

Friends of Kolkatas Elderly Newsletter – January to June 2012

Greeting from Kolkata!

This term has been wonderful as all legal matters concerning our 2 homes were settled with The Loreto Congregation, we are now a fully independent NGO and we also fulfilled our dream of starting our home for elderly men with the joy of bringing Khudiram as our first resident male member in 'Dadur Bari' [Grandfathers House]

Legal matters: Based on the meeting we had on June 28th 2011, followed by several other discussions with the Loreto Provincial Council and respective lawyers, it was decided that the property of Thakurpukur will be gifted to Friends of Kolkatas' Elderly through a 'gift deed' by Loreto House Educational Society (LHES) and the lease deed will be made directly in favour of Friends of Kolkata's Elderly. It was further decided that The Power of Attorney originally signed by Sr. Cyril- as Principal of Loreto Day School Sealdah, will be revoked and the existing lease deed of the property in Madhubati where we have our second home 'Charu Nibas'' would be surrendered.

The Mukherjee brothers as owners of the property in Madhubati representing their generous family were present and we were very pleased that Sr. Igora [new Principal of Loreto Sealdah] was also with us to sign as a witness. On behalf of Loreto House Educational Society (LHES) Sr. Tressia Aricatt – Provincial Superior and President signed the legal documents and on behalf of our organization Mrs Shukla Rebeiro - Treasurer and Sanghita Mondal as Secretary signed the legal deeds. Mr.Susil Kumar Dutta [our advocate and our general member] signed on behalf of our organisation as witness for all legal transactions.

Loreto congregation has always supported our work with the elderly but as no Loreto personnel are directly involved with our day to day activity and because we are a fully fledged registered charity with an independent legal identity, LHES [Loreto House Educational Society] felt that FOKE should have the freedom to carry on with the work without any interference from LHES in future.

We will forever be most grateful to Sr. Cyril and the Loreto Community for their invaluable support which enabled to bring FOKE from a dream to a living reality and although our independent status now means more responsibility we pray that in the years ahead the Loreto Congregation will continue to be proud of our efforts.

A salary increase has been granted to all our staff this term along with the provision for a small staff benefit. As we are less than 20 staff we cannot register with the Government Provident Fund facilities hence it was decided to make a Reserve Fund with a small contribution of 13.61 % by the employer per month on the basic salary for each staff member. Our staff were extremely happy to receive this benefit.

We had our AGM on 18th July and the audited statements of accounts and the annual report was submitted to the government office on 24th July 2012.

Our loss: loving Kali Dasi : From the very first day God blessed us with her unflinching trust in agreeing to make Bhalobasha her final home in this world, Kali was the most precious gift we ever received. To say it was a privilege to care for her for the last 7 years of her life would be the greatest understatement.

Her earlier life has been one of extreme struggle where her goodness was preyed upon to the full. Kali was married and widowed at a very early age, then worked



hard as a 'Devdasi' [serving a Hindu Priest] in return for food and shelter. Yet her beautiful eyes and ever radiant smile never belied any suffering she had so heartlessly endured. She fully embraced her family in Bhalobasha and her loving gentle presence will forever be with us. May our angel continue to bless us.



Sulekha Das came to us on the 3rd of June through a reference of an NGO. Though we did not find her on the street she was only a step away from ending up on the street. A widow with 3 brothers and 2 sisters and with several nieces and nephews, Sulekha was denied the joy of being part of an extended family. Of the 5 brothers and sisters the eldest died and the others refused to support her. Her situation was worse than those who have no one as she kept hoping that one day she would be part of this big family. A lady, who was like her adopted daughter, took care of Sulekha for nearly 10 years till she found it difficult to continue with the responsibility. Sulekha suffered from acute arthritis

and was on continuous high dose steroids for more than two and half years before we took her in. This affected her internal organs and when we did start her treatment in HOPE hospital she did not respond to any medication. Sadly after a struggle for more than 15 days she passed away on 16th July due to acute renal failure.

We were however very glad that the families with whom she lived for 10 years were there to perform the last rituals with us. After 3 days the family came back to treat all our members in Bhalobasha with homemade food in memory of Sulekha.

In loving memory of Kali and Sulekha we have two plants in earthen pots with some of their ashes placed in a special part of the garden in Bhalobasha.

Kohora who was with us since 2006 in Madhubati, was transferred in Asha Daan Home in Rajerhat near Amtala. We were unable to understand her language and she needed constant physiatrist care. The MC Sister in charge was very helpful and welcomed her immediately in their big family. Thanks to Sr. Kalpana for considering Kohora.



Inauguration of 'Dadur Bari' [Grandfathers home]

It is said that 'All good things come to those who wait' and on Sunday July 22nd we fulfilled our dream to finally open a small home for destitute elderly men. We start with one and what a special man he is!!



