



# FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER : JANUARY- JUNE 2020

Dear Friends ,

The year 2020 began with a lot of promise and hope, but we soon realised how it all changed into despair. How this small virus can rule the most dynamic species and change the priorities of mankind. The environment allowed itself to improve, but in the process taking innumerable lives. Added to this terrible pandemic, West Bengal suffered the gigantic Amphan cyclonic storm which left the entire state devastated. However, there was no dearth of support from groups, friends and the organised sectors for the people affected by Amphan. We did our bit too. This again brings back hope in humanity. Our resilience will bring us through for sure once again!

## Here is a reflection shared by Rajeswari:

"As I venture out all protected with a mask, sanitizer etc to the market round the corner, I see the anxious look on my mom's face which tells in not so many words to come back home safe & at the earliest. The anxiety is not only for my health but also for her own safety & security. My mom is nearing 70 & has a lot of ailments which restrict her mobility & increase her dependence on me at all levels - physical, emotional & financial. She is not worried about her getting infected. Her worry is more for me being healthy so she doesn't live to see a day sans me, where she would have to depend on strangers.

Lockdown has in many ways made me more aware of how vulnerable the elderly in our society are, not just physically but at all levels. With the world going digital, their children far

away & this kind of an unforeseen situation, this unspoken need for support became more evident.

Cyclone in the midst of lockdown was another great reminder of Buddha's famous teaching of Impermanence. Communication was cut off, things were not available & one had to just pray. As things normalised a bit, my mom reflects, will things ever normalise??

I couldn't even imagine what it would have been like if my parents were alone in this kind of situation. My thoughts then go to those elderly who do not have the luxury of such support of family & friends. FOKE has in its small way helped protect the lives of some elderly in our homes but what about all those innumerable ones who aren't so blessed?

Increasing the capacity in our homes to accommodate a few more elderly is a future plan but how many such homes can we make & sustain & for how long? With the low mortality rate & longer lives, how prepared are we for the future? What is the solution beyond residential homes? Lockdown left me with questions galore & I leave you with some of them."





**REST IN PEACE  
KAMALA HALDER**

**We will miss the presence of Kamala in Charunibash as she was a regular visitor. Kamala was our non-resident member who shared both meals in Charunibash on a regular basis. She participated in all the programs and loved spending her time with the other members and staff in Charunibash.**

**She always received her share of gifts from visitors and friends. Kamala enjoyed her visit to the pandals during Durga Puja.**

**We were happy to support her family for the prayer ceremony they lovingly arranged in her memory.**



**Update on  
Smritikona**

Smritikona Ghosh came to live in Bhalobasha from 11th September 2019. We were able to locate her sister Gauri, but sadly they do not have any interest in meeting one another. Out of respect for their wishes we are not pushing, since none of them will be happy if we do so.

Smritikona is now well settled and wants to visit the bank and post office to withdraw whatever little savings she has. We will help her in this process so that she can use it for herself.





## MEDICAL NEWS

Thankfully, during this time all our members and staff were in good health. No hospitalization or any serious illness touched our members. It was such a blessing because in case of any required hospitalization, it would have been a major challenge during the Covid-19 situation.

Lovely was hospitalised before the lockdown as she had hurt her feet and needed an x-ray and check-up. We admitted her on 14th March; she remained in Hope Foundation Hospital during the entire lockdown period and Amphan cyclone, and returned home only after 3 months on 11th June. On the very same day we admitted Maya Adhikary and Dipali in Hope Hospital for follow-up treatments with a few tests, physiotherapy and general check-ups. Both returned home on 20th June 2020.



## ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS

**Extension of Bhalobasha:** No new members were taken in as both homes are full. We had to refuse several admission due to lack of space. The new extension is now our utmost priority. The construction was about to start in April 2020, but due to the sudden announcement of lockdown all our plans came to a standstill. We will know soon when we can start provided we have all the required safety measurements in place. As there will be laborers and various people from outside involved, we have to ensure that all our members and staff stay at a safe distance while the work is in progress. We apologize for this unintentional delay, but please be assured that each and everyone who donated will not be disheartened. We will all witness the joy of sharing the home with a few more elderly who will benefit from our extension soon.

