



**FOKE**

Friends of  
Kolkata's Elderly



## FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

**Newsletter July to December 2023**

Dear Friends,

In the news of 2024, let kindness be the headline, compassion the lead, and joy the breaking news. Cheers to a meaningful new year ahead.

It is always a pleasure to connect with each one of you through our half-yearly newsletter. The year flew by in a blink and though a lot has been achieved, much was also lost, during this time. However, every sadness is eased by a sudden glimpse of happiness. We are entrusted with people who need us and we are blessed to be able to do the little that we can. Our elderly members in both homes and the children who attend Happy Classroom are blessed with your love and support. Education is the key to breaking the vicious cycle of poverty for the children. For our elderly residents, it is the expression of love and care that will slowly mend their broken bodies, souls and minds. Thank you to each and everyone who support and encourage the entire FOKE team.

# Rest in peace

We went through a most trying time in the month of July as 3 of our beloved members, Dipendranath Bhattacharya, Ganesh Ghosal and Anjali Chatterjee left us after enduring much pain and suffering. Dipendranath and Ganesh came together to us from Vidya Sagar State General Hospital, and their departures from our world were within 20 days of one another.

**Ganesh Ghosal** belonged to the well-known Ghosal Family, which he left of his own will. Whatever his past may have been, he adjusted well with everybody in Charunibas; took up some responsibilities and provided good care for his roommates. His last couple of weeks was full of pain and suffering. After several days in Diamond Harbour Hospital, he was shifted to NRS Hospital where he passed away on 8th July.



**Dipendranath Bhattacharya** suffered from throat cancer. For his last few months, he lived in Bhalobasa to get easier access to periodic cancer treatment in hospitals. He suffered but showed great strength of will; he courageously endured the many chemotherapies and pain. Finally, he gave up on 23rd July.



**Anjali Chatterjee**, a calm and dignified lady whose young days were full of hurdles, had been living with us since 2019. She also suffered physically during her last days in Bhalobasa. and passed away on 31st July.



May their souls find eternal peace and happiness.



# Welcome home

**MARIAM BENEDICT:** Mariam has now reached the age of 72, and was married at the age of 17. Her husband was a factory worker. Together they lived in a small rented house and had no children. Mariam was left alone after her husband's death, without any means to survive. Her supportive brother-in-law died suddenly and Mariam became homeless. Ms. Delfina Boila, the retired teacher and Ex-President of FOKE, requested us to provide a permanent home for Mariam. Since 16th September, Mariam has been in Bhalobasa. She has various health issues which are being taken care of, while she is slowly settling in.

**MUKUNDO DOLUI** was a well known rickshaw puller at Chakraberia rickshaw stand. His father was a fruit seller and died an untimely death. Mukundo and his brother did not have the opportunity to attend school and the elder brother started rickshaw pulling for the family. Sadly, his mother and brother also died of illnesses and ill-health and at a tender age of 15, Mukundo was left living a lonely, working life of a rickshaw-puller. He rented a small house for himself, ate in roadside eateries and got a bit addicted to smoking and drinking. He is now almost 70, and due to a long life of hard work his body is frail. A sudden fall broke his femur bone and thereof he was unable to carry on with the rickshaw pulling. The house was soon gone due to non-payment of rent and he ended up living on the streets near Ramrajatala bazaar in a helpless condition.



He was watched for few days by two Good Samaritans – Santana Banerjee and Subhasmita Das, who after befriending him decided to rescue him. They admitted him to Howrah Hospital where he was operated. After discharge he was temporarily kept in a night shelter. FOKE remained in connection and upon completion of the legal procedures he came to live in Charunibas on 16th August. He is an active member and takes responsibility for his new big family. Everyone loves him for his kind and soft nature.

