

# F.O.K.E. Newsletter

August 2011-December 2011

## Dear Friends

At the end of what has been a most exciting as well as at times a very challenging year for FOKE we joyfully extend to each and every one of you the heartfelt wish that 2012 will be extra special.

**Our New Members: Mala:** Like Lovleena and Ganga, Mala was a gift to us from HOPE Foundation Hospital. Mala originally lived in Thakurpukur and still has her house there. After her fall from bed she broke her hip and was admitted by her son in Bangur Hospital who slowly stopped visiting her. Later she was taken to HOPE where she had her cataract operation and lived there for 6 months till the management found her a home with us. Mala is a widow and had lost 2 of her sons in accidents and the younger son is not interested in looking after her. We plan to visit him and the house soon. HOPE has provided us with a small medical bed as we really had no space when they requested us to take Mala. Somehow we had made space in Bhalobasa where she stayed for some time and now she is in Madhubati.



The following is a beautiful piece which was lovingly written by Eloise Hahn, from Sydney, Australia, who for several years has been a wonderful friend to FOKE as well as to Loreto Sealdah and who was present in Kolkata when we had the joy of welcoming Tara to join our family in Madhubati.

**Tara:** 'The story of an elderly lady called Tara is one that has touched my soul to say very least. Meaning



“Star”, Tara is a humble, grateful and talkative woman. Someone I know I can learn a great deal from. I was asked by Sanghita to help pick Tara up along with Nurse Champa Chowdhury who works part time for FOKE. On arrival at the NRS Government Hospital I was extremely moved seeing Tara lying on a metal trolley in the aisle of a ward on the second level. With small cockroaches and bright red bugs crawling along her skin and stained green and white sari, her sad eyes are now forever etched in my memory. Underneath her small

trolley was a bucket she used as a toilet.

Lifting her into the jeep I was reminded of her frailty by the weight of her small body. I was curious to find out about her story and we soon found out that many years ago she left her husband after becoming tired of his infidelity. So along with her young son and daughter she moved back in with her parents. To earn money she worked as a cook and later at a Hindu temple. At some point her parents died and her children inevitably grew up and had families of their own. Both children are believed to live in a small place with one bedroom, and did not allow Tara to live with them. After breaking her leg working at the temple she dragged herself to the hospital. There she managed to get herself admitted after a Manager took pity on her. That was in 2003. So for eight long years that trolley in the aisle of the hospital was to become her home. A place where her leg was fixed and her heart broken.

But with this story there is a happy ending. With the grace of FOKE, Tara has been given a second chance to live in a happy, loving and safe environment at Madhubati. She is now surrounded by the inspirational care of staff that loves her, and friends with similar stories who have become companions for life.

I take my hat off to the staff of FOKE and also to Tara who embodies a woman of strength and courage through times of great suffering and hardship. An endurance I can't even contemplate. May God bless all those souls who lie in similar circumstances to the one Tara was in, and may angels surround them with strength and courage.”



**Ganga reunites with her family:** In December we all experience the joy and sorrow of a most unlikely miracle when through the efforts of our staff member Sridam, Ganga's long lost family was relocated. After 3 years of searching for Ganga her son had given up all hope of ever finding her alive and he was overjoyed to learn that she was in our loving care. Two days later he arrived with his wife in Madhubati amidst great scenes of joy and disbelief. Ganga has always been a most popular and active member, loved by all especially our staff so there were a lot of tears later that day when she bade us farewell, with the promise that she would return to spend Christmas with us.

**Our Rainbow Miracles:** It has always been our profound hope that the loving attachment that the Rainbow developed with our elderly members when delivering lunch each day in Sealdah Station would one day grow to be something even more substantial and we are now extremely proud that this long held dream has become a reality. In July Rosie and Sunita first volunteered to become 'ayahs' [night nurse] for Kamala who was at that time in NIOH for rehabilitation. The girls would hopefully later join our 2 homes to continue their training and both quickly have grown to be most loved junior staff members. In October Roshida joined us in Madhubati and is currently learning the delicate craft of elderly care under the wing of Sushila and our resident nurse in Bhalobasha, Dipika.