**New Recruitment :** Sandhya Mondal joined us from 1st March 2020 in Charunibash. Sandhya is taking up responsibilities alongside the other staff members. We welcome Sandhya in the FOKE family.



**Gobindo Naskar** discontinued his service, as extra help in Charunibash since May 2020 due to health issues. However he will be welcome to work on a per day basis whenever he is able.



**Medical Van:** The second hand Tata Sumo van, which got donated to FOKE through a gift deed by CRDS facilitated by Friends of Calcutta (FOC), served us well for the last few years. Both FOC and FOKE used the car for medical purposes. However, because of its lifespan of 15 years it became difficult to maintain. The expenses incurred for maintenance was becoming an extra financial burden on FOKE. There were safety issues too. Hence, it was decided by the Committee, that the vehicle would be handed over / returned to FOC through a gift deed.



This tank was received in donation from  
"DAKHINER BARANDA GROUP"

2020-11-13 13:07

### Donation in kind:

We are very glad to mention that as on 31st March 2020, a donation worth Rs. 3,60,000 (Rupees Three Lakhs Sixty Thousand) was received in kind. Groceries, toiletries, garments, assets, medical equipment and gifts for members kept coming in both our homes. We really appreciate this involvement where each of you set aside time to purchase the necessities for the homes.

Our members have earned Rs. 6840 in the year 2019-2020, by selling bead necklaces and paper bags and it is entirely their savings and they have the freedom to spend as they wish.

### Repair and renovation:

Our Charunibash home was badly affected by the Amphan cyclonic storm. Tiles in the prayer room and the room upstairs were broken by the numerous trees and branches falling down on and around the house. The staff and some of the members worked very hard to fix the roof and clean the house and the surroundings, cutting trees and slowly putting everything back in order. There was no electricity in the house for more than 2 weeks. The pillar of the gate in Bhalobasha nearly fell down, but is repaired now. Electricity resumed after 3 days in Bhalobasha.

Other than the repair mentioned above there was pipeline installation and septic tank renovation of the ladies` toilet in Charunibash. A new water tank was installed in Bhalobasha.



Shot on realme 3  
By Srimanta



## Support received and offered by FOKE during the lockdown period:

We were overwhelmed when on 4th April 2020, BEHALA AGRONI SANGHA arrived in Bhalobasha with dry food items. This was followed by DANPITEY another group, coming with rice and sanitizers in Bhalobasha on 8th April. Our big supporters, Paromita Neogy and Chinmoy from WISE also came with equal support of groceries for both homes on 9th April. Thank you to all who came facing many risks and delivering the necessities and then left within a few minutes maintaining social distancing. We distributed dry food from Bhalobasha thrice, which included rice, dal, potatoes, soap, soybeans, cooking oil and eggs, for all our 20 students, a few ex-students and the local rickshaw pullers. We are very grateful to Pallavi for connecting us with friends Mr. Arvind of Manab Seva and Friendz Forever Behala Aryya Vidyamandir 1987, for their contribution. Chandrayee and her family kindly sponsored one day's entire distribution as Chandrayee is very close to the children. Thank you, dear friends.



### Follow-Up School

In January both centres had new admissions. Charunibash has 48 students with 26 boys and 22 girls, and Bhalobasha has 20 students with 12 boys and 8 girls. The lockdown was announced on 24th March 2020 and we closed our school in both centres from 30th March after consultation with staff, parents and the Committee. We reopened on 8th June 2020. Since the number of students in Charunibash is larger, we divided them into 2 batches where classes I, II and III attend classes on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, while classes IV and V attend on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. In Bhalobasha there are only 20 students, so they all come in the morning as their regular school is closed. In both centres the pre-school students are still restricted to attend. The teachers and staff ensure all possible precautions at the start and end of the classes .