# Repatriation Of Jubeda Khatun



**Jubeda Khatun** was initially rescued by HIVE INDIA with the help of Lake Police Station. Jubeda came to live in Bhalobasa from 9th September 2021. Sadly, she came to us with massive mental trauma. It was difficult to keep her indoors as she always wanted to walk out and find her way home. Jubeda's plight convinced us to continue our search for her family. With continuous care and unconditioned love we were able to gather bits and pieces of information about her home and relatives in Assam (a state in North East India). Our psychologists Nirmal Sarkar and Sohini Sarkar took the responsibility of gathering every bit of information she could give, based upon which FOKE approached HAM RADIO and, amazingly, HAM Radio was able to connect with her relatives on a video call within a day of receiving the information. However, the son did not want to co-operate and the process continued being delayed. We tried to look for local NGOs and old age homes around her hometown as an alternative. However, after overcoming several challenges, Jubeda's brother and her nephews agreed to take her home with them. With the intervention of Rupai police station in Assam, HIVE India and with everybody's consolidated efforts, her nephews reached Kolkata late night on 6th July 2023 and we arranged a hotel for them to stay overnight. We are thankful to Lake Police Station for helping with all the official procedures.

Jubeda was ready to go back home, but was also sad to leave behind the friends she had made in Bhalobasa and Charunibas. It was a happy and emotional moment for all of us.

We stay in touch with Jubeda and her family. We thank Ambarish Nag Biswas of HAM Radio, for making the first connection which later helped us move forward. Special thanks to Nirmal Sarkar for keeping at it and giving Jubeda the opportunity to spend the rest of her life with her loved ones.

# Volunteering Experience



**Adrienne Miller Conroy** - our beloved friend, from Ireland, spends a good few days in the homes and with Happy Classroom. In Ireland she does fundraising in her Parish - Holy Trinity Church and Pobalscoil Neasáin School to support our work. Thanks to Adrienne's loving family and friends who encourage her to be in India every year.

We thank you Adrienne for being the precious person you are and bringing smile on so many faces.



**“The reward is knowing you are part of their lives and you get a sense of fulfilment knowing you gave a little out of your time to fulfil a big part of their time. It is so important to give this time when one can as one day we too will be elderly and we will hope someone will give time to us. Over the last 18 years I have earned the privilege and this privilege I am so fortunate to have. I get so upset each time I leave, as do they all - a testimony to our true relationship.**

**- Adrienne.**”

**Bidisha Ghosal** - a psychology student, a regular volunteer of FOKe. She volunteers not as a part of her educational requirement but from the love for those who needs.

**“I started volunteering here as I have some free time after my exams. I helped with the kids, spent time with the elderly and helped in administration. I got a second family, a home away from home. Initially I thought I would volunteer for just a month but now I'm a regular volunteer. And the best thing about this experience is their flexible administrative environment. Anyone can help here as much or as little they want as per their convenience.”**

**-Bidisha Ghosal**



## Our Outreach Activities

### Happy Classroom

As on 31st December, we had 60 students in Bhalobasa and 56 in Charunibas. One of our students, Manisha Mondal, will be appearing for her Class X exam in February 2024.

The second half of the year was full of academic activities like regular classes, remedial classes, online classes, extra-curricular activities and parents teachers meetings and in preparing students for their final school exams.



## Celebrations:

Our children celebrated birthdays of great personalities, members of our homes, teachers and students. By doing this, we hope to encourage values like sensitivity, empathy, integrity and accountability in our children as they are growing up.

This year our theme for Independence Day was "environment protection", so our children cleaned their surroundings and villages, planted saplings, participated in processions with posters made by them, and other cultural activities.

Other celebrations like Buddha Purnima, Durga Puja, Eid, Rakhi Bondhon, Christmas and New Year have become an integral part of Happy Classroom.



## Special Invitation :

In celebration of Rangamala Memorial's 20th Anniversary on 23rd November, our three nursing students Rubina, Rakhi & Simran presented an outstanding dance performance. They were given a stipend of Rs. 2000 each for their nursing training course. Overcoming many adversities in their lives, these students are making their paths towards a better future with support and encouragement from us.



## Update on the Nursing Training of our students:

Our three students Rubina, Rakhi and Simran completed their theory classes on nursing and will start their practical classes by way of placement in different hospitals/ nursing homes. Sadly, Rubina is not continuing the practical session, but we hope she will resume her training in the next session.

## Update on the computer classes in Bhalobasa Happy Classroom.

30 students from classes V to X are enrolled for computer classes on weekends. The Students have learnt MS DOS, HTML, Flowchart and MS Excel and have appeared for an exam as well.



Our teachers visit the families of our students every two weeks. It is especially important to visit the parents who are not regularly attending the Parents Teachers Meetings.

