



# FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER : JULY - DECEMBER 2019



## ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS

**Extension of Bhalobasha :** The plan for the extension is now complete, but is waiting for sanction from the corporation. The BLRO Mutation is still pending as the administrative office is relocating. We continue our appeal to friends for donations for the extension and we will be very grateful if the support continues till we fulfil the estimated budget. We are very grateful to every person who donated for the extension already. We should be able to start the construction by the end of February 2020.



**Surajit Das** who was the co-ordinator of the out-reach programmes – which includes the Self Help Group and the Follow Up school, officially resigned in 2016, but continued on a part time basis, till September 2019. He has now resigned permanently. The members of the Self Help Groups are in the process of returning their loans before the groups finally dissolve.

Dear friends,

Greetings and warm wishes for the New Year! We hope you all had a good start of the New Year 2020. May this year bring in positive changes and opportunities for each one of you. We are very grateful to The Almighty for always opening doors and creating a path to walk forward. For every problem He provides a solution and means to overcome the hurdle. FOKE is so blessed!

We celebrated the 15th Anniversary of FOKE on 8th December 2019 during our third general meeting which was held at our long standing friend Raju Buxani's warm and welcoming home. His father who is 80 years old and has lost most of his mobility helped us with the cutting of the cake.

We are very thankful to all those who donated in cash and kind and above all did it with so much of love.



**Saraswati Roy** worked with us from 2008 until October 2019. There was a farewell and Saraswati was paid her due severance pack for all the years of service she had put in at Charunibash. We will miss her laughter and sense of humour in the house! We are in the process of looking for another female staff in Charunibash.

We were happy to welcome in our FOKE family the following new members:



**NEW MEMBERS**



**WELCOME HOME**

**Smritikona Ghosh** nearly 80 years was rescued by staff at Tala Police Station in extremely poor health. With support from Hive India, Smritikona was admitted to Sambhunath Pandit Hospital where she was treated for her injured right limb and general health. Her father died when she was very young and soon after his death Smritikona, along with her sister Gauri, was sent away to live with her maternal aunt and cousin. While Smritikona remained with her cousin, Gauri returned to the village. In later years the cousin left for a job to another city and Smritikona continued her life by providing private tuitions to students and found a job as a teacher in a private Hindi medium school. A parent from that school offered for Smritikona to move in with them from her small rented house. Smritikona looked after their child but after a few years when they decided to move away to their parental home, Smritikona was asked to look for alternative accommodation.

In fact while living with the family she had a fall from which she never recovered. She managed to get herself admitted to the hospital with the intervention of HIVE India and the police authorities, but after the discharge from the hospital Smritikona had no home. The Tala Police Station approached FOKE and on 11th September 2019 the policemen brought Smritikona to Bhalobasha where she is slowly settling. She has a good sense of humour and does not like people doing jobs for her. Though she uses a walker, she is independent and moves around very cautiously. We will soon visit her sister who lives in Falta.

We visited Smritikona's friend in Dum Dum on 26th November, where she kept all her documents and belongings. Smritikona was very happy to meet the family and relieved to get back all her important documents.





**NEW MEMBERS**

**WELCOME HOME**

**Lokkhi Soreng** On 11th December Lokkhi was seen sitting restlessly near the FOKE office. After some conversation it was clear she was displaced for some reason and had no home. We contacted the local Taltala PS who supported us with lodging the General Diary. Lokkhi was then admitted in Dr. Fuad's nursing home for a general medical check up. On 24th December Lokkhi was taken home to Charunibash, which was the greatest Christmas gift for us all. Lokkhi is hallucinating and has the tendency to wander away, hence we have to keep a close watch on her. However she is quiet and is settling in with the others. Whatever information she is able to share will help us find her home and relatives.



**REST IN PEACE**



### **Madhuri Mukherjee**

It was sad to let Madhuri dida go! She stayed with us only for a few months and most of the time she was sick. We visited the area where she lived and collected all her documents from the local shopkeeper, who had kept them secured. Later we also visited her elder brother, nephew and niece with whom Madhuri wanted to stay for the rest of her days, but sadly it was not to happen. Madhuri had some money in the bank which she was not able to enjoy and wanted to give it to her niece and nephew thinking that in return they will take care of her.

