



Friends of
Kolkata's Elderly
FOKE



FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

NEWSLETTER: January - June 2023

Dear Friends,

The year began with lots of enthusiasm. With the expansion of our new building and more space for the children the Happy Classroom students and staff are really happy. Thanks to the generosity of PC Chandra Jewellers Private Limited and Concentrix Daksh Private Limited for making our dream come true. Residents and staff members also have a more comfortable space to live and work in. We now have solar power and solar run hot water in Charunibas. These six months also witnessed the generosity of many who visited and spent their special days with us in both homes. Our wish to get the boundary wall of Bhalobasa painted with some art work on social messages came to fruition when associates of Marsh India Insurance Brokers Pvt. Ltd. visited to spend few hours with us with snacks for all and sponsored the art work. Thank you Sourav Bhattacharya and your team for completing the wall-paintings with messages for elderly care, education for all and saving the environment. Every piece of message was drawn, based on real photographs of our programmes. In the midst of all this joy our greatest sadness was the loss of Sr. Cyril, the first Patron of FOKE.



OBITUARY



The first Patron of Friends of Kolkata's Elderly.

Sr. Cyril Josephine Mooney, born in Ireland on 21 July 1936, came to India at the age of 20. She was the Principal of Loreto Day School Sealdah from 1979 till 2012. During her leadership, she empowered all her students and staff members to strive and keep an open eye beyond the walls of their regular comfort zones. The deeply ingrained inequalities in our society made her uncomfortable, and thus she crossed the boundaries of fear, subjugation and limitations to follow her conscience. 'Compassion is a compulsory subject', she used to say. Sr. Cyril therefore made the school into an inclusive atmosphere where human beings with values were continuously developed through her practical social development programmes. The human and infrastructural resources were used to its utmost limits, thus making us a part of the mission of 'equal opportunities for all'. Her astuteness and inner eye to see the potential of her students and staff was a unique power in itself.

I thank Sr. Cyril for giving me all the opportunities in life to know what I was capable of. FOKE in its journey over the last 20 years is only trying in its most humble ways to break the barriers of inequality and injustice. With Sr. Cyril's guidance and blessing the journey began when she

allowed the Rainbow children (street children living in the school) to go out with daily lunch packets to feed the elderly living on the platforms of Sealdah Railway Station, and her faith remained with us. She always believed that as long as the work for the poor is done with love and sincerity, then surely money, resources and support will follow. FOKE is a testimony to this belief as our 20 years truly is a miraculous journey made possible by the generosity of many. Thank you Sr. Cyril for making us a channel of your Peace and Love. Keep guiding and never let the attitude of "Damn it, Do It", ever die in us!



IN HONOUR OF OUR BELOVED
SR. M. CYRIL MOONEY IBVM

We remembered the works
of Sr. Cyril with the
students of Happy
Classroom on 26.06.2023.

Welcome Home

Salma Aga

Saima was rescued by Sahadeb Some on 5 April after he received a call from Lake Town Police Station. After a few days of medical care by Dr. Fuad Halim and his team, Salma came to live in Bhalobasa. Within a month of care, love, counselling and psychiatric treatment, Salma became a changed person. She is jovial, full of energy and an entertainer. She is well able to speak about her family and the area she used to live in. Salma wants to visit and meet everyone in her community and then return to Bhalobasa. We will fulfill her wish.



Non - Resident support :

Basanti Dhara comes on a non-residential basis since 8 April 2023. She stays the entire day in Bhalobasa and has her meals with us. Presently, she is living in a small rented house which she has to vacate in June 2023. We will take her as a resident from July 2023 as she is unable to pay the rent any more. By then we will also have space in Charunibas as Zubeda will soon return to her home in Assam. Basanti is calm, considerate and willingly helps the other ailing members.

Non resident medical support:

Sahadeb Some rescued a dying lady – Samila Bibi, from the railway platforms after receiving a message from **Baranarag Petals**. She was admitted in Dr. Fuad Halim's nursing home while the search for her family members continued. **Baranagar Petals** played a vital role in the process to find her family. We shared the medical costs and the cremation was carried out by her family members.