From January 2024, we are rescheduling our classes in Charunibas; we will now conduct a morning session from 7-10 am for students of Classes Nursery to IV to give the children some time to play in the afternoons. This will also reduce the burden on our teachers and improve the quality of education with fewer students in the afternoon session.



### **Educational tour:**

On 15th December, our students went for a "City Visit" to Kolkata where they visited Victoria Memorial, Birla Planetarium, Nehru Children's Museum and St. Paul's Cathedral. None of our students have had the opportunity to see these places before, so it was truly a lifetime experience for everybody. We thank all who donated and supported us to make this event successful.

### **Awareness programme:**

We made a presentation on "social media " to create awareness about possible risks, and thereby hoping to promote safe social media use for our children. This session was conducted by Bidisha Ghosal- our volunteer.

### **Teachers Training:**

An educational workshop was held at our Thakurpukur unit on the 28th of December. It was conducted by Ms. Piyali Sen and was attended by the Happy Classroom teachers of both units. The workshop was aimed at providing proper and basic guidelines for class management at the primary level, and covered different areas of importance like discipline, evaluations, lesson planning, attending to specific needs of the children, and much more. The workshop also included demo classes of the different school subjects, interactive discussions and various suggestions.



# Exposure Programme



## Nurses Exposure programme:

On 4th July 2023, 5 nurses doing their final year of Nursing Training from Nilratan Sarkar Medical College Hospital, attended a full-day exposure programme in Bhalobasa where they learnt about geriatric care and the administration of an old age home. This kind of exposure programme is now regular in our homes and it is now a compulsory part of nursing training in Government Medical College.

# Vocational Training



## In-house Training on Tailoring in Charunibas:

We resumed the training on tailoring, in Charunibas as all the construction/ rebuilding work is now over. 20 participants started on 5th August, and will appear for their internal exams in January. This will be followed by an external exam held in another vocational training unit. Each trainee will receive a valid certificate from the Institute.

To empower the women around Bhalobasa, in Thakurpukur area, we collaborate with Transcendent Knowledge Society and the programme "Charka". Several mothers of the students of Happy Classroom attend the training on tailoring, block printing, embroidery, and natural dye. It has been observed there is a change in adaptation of the skills among the women with eagerness to learn new skills. Though there has been several drop outs from amongst the batch of 35, due to various reasons, the overall response is positive. Charka's future plan will be absorbing them in their production unit; connect them with market and designers for order and to establish home enterprise

## Outreach programme with our networking partner: Kaikala Chetona

### SUPPORT TO RURAL ELDERLY (Sabar Community)

The support program for the distressed elderly persons at and around Kaikala village under Haripal block of Hooghly district continues to benefit the identified elderly persons who cannot work, lives alone or with families but are unable sustain themselves due to poverty.





During this term 45 aged from 6 different locations benefited from the dry food provided periodical and new clothes, winter clothes and blankets during the festive season and winter. They received additional food support during Durga Puja and Christmas. To some we provide prescribed medicines.



Well wisher Shri Ashis Kumar Dey visited Kanakpur village on 30th December with his family and spent time with the identified elderly persons of the 'Sabar' tribal community and distributed 60 blankets and other clothes, varieties of fruits and cakes. Children and other community members also received the gifts. This was facilitated by FOKE and organized by Kaikala Chetona with their excellent management skill.



**Education Programme:** FOKE supported the education project till July, 2023. The initial target group was the 'Sabar' tribal community and now the project has expanded to include the 'Santhali' tribal community as well. At present, there are 8 'Sabar' Centers and 4 'Santhali' Centers which benefit more than 500 children. Along with quality education, we try to provide nutritional tiffin which partially compensate for their nutritional deficiency and encourage them in attending the centres and learning. If fund permit we will continue to support the education programme in future.

Special thanks to **Somnath Chatterjee and all the team members** of Kaikala Chetona for dedicated input, interest and love in their ways of delivering the much needed services, and also in helping FOKE spread in the rural areas of West Bengal.