## Annual Sports Day:

On 23rd and 26th January both homes celebrated sports day including the members and staff. In both places the event started with flag hoisting, being Netaji's Birthday and Republic Day respectively. For sports there were prizes, but there were also prizes for best performance and highest attendance. Every child received a prize for something. In Bhalobasha there were sports for the mothers too as the numbers here are few. Shefali has suffered a double stroke, but this did not stop her from participating happily in the game of throwing the ball in the bucket.

## Tailoring Unit:

The first batch of 9 trainees completed with a written exam followed by a practical exam on 29th February 2020. Each trainee submitted a complete item made independently for their final practical evaluation. The certification got delayed due to the lockdown. The plan is to hand out the certificates when the second batch resumes their classes, hopefully in August. The second batch started on 1st March 2020 with 21 trainees with great enthusiasm. The passing-out group welcomed the new group and shared their experiences. Two classes were conducted before the lockdown was announced. The trainees pay a nominal fee of Rs. 50 per month for the 6 months course. We are in the process of planning to include the first group of 9 in an income generation scheme, for which 2 meetings were held in June to share ideas. At the meeting it was also good to learn that few of them did earn using their newly aquired skills during the lockdown.





## Ideas of alternative livelihood for the rural women:



On 8th January in collaboration with Behala Sujon Social Welfare Society, we organised a meeting with the local women in Madhubati and trainees in the vocational group. Ideas on making jute products, cloth bags, pickles, jam etc were shared by resource persons along with marketing strategies. However, we are yet to see it evolve as the interest is difficult to keep up if not organised in the best possible way. The lockdown situation is now a hinderance to the plan.

New Year was made very special this year with Adrienne being present and sponsoring a lavish lunch in both homes. Nearly 100 people had their lunch in Charunibash, including the students and some needy villagers.

Added to the celebration was the distribution of blankets amongst villagers. Lorraine sponsored the gifts for the members and children and it was such fun when everyone joined in to dance and celebrate.

On New Year's Day our friend Moushumi Mukherjee celebrated her mother's birthday with us and this was really special. Republic Day, Netaji's birthday, Saraswati Puja and Holi were celebrated in both homes. Unlike other years we had to cut down on celebrating Bengali New Year, Rabindra Jayanti and sadly restricted ourselves in welcoming friends, visitors and celebrations in both homes due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



## Celebrations







## Staff Appreciation Day

This special day was celebrated very differently this year. The day was spent visiting the Alipore zoo with lunch and felicitating Bela Barla's 15 years of valued service in FOKE. Words of appreciation from colleagues, presentation of a plaque by Michael and gifts from Kerry added to the happiness of Bela. We are very lucky to have Bela among us.

After the zoo we had a look at a handicraft exhibition and then went to Victoria Memorial for a stroll while some went inside the museum. Next was the visit to St. Paul's Cathedral and the day ended visiting Sanghita's home for tea. It was a wish fulfilled. Everyone had a good time and were excited, sharing their ideas for next year.



## Memory Donation:

Saheli Majumder Mitra sponsored the lunch and cost of some rations for everyone in Bhalobasha in memory of her beloved husband, Dr. Subhasis Majumder. She also visited Charunibash with sweets and chocolates for the members and students.

Ratna Bagchi and Keya Basu remembered their parents by sponsoring the lunch in both homes in June. They did not visit due to the lockdown, but we ensured that their wishes were carried out.

We also received a special donation from Sourav Ghosh, referred by Dakhiner Baranda Ladies Club, which was received in remembrance of his beloved mother Subhra Ghosh.







## Rescue and rehabilitation:

On 22nd January 2020 on the way to the FOKE office, a very sick middle aged man (his name was later found to be Manoj Tanti) was rescued from Moulali. After several hours between Munchipara Police Station and Premdaan home (Missionaries Of Charity), he was finally admitted.