Therapy Sessions

In both homes two of our teachers, namely Aparna Mukherjee in Charunibas and Soma Banerjee in Bhalobasa is assigned to involve our members in activities. Children are also encouraged to participate . Psychologists, Nirmal Sarkar and Sohini Sarkar visit both homes and involve all our members in outdoor / indoor activities. Our staff members carry out these activities on a regular basis to keep them active. Exercises, yoga, music therapy, dance, drawing, different indoor games and engaging in different household chores is all part of the therapy. As our members come malnourished with severe mental trauma and acute ill-health, they need special care, love and motivation.

Volunteers are encouraged to join in these daily therapy sessions as they carry great value for the welfare of our members. .



Administrative Updates:

The official inauguration of the registered office of FOKE, which is now in Bhalobasa, was on 14 January when we had our AGM. All official documents with our office setup have been established now in Bhalobasa.



The final phase of work with the grant received from Concentrix Daksh Private Limited for the construction / repair of Charunibash ended in June 2023. The grant utilization report and final report was submitted to both PC Chandra Jewellers Private Limited and Concentrix Daksh Private Limited during this phase.

Medical news

During this term there was major treatment for Dipendranath who has throat cancer and is being treated in PG hospital and going through chemotherapy in Bangur Hospital. His health is deteriorating very fast. Uma goes to Diamond Harbour hospital for psychiatric follow up and dental checkup. Khudiram was admitted in Hope hospital for respiratory problems. Ganesh Ghosal was taken to Diamond Harbour hospital to the dermatology department. Maya was taken to medicine department for follow-up treatment of asthma, while Shital was examined in the ENT department. Satyabrata had some neurological problems for which he was admitted in Mohon's Nursing home. Annapurna underwent her vitrectomy operation in Vivekananda Netra Niramoy. Dr. Provamoy Mahato visited Bhalobasa in April and June 2023. Dr. Sathi Sarkar from Vidyasagar Hospital checked all our members in Charunibas.

Celebrations and festivals

Birthdays of great men like Swami Vivekananda, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Rabindra Nath Tagore was celebrated.

Republic Day, Saraswati puja, Buddha Purnima, Good Friday, Easter, Holi, Eid were celebrated with zeal. Celebration of birthdays of our resident members, staff and students is also a common practice.

There was special Kirtan (devotional songs) and khichuri lunch organised by Kalpana Mondal in Charunibas which the members greatly enjoyed .



Sima's Birthday



Kirtan



Rabindra Jayanti



Saraswati puja

Inauguration of the multipurpose hall in Bhalobasa



On 28 February, we were extremely happy to welcome the associates of PC Chandra Jewellers Private Limited to officially inaugurate the room which is dedicated to the memory of Late Jahar Lal Chandra. We also received in donation furniture which is of great use to us. The inauguration programme was designed with dance, music, recitation and speech by the honoured guests.

Happy Classrooms



After retirement from High School teaching for 33 years I strongly believe that Teaching is the greatest Act of Optimism. I did not want to waste time sitting at home so am engaged nearly full time with Happy Classroom. Fortunately, I came in contact with FOKE and my dream to give back to the society by way of educating children from deprived background, came to reality. In the last couple of years nearly 50 former students volunteered in Happy Classroom; I am amazed to receive many requests for volunteering in our education centres, from my ex- students. They volunteer in different capacities- some do regular teaching, some teach occasionally while some visit to interact at different level. The most inspiring fact is that they visit with their children and interact with the students and the senior members. Those who are settled abroad try to help in resource building. My subject was Social Science, where I taught them about societal structure , social responsibilities and did various related project. I am happy today that they have grown up to be responsible citizens. - **Piyali Sen**

We thank each member of 41 Club 12 for donating two new computers to Bhalobasa Happy Classroom. The Inauguration was on 7 January 2023 by the Club members and they were happy to visit our first exhibition of art and craft by the students of Bhalobasa Happy Classroom.