The family were not able to provide any information about her elder son. We did as much as we could for her and in her last two months she was hospitalised thrice. A prayer service after her death was carried out in Bhalobasha as her last few months were spent there.

Lovely and Kalyani were admitted to Hope Hospital. Dasumia had a thorough check-up and no major ailment was detected. Ramlati is availing follow-up treatment for diabetes in Diamond Harbour Hospital. Maya Roy, Nimai and Dipali were taken for check-ups to Calcutta Rescue's clinic, and Calcutta Rescue provides the necessary medicines for them. Anjali Chakraborty was

operated on 3rd October, as she had a fall due to sodium imbalance, and it took more than a month before she could walk. Within a week of her return from the hospital she was readmitted as her sugar levels fluctuated. She was twice taken for check-ups and is slowly recovering. We have also sponsored treatment to the husband of our teacher Aparna Mukherjee through Calcutta Rescue.



### OUT REACH -CASE STUDY FINDING A RESIDENCE



On 25th September a gentleman named Sudipto Roy found us on facebook and contacted us to help an elderly couple, who were helpless and living in Howrah Railway station. On receiving the information action was taken and Radhika, our friend and well wisher, later shared her following thoughts: 'So finally this old couple have found a permanent home, in the safety and security of Kosish the hospice, under Dr Dam's eagle eye. Sanghita and I saw them off on a train last night and they have reached and settled in today morning. An entire community of socially responsible citizens, from the gentleman who posted the original story to Sanghita Mondal of Foke who found them a temporary immediate shelter and managed to remove them from the

horror of living in a railway station, to Dr. Brahma in Jibantala who generously gave them that shelter, to Dr Dam who went out on a limb to arrange a residence for them, to my friend who chooses to remain unnamed but whose generosity and kindness gives me a little bit of hope in humanity again, to a colleague who braved the weeknight traffic in a crowded bus to deliver bags for them at Howrah station last night, to Dr Dam who took time out of his busy day to receive them at the station – the list is very long. A huge thank you to each person who has stepped in to make their life a bit better, who has believed in their genuine need and who has not given long lectures on how one should save for old age and stay friends

with relatives in the hope that they will step up when the time comes. As this episode comes to an end, I can not help but share one observation. Every day, many of us come across many depressing incidents and images on the streets. From homeless old people to abused children, a sick and injured animal to domestic violence spilling onto the public domain – this list is endless. We certainly cannot address all of them. We can put the information out on social media – in the hope that someone else will take the responsibility of stepping in. We can call

We can call NGO's and CSO's requesting help. And these are indeed powerful platforms which can transform lives. But somewhere, somehow, are we shying away from our own social responsibility by posting on social media and hoping someone else will take up the job? If we can, should we not do a little more? Think about it. I am thinking too about how we can change the way we do things

- Radhika Singh



## SHORT - TERM CARE AND SHELTER

We were contacted by the councillor of Ward 140 to provide residential support and medical treatment for a middle aged lady Rani Bose. Her left foot looked extremely bad, as if gangrenous, which needed immediate operation. An amputation could have taken place too, if not treated in time. With the help of the representative from the councillor she was hospitalised, and after her discharge she was provided with all the necessary dressings, medication and a comfortable stay in Bhalobasha. She was too young to be a resident in Bhalobasha. However Rani broke our trust with a lot of false information and we were very disappointed when we were not able to locate the family she claimed to have worked for and who according to her had thrown her out of their home. With deeper interrogation we were able to contact her son and sisters with whom she settled, but about whom she didn't want to share any information initially.

## Support to an old age home in Bodh Gaya:

Last year a few members from FOKE, visited a home for destitute elderly on the outskirts of Bodh Gaya. This home has very basic amenities and every bit of support was welcoming. Winters in this area are severe & the members of this home did not have any winter clothing as such to fight the cold. The temporary structure and the vast open space around made it very tough for them every winter. This year FOKE shared the blankets donated by Wrap With Love to these members. They really appreciated this and accepted them gratefully. We would like to thank Wrap with Love for their support on behalf of FOKE and Ms Veda and her organisation, Sujata Buddha Welfare Centre in Bodh Gaya. We were also happy to extend our support with rations which was sponsored by a long term friend.