**Sharing resources:** Every year before Durga Puja, we get saris, night dresses, petticoats and blouses from the **Kolkata Municipal Corporation**. We happily shared these precious gifts with a night shelter called Ghare Phera, Tahader Katha and Kaikala Chetana. We also supported NGOs namely Baranagar Petals and Oikyatan Paribar by sharing the donated blankets for distribution amongst the families of brick-kiln workers in Madhyamgram and tribal communities in Purulia. Recycled clothes were shared with Kaikala Chetana. Thank you **Mr. Pradip Arora** and **Mr. Rajesh Khanna** for your donation of blankets for the poorest of the poor.



# Visit to Ireland

It was a great opportunity for me to visit Ireland in October. I thank Kerry Luxton for sponsoring the flight and Adrienne Miller for providing me with all the necessary documents for the visa. It was only with their help and encouragement that I was able to make this trip which was very happening. I met possibly everyone I know who supports FOKE in Ireland. It was not a trip to raise funds, but to thank people in person and to share with them the joy of being part of this very rewarding journey with FOKE.

My special appreciations go to John and Evelyn Alexander, David and Helen Cusson, Marie and Sean Garvey, Laetitia Gomes and Adrienne Miller for making me feel so welcome in their lovely comfortable homes. Sadly, Kieran Allen died shortly before I arrived in Ireland, and I went to his funeral. He was always a silent supporter of FOKE and encouraged his beloved wife, Maura Allen, to travel to Kolkata and spend time with us.

Seeing Bosco and Lynette raising their beautiful children in a unique way in this world of competition and consumerism, was a joy in itself. Marie and Sean even with their not-so-good health condition went out of their way to arrange for me to meet the members of ICA, friends and well-wishers, who over many years have been supporting FOKE. I thank Fr. Vincent O'Hara and members of Friends of Calcutta for arranging a lovely get-together in Avila. It was such a pleasure to meet Ursula, Miriam, Sinead, Mrs Mc Cann, Una and Michael. Thank you, Michael, for providing me with the opportunity to witness the homeless situation in Dublin - it was good to learn how the system works. Thank you Fr. Pat Hogan, for inviting me to the Woodlands Hotel, and for making arrangements to meet Brian, Joe and Declan Ahern. Protima, ex -student of Loreto Sealdah, welcomed me and treated me to a lovely Indian dinner. I was extremely honoured when Fr. Richard Davern drove me to visit the grave of his mother, Mrs. Eily Davern. She had been our dearly beloved supporter and visited in 2004 and 2006. Thank you, Fr. Richard, for introducing me to your sister Marian and making my trip so meaningful and special.





Adrienne arranged for me to visit her school for a day. My gratitude goes to Bríd Ní Annracháin, Deputy Principal of Pobalscoil Neasáin School, for inviting me to meet their students of secondary classes to talk about the culture and work we do in India. It was a wonderful opportunity to thank all concerned for their long support of FOKE. Adrienne also arranged for me to speak in the Holy Trinity Parish and I am grateful to Fr. Declan for giving me the honour and chance to thank all the parishioners for their support to FOKE. Over many years, Fr. Gerry has kept this Parish attached to FOKE through Adrienne. He has now been transferred and sadly missed the opportunity to meet in person.

I enjoyed watching the rehearsal of a theatre in which Adrienne was involved. Thank you Aaron for sorting out my travel tickets to various places. Carrie Ann and Amy welcomed me into their lovely new home and cooked a spicy lunch to make me feel at home.

Aine, Norah, Margaret, David, Rita, Michael O Raily, Brian, Ann O Brian and Kathleen Cashin, Chris, Geraldine, Mrs Gallahar - all made time to meet up which I enjoyed and appreciated. It was my wish to meet Fr Sean Sexton and I was happy to do so. John Alexander, Sorcha and Lorraine gave me some touristy days too which I enjoyed thoroughly. Mr. Tilak Shankar Majumder ( ardent supporter of FOKE) and his daughter Sohini from Kolkata , surprised me by meeting up on the very first day of my arrival.

Thank you friends for all the lovely gifts and for making my trip so memorable. I am overwhelmed and feel very privileged. I may have missed some names but please know that every one of you have encouraged me and made me feel very special. THANK YOU.