In Bhalobasa we have 65 students from Nursery to X with 8 teachers and 3 volunteers.
In Charunibas we have 65 students from Nursey to VII with 5 teachers



Computer classes began from May 2023 in Bhalobasa for students of classes V to X, twice a week. We thank Mr. Michael Rao for connecting us with Mr. Anandarup Paul, who kindly sponsors the honorarium of the computer teacher per month.

Online Classes: The Sai Baba Seva Ashram & Yoga is now providing online classes for our students of Classes V to VII on weekends, in Charunibas. The children learn Basic English and general knowledge. They have donated a smart television and we now have Wi-Fi connection for the classes.



This year we had a joint Annual Sports Day in Madhubati, on 29.1.23, with students of both Happy Classrooms. This meant the students of Bhalobasa had a great outing this time. The primary school students of Bhalobasa enjoyed their Annual sports with the elderly members in Bhalobasa itself on 4.2.23.

International Mother Language Day was celebrated and organised by Rangamala Memorial Development Initiative in Charunibas where there was a sit-and-draw competition, elocution and extempore. Several students from the local government schools also participated.

6 student from Bhalobasa Happy Classroom recited poems at Bioygarh Boy's High School in presence of eminent personalities. Keya Basu trains and encourages them to participate outside their known environment.



Exhibition cum sale

Both centres of Happy Classroom exhibited handmade craft by students, teachers and elderly residents. Visitors and guests encouraged us as this was our very first effort. We also provided a stall to Sipra, a physically challenged young girl to sell her own hand made jewellery.



We would like to make this exhibition an annual event to support Happy Classroom. Your presence and encouragement will be much appreciated.



Teacher Training: A workshop on 'Primary teaching' was conducted by Anita Deb and Piyali Sen with the teachers of Happy Classroom. Mrs. Sen always provides new methods and ideas to the teachers and takes classes online to develop their teaching skills.

Jon Elis - a teacher from England visited for a day to encourage and advice the teachers of Charunibas Happy Classroom.

Workshop: Teachers namely Sangita Bayen and Supriya Halder of Charunibas Happy Classroom attended a workshop on Health and Psychological Development of children and the impact of internet. Dr. Fuad Halim played a pivotal role in organising this programme.



Farewell to Fatema

A farewell was also arranged for Fatema Khatun who taught in Charunibas Happy Classroom for a few months. Supriya Halder our ex- student is the new teacher.

Summer Camp



At Happy Classroom our Summer Camp from 17.5.23 till 01.6.23 continued with full enthusiasm.

Topics covered in Bhalobasa Happy Classroom were Evolution, the Democratic system- rights and responsibilities, concept of money - money and credit, gender equality, , Rules of Bengali spellings and first aid. These were conducted by different resource persons organised by Mrs. Sen, who are mostly her former students.

Activities with the elderly residents was also part of the camp.



In Charunibas a full day session with sports, waste management, travel and child marriage was conducted by Mr. Nirmal Sarkar and Mrs. Sohini Sarkar.

Resource persons from **Kaikala Chetana** did workshops on practical science, origami, easy maths, which was much enjoyed by the students of Charunibas Happy Classroom.

Session of First Aid was conducted by **Champa Majumder**- our Medical co-ordinator.



Our Outreach Activities

Nursing Training: Three of our students namely, Rubina Khatoon, Rakhi Barang and Simran Parveen, after passing their class X board exam has joined nursing training since 19 April 2023, for 1 year. Presently, they are attending the theory classes thrice a week. This course is being provided by St. John's Ambulance in collaboration with Rotary Club.



Session on Empowerment:

On 8.6.23 we had a session conducted by Alka Karnani from Bandhan Bank on savings. A film show was followed by interaction as to why women should save. They were encouraged to save 1 rupee per day.



Transcendent Knowledge Society has a programme named CHARKA. A meeting was held with the interested women from the community on the same day. They offered professional training in tailoring and block printing.