- Rajeshwari S





**RESCUE**

On 5th August after receiving a phone call with the request to rescue an elderly man from Bansdrani, the next few hours of phone calls to local police and respective officials made it possible for the man to be taken off the street. During the night he was admitted to Bangur Hospital and within a day the police located his family. His son said that he had wandered away from the house. This was the outcome of receiving a call in the middle of the night and acting on it! With Radhika's question above we may add here that being able to respond at odd hours is also a call for organised sectors as well as individuals knowing emergency situations, of their very nature, tend to arise unannounced!



### **SELF -HELP GROUP**

Our SHG, which has been functioning since 2008, is in the process of winding up. We conducted an evaluation of this programme on 26th August 2019. The Resource Person was Satyajit from Kajla Janakalyan Samity – an organisation who are experts in running more than a thousand SHGs in Medinipur District. The SHGs we had were effective for individuals till date, as all loans were applied for personal needs – be it a business, house building or medical reason. However we felt that the emphasis should be on group loans and group production as there is support from government for the same.



A specialised organisation is working with such SHGs in the area and we do not want to run anything in parallel. The relevance of continuing with our SHGs was slowly losing its worth, as the needs of individuals have improved with several government facilities available at present. All our SHG members can join the other existing organisation prevailing in that area and there is no justification for continuing a parallel system. Surajit Das – Co-ordinator of this programme resigned, but is slowly winding up the groups by retrieving all the loans, so that all the members can get their equal share of funds before the groups finally dissolve.



## FOLLOW- UP SCHOOL

The number of children in both follow-up schools has dropped. We feel that there are several tuition centres cropping up around the area where parents who are able to afford it are sending their children. This is a good sign but at the same time those children are learning by heart to gain marks for the exam and sadly preparing themselves for the rat race in life. It is however a good sign that we are catering to the children who are really needy and are able to enjoy our system and methodologies. Students had annual exams in their regular schools and

before their exam we conducted our own internal evaluation ,where most of them did well.

Parents and Teachers meetings were held in both schools and in January we all look forward to the Annual Sports Days in both centres, together with our staff and members. The students celebrated birthdays of members and various festivals in the homes.

Sushmita Halder age 9 years, a student of our follow up school lost both her parents and her brother in an accident caused by electrocution. Sushmita was only about 1 1/2 years old when it happened. Sushmita lives with her grandparents who are finding it very difficult to care for her as she grows up and also because financially they are unable to provide for her basic needs. They asked us to provide a hostel facility for her. We have found a secure hostel and schooling for Sushmita, as well as a sponsor and soon we hope she will be under proper guidance and care.



## CASE STUDY

## REVIVAL OF THE TAILORING UNIT

Many may remember that in 2009-2010 we used to run a tailoring unit in Charunibash. In 3 batches we had trained more than 30 women from the community and some sewing machines were also given out.

The second phase of the tailoring classes about which we mentioned in the last newsletter, began on 14th July with 10 female participants. A very efficient and social minded tailor master, Md. Saifuddin, who has his own tailoring business, took interest and appointed a young talented girl, Beauty Mondal, for conducting the classes. This batch will continue till mid January 2020 with an evaluation, after which they will be independent enough to continue on their own.



## EYE CHECK-UP CAMP BY GKB OPTICALS

Over the past few years GKB Opticals conducted, with great efficiency, eye check-up camps for the members in Charunibash and for the rural population of three villages around Madhubati. On 8th August, we held a camp in which 120 patients were checked. Spectacles were given out to 82 beneficiaries on 2nd November 2019.



## BLANKET RUN

On 27th December we did our Annual blanket run on the streets of Kolkata. Here is Jhinku Banerjee's thoughts who enriched FOKE by gifting many professional and beautiful photos - "Its heart wrenching to see people sleeping under the open sky in such cold nights. FOKE did a tad-bit to extend some warmth to those people on the streets in our city. Adrienne, Sahadeb, Arundhati, Amit, Nazma ( Saira's daughter), Raghavendra and Sanghita led the program and I got the chance to witness the sheer joy in people's eyes to get the warmth of hearts. I believe, it was the touch, not the blankets that was bringing those glitters in the eyes of the people"