**Durga Puja:** This year, as always, we celebrated Durga Puja and Diwali with grandeur. From both homes we had the usual enjoyable visits to the different colourfully decorated pandals. We travelled in auto Rickshaws and the drivers were very helpful to our ladies. For the 4 days of the festival we had a special menu cooked in the homes. Each member had their new saris / dresses with matching jewellery and was extremely happy.

**Christmas Programme:** What joy we had on December 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> when after a lot of secret preparation we presented all our beloved members and staff with special gifts in what was a most fun filled fashion. The idea was born earlier this year when Lovelina was admitted to Hope Hospital with abdomen pains, on leaving the hospital we presented her with a beautiful doll which brought great whoops of joy in the village of Madhubati as Lovelina proudly showed off 'baby' to one and all. She would later spend hours and days knitting for 'baby' so the thought was that including the usual gifts they would receive, that each and every member would also be given either a doll or a cuddly toy. Thanks to our beloved Maura and a lady in Bagenalstown we had beautiful such gifts for all. Lovelina now has twins and Savitri has a dolly with hair almost as long as her own. We presented the gifts in beautiful bags which they will use whenever they are going on their outings.



The greatest fun was without doubt when Parul opened her bag. Parul renowned as our most lovable rogue, totally dedicated after years of smoking on the street, to sneaking off for a quiet biri was mesmerised when she saw her doll was a spectacled man smoking a pipe. The dancing toy also had a packet of 'biris' in his hand and her great concern was that he would dance so much that the cigarettes would be lost. She kept trying to catch the biris and all were in hysterics. Later in Bhalobasha Mamata who always has prided herself on being the doctor in the house was given a toy medical set in her bag and we are now assured that every morning she will be conducting her clinic. The greatest gift any NGO can ever receive is the uncontrolled laughter of those they have the honour of serving and especially on December 26<sup>th</sup> we felt as though we were the wealthiest NGO in the city. Long may laughter reign!! We were especially delighted when all the local rickshaw wallahs as well as the local shop keepers all amassed on Bhalobasha for snacks on December 26<sup>th</sup>. It was extremely touching to watch them all receive blessings from all our members as they entered the house and this simple gesture of mutual appreciation was appreciated by all.

Ganga, as promised returned to us in Madhubati for 3 days over Christmas with her daughter-in-law. It was both touching as well as heartbreaking when she poured out her heart to Sanghita wishing to permanently stay in Madhubati but knowing the great love her son had for his long lost mother we came to the compromise that 3 or 4 times a year she could return to us for holidays.

**New Staff Members:** In November we were delighted to welcome Gita as our new cook along with her 3 years old daughter. We hope that Gita will continue to enjoy being part of our family and that Priyanka next year will join our pre-school.

**Garden Renovations in Bhalobasha:** A lot of work has been done on the garden in Bhalobasha and apart from the welcome benefits we are receiving from having a welcome supply of vegetables we are also most heartened by the many words of appreciation the staff have received from locals who pass by. Surajit, Sridam Baren and Bishnu have as always excelled themselves in meticulously bringing about this transformation.

**Medical Interventions:** We are very happy to use the Government Hospital facilities available and it has been very good and cost effective. Binapani got her Gall stone operated followed by checkups in the Gastroenterology and Cardiology Departments. Later we had Momata, Sabitri, Subhadra and Mayarani in turns, checked in the Geriatric care and Psychiatric unit in PG Hospital. The doctors in these units spend nearly one and half hours each with our ladies and are most thorough. This was felt essential as our visiting doctor was unable to visit our Madhubati home anymore due to his busy schedule and in a way it also was good for the ladies to come out to the city and experience the world outside for a change.

In between we had to admit Parvati, Momata and Savitri, Subhadra to HOPE hospital for a few days hospital care. At present we have Shanti in HOPE as she has a back pain and has been given a special belt.



**School News:** We were also delighted in October to welcome Rupa as part of our teaching staff and she also had the Barefoot Teachers Training Course in Loreto Sealdah. We are now in a position to greatly improve our teacher/student ratio which we hope will greatly benefit all students with a new batch arriving in January. Thanks to the continued support of Concern India- Kolkata for paying the teachers honorarium and the food for the children.