On 8th February 2020, Sahadeb Some our President, rescued a young man from Dum Dum with the help of the NGO APNA GHAR and he is now in their care. We visited him and thankfully he is slowly improving. Hopefully this is a great chance for this young man to once again enjoy a normal life. The secretary of the organization AAPNA GHAR is confident that his home will be found soon.



On 21st March, the day before the lockdown was announced in India, a young man called Niraj Kumar Dubey was rescued from near Taratala. His mental condition was not sound and gave us the impression that he was lost. With the help of the Parnasree Police we were able to admit him in Vidyasagar Hospital and within a day we were able to contact his family. Sadly, due to the lockdown the family was not able to travel and Niraj was not willing to stay in the hospital. When he became violent the hospital authority released him as he was a threat to the other patients and staff. It was heartbreaking as we failed to unite him with his family. Niraj may never get the chance to return to his family again due to his unstable mental condition.

### Update on Parbati

We mentioned Parbati in our last newsletter who was rescued from Moulali and is a cerebral stroke survivor. Our friend and Assistant Secretary Arundhati, is kindly providing Parbati the home support while Calcutta Rescue is taking care of her medical treatment. Parbati has improved much and visited both our homes with Arundhati recently. We will however have to look for a permanent place for Parbati and hopefully by the end of this year we will find a safe home for Parbati.







## Our little effort to help Amphan-affected villagers

The trip to Madhabkati, Hingalgaunge started at 5:30 am, with a break of 40 minutes in Sonarpur for collection of the tarpaulin, mosquito nets and food packets. We reached Madhabkati after crossing on a vessel around 12:30 -1 pm where the villagers were waiting patiently. It was a simple makeshift distribution point, so a bit chaotic. However, the organizers had people with coupons either for mosquito nets or tarpaulins so as many as possible could benefit from it. The food packets were mainly for the children. At the end of the distribution we were able to look around the village a bit, but had to rush as the last vessel leaves at 6 pm. Jhinku and Shubham, our team members, went around the village to see the condition and speak to the villagers, while Pallavi and Sanghita stayed in the distribution camp. We returned with 81 tarpaulins and 200 mosquito nets as many from the next village Malikan Gumpti could not attend this distribution point. However, they got a second chance the very next day as another group was arranging relief then in that area.



FOKE joined hands with some energetic volunteers and on 7th June we went out to Gosoba, Basanti and Chotto Mollakhali. Friends came up with the required donations. FOKE distributed the balance items of 200 food packets, 80 tarpaulins, biscuits and 100 mosquito nets and a payment of Rs 6000 towards the boat fare was our contribution. Rajeswari contacted the Buddha Light International Association in Tangra, who worked very hard to prepare and put together cheera, muri, biscuits, cake, soap, detergent, kitchen utensils, rolls of plastic for 500 families. All items collected were distributed in: 1. Gosoba - 150 families 2. Basanti - 209 families 3. Chotto-Mollakhali - 320 families. The day started at 4 a.m with loading 5 mini trucks and a team of 19 volunteers which included our committee member Jhinku Banerjee and our medical co-ordinator Champa Chowdhury. They started the journey at 5:30 am from Kolkata and divided themselves into 3 teams to go to the 3 places mentioned above. Keeping the social distancing in mind the distribution was carried out. In Chotto Mollakhali the distribution had to be done from the boat itself. Although we faced disruption due to political intervention in Choto Mollakhali, we resumed the distribution from an unstructured jetty during heavy rainfall, as we were very determined to benefit the despairing villagers. The return journey on the boat was again another 3 hours. The day ended at 11 pm. The distribution in the other 2 places went peacefully.





40 tarpaulins were donated by FOKE to Champa Mahila Samity who are working remotely at Basanti area, in Sundarbans. Several families who had lost their houses received these tarpaulins.