## Visitors & their gifts



## Group Visit, Celebration and Gifts:

During this term we were visited by many groups, individuals and families in both homes. We thank the associates of **Concentrix Daksh Pvt Ltd** for their donations of grocery and visit to Charunibas; **Astha Biotech** for their donation of a geyser and groceries, **Baranagar Petals** for donation of a water filter, several useful items as part of our annual requirements and for the education centre in Bhalobasa . **Pushan, Chetana (ESI ) James Residency, Union Chapel, Sakti Social Foundation, Kolkata Kanpur Seva, Sr Satya Sai Seva, Barisha Sangha-** all donated in kind.

During the Durga Pujo our members were showered with many gifts and sumptuous food by groups namely **Boys Sporting Club, Berger Paints, Eastern High Ladies Club, Uttaran Sanskritik Sangathan, Rotary Club of Calcutta- New Town and Humaquest Pvt Ltd.** We also received gifts and lunches from **DISHARI Mahila Kalyan Udyog, NEER** and **Oikyatan Paribar**. A special gratitude to **Raja Das** and his club **Shanti Sangha** for organizing the visit and lunch for all our members, staff at their puja pandal. **Gopal Chandra Adak** grocery supplier of Charunibas, kindly sponsored the auto cost for the Durja puja outing.

Special Christmas lunch was organised by **R P Kundu** and The **Women's Police of Diamond Harbour** in Bhaobasa and Charunibas. Christmas gifts were sponsored by **Mr. Ashoke Kumar Sinha , Rajashree Dey & Sai Baba Seva Ashram.**



## Special Day Celebration and kind donations from well-wishers :

Manashi Sarkar , Rajni Dhanuka, Bandana Maity, Archana Ganguly, Jaya Verma, Shipra Dey, Prakash Chanda, Piyali Sen, Sharbari Gupta, Subodh Kumar Pattanayak, Bhaswati Roy, Sushmita Bhattacharya, Jyoyi Kumar, Uma Manna, Sunny Mukherjee, Manashi Sarkar, Rakhi Kundu, Bandana Maity, Subrata Saha Roy, Soumadeep Das, S. N Narasinha Rao, Souharda Dey, Sabita Gupta, Kanika Das, Soura Chatterjee, Paramita Neogy, M.M Singha, Manabendra Mitra Roy, Dr. Swati Sarkar. Kunal Das, Anita Das, Swapna Mitra, S. Das, Apabra Roy, Upananda Roy, Champa Khara, Arpita Barman, Subhra Dutta, Arundhuti Chaudhury, Sadhya Mitra, Raja Ghosh, Chandana Das, Sushmita Das, Riya Karmakar, Dibyendu Samanta, Kamal Chakraborty, Srabani Sinha, Sumon Halder, Oishee, Rajashree Dey either sponsored lunches or visited with gifts, to remember their loved ones and celebrated their special days with us. God bless all.

# Thank you



Everybody mentioned above took time out to visit and we appreciate their presence as much as their gifts and donations.

We thank all our local supporters: **S D Ahuja Foundation, 41 Club, Humaquest Private Ltd, TCP Private Ltd** and **Sai Baba Seva Ashram** who support us with specific expenditures every month. Since August 2023, **Mrs. Nandita Bhaduri**, her daughter **Punyarupa Bhaduri** and son-in-law **Mr Prasenjit Das** are sponsoring the electricity bills of both homes. This has relieved us greatly.

Our dream to bring the students to visit Kolkata as part of an educational tour, finally came into reality and thanks to the generous donations received from **Mahesweta Chakraborty, Paramita Neogy, Shima Ganguly, Nupur Mukherjee** and **Dr. Sakti Das. Mr. Durga Das** and **Mrs. Shiela Ghosal** donated exercise books and stationaries for both centers, which will be enough for the whole year. Special Thanks to **Mr & Mrs Mittal** of **Greenply** company for donating plywood for partitions to separate the classrooms in Charunibas HC. We also receive vegetables from their garden regularly for residents of Charunibas.

We thank all individual donors from India and abroad for their trust and generosity. We are grateful to all our volunteers and supporters for their encouragement.



A special thank you to the staff members of FOKE who carried out their duties during the Secretary's travel to Ireland. They did a lot of extra work catering to the many visitors during Durga Puja and everything that needed attention, with great sense of responsibility and care. Thank you Mrs. Piyali Sen for the constant guidance to improve Happy Classroom. May all be blessed with God's special love.

Wish you all the very best now and always. .

**From The FOKE Team .**