## RESCUING A YOUNG STROKE EFFECTED WOMAN



A young woman named Parbati, who was paralysed on the left side after a brain stroke, was abandoned by her husband and in-laws. Her two children live with her sister in law, while Parbati ended up in Sealdah station. She couldn't survive there and soon ended up near the Moulali Masjid, opposite the FOKE office. The local women protected her but there was no shelter for her on the street. We contacted Calcutta Rescue, who promised all medical support. Our friend and Assistant Secretary Arundhati, with an open heart, took Parbati home. The location worked out well as the CR clinic is in close proximity to Arundhati's home. We are very thankful to Asif, the co-ordinator of the CR unit, for extending all medical support including physiotherapy, cardiac treatment and other related investigations. Parbati was also hospitalised in between and is receiving physiotherapy in her present accommodation. The treatment is long term and we are hopeful to find a permanent place for Parbati. Thank you Arundhati and Asif for giving Parbati another chance







## EXPOSURE VISIT

The Future Institute of Engineering and Management placed four students to complete a survey of NGOs in Kolkata as part of their MBA curriculum. The students had good exposure and therefore a good experience in the process.



## CELEBRATIONS

Independence Day, Childrens Day, Teachers Day, World Elderly Day, Durga Puj, Diwali and Annual Christmas programme were celebrated with lots of fun in both homes. Bijoya Shommiloni was organized in Charunibash by **Sevayan-Hands** for while **Abhobhikar** – Musical group and **The Academy of Fine Arts** – Dance group celebrated it in Bhalobasha. We celebrated the birthdays of our member ,Khudiram,Nemai,Maya, Tara, Athai, Jenny and Ramlati, Bhubaneshwar.





## FRIENDS AND THEIR VALUED DONATIONS

We are overwhelmed with the local support we have received this year. We are specially grateful to all our friends and well wishers who sponsored the cost of 15 metal beds for the members in Charunibash during this term. On Diwali each member had a lovely comfortable bed to sleep on and the rooms now has more space too.

**Concentrix Daksh India Services Private Limited**- A business Service Company for donating a months rations and more, but above all for entertaining all in Bhalobosah with music and dance. **DISHARI**, for celebrating Mahalaya and donating. **WISE** (Welfare of Seamens Everywhere) sponsored a bed, a Water Purifier in Charunibash and donated woolen jumpers, school bags and learning materials, 40 of each for the students, which we shared between both centres. **PROTASHA** and **BEHALA SUJON** group donated the pujo garments to the members and staff. **PRAYASH** sponsored a lunch too in Charunibash. **Milan Sangha Club** , **SEBOK** and **ICCHEDANA** donated rations and food items, **JAGORANI** for sponoring the cost of plants in Charunibash and lots of English primary level workbooks were given

children. Sunny Mukherjee – our good friend and general member donates his regular bag of rice and also donated a Water Purifer for Bhalobasha. Sunistha and her family for proving personal gifts to members and rations in bhalobasha. Rajesh Shah and Swarnalata Das for sponsoring two second hand sewing machines. 100 blankets were purchased, sponsored by Sean Garvey, friends and family, and 20 blankets were donated by Rajesh Khanna's business. We were glad to receive 100 beautiful soft blankets from our friend Pradip Arora, of which 50 we shared with Sevayan – Hands for All to distribute in the rural areas and 50 were given to the villagers in Madhubati and to the nuns of Tara Ma er Ashram in Hotor. Thanks to our friends Niru, Setu and Amritam ( a NGO) for donating some blankets. Milan Sangha Club donated too. Kolkata Corporation for donation of Night dresses, sarees, blouse and petticoats, which we share every year with other NGOs. Thank you Veda for bringing Kabir and Antara.



## VISITORS AND WELL-WISHERS

Our friends and well-wishers from Ireland and Australia continue their support. We were very happy to welcome the Edmund Rice Education Australia for the first time and we are very thankful for their donation towards the extension of Bhalobasha. SUAS group visited both homes and had craft/ story telling /dance /music sessions with the children and members. Calcutta Calling, as always, visited in November and also donated towards the extension. Adrienne visited both homes and stayed in Charunibash for 4 nights. There was special New Year lunch for nearly 100 people in Charunibash and about 50 in Bhalobasah, both sponsored by Adrienne.



We thank all who sponsored a lunch or donated household items to celebrate their special days and in memory of their dear ones. Heartfelt gratitude to all our friends and well-wishers for the tremendous support and encouragement. We wish you all a promising and rewarding year.

Warmest regards  
The FOKE Family.