We had a grand celebration on **Children's Day** where all our children were invited for lunch served with chicken curry, in the house. Teachers cooked and all helped to make the day enjoyable for the students and it was like a picnic day for all.

**Self Help Group:** Presently we have 4 SGH with 14 members in each. From their savings members have taken loans for cultivation and the loan of 80,000 which was received from the bank (Rs. 40,000 each for 2 groups) has now been repaid and refunded to the group. We are in the process of forming our 5<sup>th</sup> group.

**Renovation:** Having totally renovated Madhubati earlier in the year, complete with repaired walls, new bathrooms and kitchen as well as adding an outdoor kitchen to facilitate the cooking of hot lunch for our students we have started revamping Bhalobasha. Over the next few weeks, and in advance of our 8<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2012, we hope to totally refurbish and modernise the kitchen in Bhalobasha as well as the upstairs bathrooms. Funds permitting we will also paint the house both internally as well as externally so there are exciting days ahead in Thakurpukur. **We are most grateful to Sean Garvey, his wonderful family and many friends for funding this most necessary work.**



**Visitors:** Kerry Luxton and Elouise Hahn our two special friends visited us during this term. Like all years they were very generous with their time and donations to FOKE. Kerry is very passionate about our work with the elderly and she makes the best use of her cooking talents to raise funds for FOKE. Kerr prepared pampering gifts including soaps and face towels donated to her b supporters in Australia. Elouise likewise charms all to support FOKE and is also planning for a documentary film on FOKE this January.

We were very happy when Sean Garvey and his daughter Lorraine visited us again this year after Christmas. We had a wonderful celebration of belated Christmas in Madhubati with the nativity play, dance and recitation by the children followed by members dancing on Michael Jackson's music. It was a lovely evening and children loved the food items as much as the members and staff.



**Our Beloved Eily R.I.P.** On Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> the sad news reached us that a lady we truly cherished was no more with us. Mrs Eily Davern, mother of Fr Richard who together with his amazing team in Caherdavin, Limerick has been so instrumental in our continued progress, had gently passed into the hands of the Lord. Eily was much more than a beloved visitor in 2004 and especially in 2006. Her visits to Sealdah Station for the food distribution and to Madhubati were very special to all and for her it was the highlight of her trip. Eily truly cherished the time she spent with us. She adored Sanghita and it goes without saying that the depth of this love was very much reciprocated by all who knew and loved her in the FOKE family. Dearest Eily we may never know what tomorrow will bring but of one thing we are certain, your exuberant spirit will forever continue to inspire us into the future.

We were also saddened and shocked to learn of the most sudden passing of Sean (in photograph with dear Eily) earlier this year. Also an integral part of The Caherdavin Team who enriched us with their presence in 2006 Sean was the life and soul of the party when he was here. Our heartfelt condolences go to his family and many friends especially Noreen his partner whose company we also cherished.

**Sr.Cyril Mooney IBVM.** In writing some words of appreciation for one of the greatest living motivators of our time it is difficult to know where to begin, except perhaps to say that without Sr. Cyril FOKE might never have begun and even if it had begun [at a much later date than 2004] it would not be what it is today. The greatest gift that any individual or fledgling NGO can receive is being bestowed with wholehearted trust, confidence and a spirit of empowerment and in Sr Cyril we have been truly blessed to enjoy the privilege of her total support in our quest to bring life to the destitute elderly. We know that once she assumes her new exciting role in early January we will continue to enjoy the vast experience of her wealth of knowledge as she will still continue to be the consultant to Sr. Igora –the new Principal. For now though **THANK YOU SISTER** for enabling us to witness almost 8 years of daily miracles.



On behalf of all the FOKE family, our beloved members and our trusted staff we wish to thank you most sincerely for your continued interest and support of our work. Your kind words we cherish and we feel privileged to share the journey of the last 6 months with our friends of FOKE. We would be delighted if you wish to forward this newsletter to whoever you feel would appreciate it.

To end we wish you and those you hold dear a wonderful 2012 and we look forward to bringing you our next newsletter in July after what will hopefully be as exciting a 6 months period as the one we have all so richly enjoyed. Wish you all A Very Happy New Year.

With warmest regards

**The FOKE Team**