Khudiram was rescued from the streets of Tollygaunge by the Hope Foundation team and was in their Hospital for several months. On discharge he had nowhere to go, so on our recommendation Khudiram was placed in a paid old age home not far from Bhalobasha. At that time, having no designated place of our own, we had also placed 5 men there. Sadly none of them lived long enough to fulfill our dream of taking them 'home' but the bond of friendship formed with Khudiram meant that he had to be our first male resident.

We are eternally grateful to Jenny, Samiran and all our friends in Hope for allowing us this wonderful privilege and we were especially overjoyed that they attended the inauguration of what has truly been a labour of love.

With permission granted from The Mukherjee Family, who so generously lease Charu Nivas to us, we built a custom designed special home for 2 elderly men as an annex to the courtyard.

A veritable whose who of the humanitarian world turned out to welcome Khudiram and the inauguration was carried out in style by our patron Dr Jack Preger, whose upcoming birthday was also celebrated. We missed Sr. Cyril on this very special occasion as she was away in England receiving her doctorate in the Most Humane Letters from Liverpool University.

A very big thank you is due to all our wonderful staff and especially to Alan Mc Mullan who worked extremely hard alongside all our staff and builders to complete the impossible within a 2 weeks time span mostly in 45 degrees. Michael [now retired as a building contractor!!] was especially overjoyed and his reward was seeing the sheer joy in Khudiram's eyes as he saw his new home for the first time.

We are extremely grateful to Michael Symons (Australia) and to Vincent Jones (Ireland) as it is with their very kind donations that we were able to fulfill the dream. Mrs. Lovlin Khan – President of Rotary Club of Calcutta Conclave and Principal of St. Peter's Day School, personally donated the TV and a music player for Khudiram. We are also thankful to AnnaMarie from Ireland for her donation towards 'Dadur Bari' which included purchasing the 2 beds in what is a beautiful room.

Khudiram was overcome with joy especially the welcome afforded him by our ladies who presented him with red roses. Welcome Khudiram and may you enjoy every moment in your new home in Dadur Bari.

Medical Interventions: We had Sabitri PV admitted in the Diamond Harbour Government Hospital for treatment of a very bad chest which ultimately was TB. We received the necessary TB medicines from the hospital and later from the local health centre. We have also got help from the local Panchayat [local Government Body] for all reference letters etc for the hospitals.

Thanks to our Assistant Secretary Champa Chowdhury, who takes special interest and trouble to network and assist with all medical crisis. Sridam was also very actively involved with the follow up of Sabitri in the hospital. Subhadra was also in HOPE hospital for few weeks in February.

It was again with tremendous hard work of Champa that we were able to give a second life to Tara (age about 28- 30 years but who appeared in such a state that she could easily have been in her 70s). Michael and Champa found her crawling on the ground, totally black pulling a plastic bag behind her. They could not walk away from her when they saw her in such a miserable condition. With a broken leg she was dragging herself to move forward and her deranged condition made her more vulnerable. Champa and Michael immediately took action and after a long stay in the Dr. Fuad Halims Nursing Home and later in NRS hospital with the necessary operation in the orthopedic unit Tara was released. We paid Rs. 4000 to rebuild her little hut where she lived for some time, but her brother and his family constantly complained against her and compelled her to come back to the street again. Fortunately Tara was again identified by Sanghita and after a good few phone calls Tara found a home that very evening with a very good NGO - Iswar Sankaalpa, dealing with mentally challenged patients, where she is happy and settled now.



Our own contribution: There is a good supply of vegetables now in both the homes, from the gardens in Madhubtai. Even in the small area in Bhalobasha we are producing some vegetables which are being enjoyed by the members and staff. Surajit, Sridam Baren and Bishnu have excelled themselves in meticulously bringing about this transformation.

Pension programme: Our pension programme continues where Rs, 500 are given to 3 very needy ladies, Mita Dey, Manju Halder and Surodhoni Roy.



Mita Dey – Mita has been a regular visitor in Loreto Sealdah with her husband. After her husband died she continues to come and takes her pension and any medicines that she requires. Tragically she lost her only son in a train accident and lives with a relative, but as they are very poor this amount helps her to spend some money on herself.



Manju Halder : Was found begging on the street with her sons prescription for medicines a few years ago. At that time we had referred her son to Calcutta Resue, who kindly helped him for a few months with the treatment for Tuberculosis till he passed away. Her only grandson about 8 years old is supported by Child Line as he suffers from Thalesemia. Manju receives Rs. 500/per month along with some prescribed medicines.

Surodhoni Roy comes by train to the city every Friday to beg. She walks all the way from Sealdah Station to Park Street and stops at Loreto Sealdah to take her money and rest for a while. The Rainbow children interact while she sits in the premises before moving out to beg for the day. She has been offered residential care but is afraid that her only daughter will dispossess her from the small hut she owns as her only possession.



