlight of the night as usual was the variety of food that was on offer, which was consumed with great enthusiasm by all.

A special thank you to Mal for the donation of the Holden jacket, Peter and Odilia for the donation of vegetables, and Lyn for the donation of the Indian handicrafts, all which were sold on the night to add to our funds. A big thank you to Geoff and Andrea for opening their home again, to all who helped to get the event organised and keep things running throughout the evening.

We hope to see you all again next year.

Membership Payments Due

Partners in Aid membership is \$25 per person, per year.

Dues are payable by **1 July 2010** and cover the period 1 July 2010 - 30 June 2011.

Money from membership goes towards our administration costs, which we are always striving to keep to a minimum. For a number of years now we have been able to maintain our administration costs under 10% of income, which puts us in the top 5% of NGO's in Australia; something we are really proud of.

Please complete the donation form at the end of this newsletter and send it to us with your membership payment.

Entertainment Books Now Available for Most States!!

Entertainment books are now available for the 2010/2011 year. These books are a guide to the best restaurants, hotel accommodation, attractions, sports and leisure activities – all with 25% to 50% off or two-for-one offers, offering great value. Partners in Aid also receives a percentage of each book sold as a donation.

Melbourne, Sydney, Sydney North, Adelaide, Perth - \$65 each

Brisbane - \$60

Geelong, Tasmania, Canberra, Gold Coast - \$50 each

Cheques to be made out to Partners in Aid. For further information please phone the office or email admin@partnersinaid.org.au

We would like to thank the following local businesses who help us keep our administration costs low by kindly providing their services at a reduced rate:

- **M & K Printing, Narre Warren, 9704 8500 (Ken)**
- **Computer Initiatives, Berwick, 9707 4850 (Tim Moore)**

Partners in Aid Donation Form



Partners in Aid

Membership 1 July 2010–30 June 2011

Please tick the appropriate box:

I would like to renew my Partners in Aid membership \$25

I would like to become a Partners in Aid member \$25

General Donation

I would like to make a general donation to Partners in Aid
(If you would like to specify an area, please circle: ABWU/
SEDS Medical Fund/ Bangladesh)

Child Sponsorship Donation

I would like to begin/continue (please circle) to sponsor a child at ABWU/
SEDS (Please circle and note in the box number of children you
would like to sponsor)

Please tick the appropriate payment box:

3 months = \$60

6 months = \$120

12 months = \$240

**Total Amount enclosed
(membership, general donations and child sponsorship)**

If paying by EFT please email admin@partnersinaid.org.au for bank account details. If paying by cheque make it out to Partners in Aid and send to PO Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, VIC 3805

Name for receipt: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Phone Number: _____

Email (for internal use and occasional updates): _____

Gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt will be issued)

Thank you for your support