We supported the voluntary group ALTERLIFE with two community kitchens, feeding 1000 villagers around 10 villages of North 24 Parganas for 3 days @ Rs. 20,000 per day. Thanks to ALTERLIFE who carried out the physical work diligently.



In West Midnapur we were able to support 131 families with dry food packets with the help of a local organisation LITTLE STAR. Food packets and mosquito nets also went out in Khejuri (Midnapur) with Pallavi.

We supported the organization JAGORANI in adding to their provisions, 2 Kgs of rice and Sooji. for 300 families at Rupmari village, Sunderbans.



We are grateful to Buddha Light Charitable Trust in Bodh Gaya for donating Rs. 50,000 to which we added our donation and shared the expenses for the community kitchen and for supporting the 131 families in West Midnapur.

Buddha Light International Association in Tangra supported with dry food for 500 families.

Thank you Rajeshwari, Pallavi, Jhinku, Veda and Champa for facilitating donations. We thank everyone for your very kind donation and trust.

**RATION KITS DISTRIBUTION**  
**(SUPER CYCLONE AMPHAN RELIEF CAMP)**  
**DATE : 24.06.2020**  
**PLACE : RUPMARI, SUNDARBON, W.B.**  
 © www.jagorani.org





## Visitors and their valued gifts

Sunistha Mukherjee and her group Dakhiner-Baranda Ladies Club visited Bhalobasha with gifts for members and kindly sponsored the cost of the overhead water tank, which we installed soon after. Concentrix Daksh visited Charunibash on 28th February with a month's food & requirements. The associates of Concentrix Daksh sang and danced with the members and children and made the day very special. Mr. T. B Chakraborty was referred by Mousumi Mukherjee, and has become like a family member of FOKE. He has visited thrice and donated financially as well as household requirements, second hand clothes in very good condition which we have distributed to the children in the brick kilns with the help of Kaikala Chetona. The donations of clothes collected all the year around were shared with similar organizations and sent to Purulia for distribution among poor tribals which Pallavi facilitated.



Adrienne celebrated both Christmas and New Year with us. A very special lunch was organised and sponsored by Adrienne and 100 people enjoyed a lavish New Year lunch in Charunibash. A similar lunch was also sponsored for Bhalobasha by Adrienne. Thank you Adrienne making the day extra special.

We missed Sean Garvey this year as he could not travel due to his health condition. Lorraine carried the flagship and everywhere we went we felt Sean's loving, childlike presence. We missed him not being physically present with us, but he was very much in our midst.

Aine and Norah made their annual visit to only Bhalobasha this time. Kerry visited and helped in the FOKE office regularly and arranged for the staff day celebration. We thank Liam Ashe for visiting both homes this year after many years.







Sevayan – Hands for All, carried out yoga classes every Friday for the children in Bhalobasha, which had to be kept on hold since the lockdown. HEARTFULLNESS conducted a meditation programme for the staff in Bhalobasha for 3 days from 1st to 3rd March 2020. Hopefully this will be a good thing for the staff as caregivers also need to look after themselves in order to be of good help to the members.

On 25th May 2020 Samiran Mullick from Hope Kolkata Foundation visited Charuni-bash and donated groceries and tarpaulins. He also gave tarpaulins and a pack of groceries to 5 of our students who were affected by Amphan. Thank you Manab Seva, WISE , DANPITE and BEHALA AGRONI SANGHA for your support during the lockdown period. We appreciate our committee members, friends in Kolkata and abroad for keeping in contact with us during this challenging time. We thank Sudit Bhattacharya for helping with FOKE's administrative work during lock-down and for designing this newsletter.

We thank Buddha Light International Association, Tangra and Buddha Light Charitable Trust, Bodh Gaya for their generous donations; we are grateful to all our friends who donated for the Amphan relief and during the lockdown period. We are grateful to all our staff members and elderly members for working round the clock to rebuild the homes without waiting for labours from outside.

The difficult situation is still prevailing so please do stay safe. We will all see a promising day soon.

With kindest regards  
The FOKE Family.