Non- Residential food programme: Under our non- residential food programme we still feed 8 old people who collect their own food from the canteen. We have not been very successful to continue the non-residential food programme on a large scale due to the strict security in Sealdah Station but we still strive to help the neediest especially in and around the Sealdah area and we are always on the look-out for crisis cases.

Follow- up School: Concern India – Kolkata have granted Rs.89, 200 which covers as salaries of 3 of our 4 teachers (we pay the new teacher Rupas' salary from our own fund) as well as our students food and teaching learning materials. Academically students also did well and at present we have 80 students on roll.



On 12 January at the Rajiv Ganguly Tournament organized by Friends of Calcutta [Ireland] our students won the Champions Cup in Kabaddi beating Topsia School from CRDS in an exciting final. 8 NGOs participated in different sports and it was a great joy and a reason to be tremendously proud of all our children and their efforts. The parents and the entire village were really proud of this achievement. The cup is a great source of pride for all our children for

whom travelling to the city were a dream...winning the Cup is yet a bigger Dream and already they are planning to retain their position as Champions!!!

Like all years **Saraswati Puja** was also celebrated with great zeal.

Our Out Reach Programme: Self Help Group: Savings per group

Name of SHG	Date of Commence	Monthly subscription	Total no. of members	A/c No.	Total Savings till May 2012.
PRNOTI	May 2008	Rs.30/- each	14	SHG -86 /08	26, 540.50/-
JYOTI	May 2008	Rs.30/- each	14	SHG -87/08	26, 540.50/-
MINOTI	January 2009	Rs.30/- each	14	SHG-171/09	20,783.00/-.
BANAPHOOL	November 2010	Rs.10/- each	10		2,940.00/-.

Visitors: We were delighted to have Maura Allen, Bernie and Fr. Pat Hogan's group from Ireland. Thanks to Maura as like all years she did her usual shopping spree for all the necessary items for the two homes and all kinds of different kitchen utensils etc especially for the newly refurbished kitchen in

Bhalobasha. Elouise as planned did a film shoot with a professional photographer on the 'Life of old people in India" for the TV in Sydney. We hope to receive the copy in August. Thanks to Kerry, Sean and Bernie for their regular donations to FOKE and for all their love for the work.

Michael Symonds visited us in June and made a generous contribution towards our work which we have used for the construction of Dadur Bari. Anna Marie Dunne who came as a volunteer to Loreto Sealdah from Trinity College and visited both our homes. She loved our work and contributed towards Dadur Bari.

Concern India did an on-spot visit to check on the follow-up school one evening and were very pleased with our school..

Jenny and Samiran from HOPE Foundation visited Bahalobasha and also made a sudden visit to Madhubati. They were very happy to see Mala and Lovely as both had come to us from HOPE hospital.

Recent Developments:

- Since June we have a new physio therapist Champa visiting Charu Nibas on a regular basis and her talents are already improving the mobility of our members. She will soon extend her work to Bhalobasha.
- Since April we have a new cook Kanchan Das in place of Gita in Madhubati
- Sunita, our Rainbow girl, is doing her training from HOPE hospital on a regular basis and on completion we will hopefully place her in full-time employment as we have decided she is too young right now to take on the responsibility of caring for our members.
- Website...after years of planning we are proud to announce that we are at last online. Please log onto www.foke.in and we hope you enjoy the fruits of our efforts to share the joy of FOKE with all. We would greatly appreciate the promotion of our website and we especially hope that as many as possible register as Friends of FOKE ...see 'How TO Assist Us'
- Donation boxes.....in our quest to be financially stable we have designed and distributed collection boxes to local business premises. We were extremely proud that the very first box was placed, on Sr Igoras insistence, in our spiritual home...namely the front office of Loreto Day School Sealdah.

We are very grateful to Raju Buxani who kindly sponsors the major rations while Rajesh Shah supplies us the basic medicines for the 2 homes on a bi-monthly basis. Their contribution and commitment is truly invaluable.

Between January and July Michael has been here twice (staying for 2 months at a time) and he did his utmost to progress the work of FOKE , creating the website, designing the donation boxes and above all realising the dream of Dadur Bari as well as empowering the management and staff to continue the progress.

We are ever grateful to each and every staff member for all their hard work. A heartfelt thanks to The Loreto Congregation for sorting out all the legal matters; to HOPE Foundation Hospital for always making space for our members, to Concern India for their support towards our Follow-up and Pre-school; to all our management and staff for their loyalty, and to our friends and well wishers who have made this journey possible 'THANK YOU'.We are truly delighted to share the excitement and joy of our work with you as it is only with your assistance, prayers and heartfelt support that we can grow!!! Please feel free to forward this email to anyone you feel who might appreciate same.

With warmest regards and good wishes to each and all.....The FOKE Team

www.foke.in