20 ladies are presently receiving professional training which will soon make them capable of earning decent wages. We are happy to provide this opportunity and empower the women around Bhalobasa.

Upcoming Training on Tailoring in Charunibas: For the tailoring classes three meetings with the women of the communities were held. Teacher Suprabha Bera was introduced and the training for the group of 20 ladies will start from 5 August 2023.



SABAR' CHILDREN'S EDUCATION PROGRAM: The partnership for this program started from January 2023. More than 500 'Sabar' children receive supplementary stimulating education, through 8 centers, within a 15 km radius area, based at Kaikala village. In addition to providing education, special programs, such as, health check-ups, environmental programs and special feeding of the children are also organised. FOKE could only sponsor these education centres for seven months (January till July 2023), as funding to continue the same is not available at present. If funds permit, we will surely sponsor the education centres, knowing how fruitful it is for the children's development and future possibilities.

Annual Eye Check-up Camp



Like every year, GKB Optical carried out their CSR activity by way of conducting a free eye camp in Charunibas for the villagers. Following the eye check-up by GKB optical on 31st January 2022, where 230 villagers were checked, the distribution of free spectacles for 169 villagers was conducted on 5 April 2022. We had another free camp on 23 February 2023, where 203 villagers were checked and 174, including our members & staff, received free spectacles of very good quality. We are thankful to the associates of GKB for continuing their services.

Our Special guests

It was our great pleasure to invite all the elderly members of Notun Ghar run by Kestopur Jagorani Foundation on 11 February 2023. These elderly members were once homeless and 'Notun Ghar' is now their permanent home. They came with many gifts and learning materials for Happy Classroom and the day was spent with much fun, laughter, dance, music and food.



Outreach programme with our networking partner: Kaikala Chetana

Sabar community food programme: Presently we have 42 elderly members who belong to this very backward community. They receive monthly rations along with occasional medical support and clothes. Kaikala Chetana takes responsibility for the distribution and their general wellbeing, while FOKE supports the costs from the local donations received. One main feature of this program is its flexibility which allows the local organizers to make the final decisions on the selection of beneficiaries and the type of support mostly needed.



Brickfield school project:

We have set up an education centre at the BMBS brick-kiln for children of the Hindi-speaking migrant labourers. Since 6 January 2023, the centre started with 44 enrolled children and two experienced female teachers. The Center seemed attractive to the children and their parents, so quickly the number of enrolled children increased to 67. The project is extremely important given that these children are otherwise denied any access to education during the period

the families stay and work in the brick-kiln. The Center works for 4 days a week from Tuesday to Friday, for roughly 2-3 hours a day and the children mainly learn through play and activities. They learn academics as well as extra-curricular activities.

Along with education, we provide some nutritional food to the children on each working day. We started with a cost of Rs.3/- per child which within a few days increased to Rs. 10/- per child as our friends and well-wishers came forward to support the cause. It means that the children, who are in need of nutritional support, receive the same while they are with us.

A medical camp was organised in the brick-kiln on 23 January 2023. On this day the committee members of FOKE visited to spend the day with everyone there.

Well-wishers of FOKE like Mrs. Mahesweta Chakraborty provided slippers to the children and for many it was their first experience of footwear. Ms. Rajni Dhanuka and Shri Dibyendu Baidya sponsored sumptuous food to the children in celebration of their special days.

Our Volunteers

Our youngest volunteer : Ella

Our youngest volunteer Ella from Ireland:

We all know the importance of teaching our children values and to learn by examples to show true compassion to those who need it. I am so fortunate that my children have learnt all these and over the years did their part for the children and members of FOKE. The biggest legacy I can leave behind has started with my young granddaughter Ella. When I planned my visit this year Ella, only 13 months, was introduced to a sponsored walk. On Easter Monday wearing a jumper with the FOKE emblem Ella walked 2 kms to raise money for FOKE. It is such an amazing achievement for a little girl, but more importantly the lesson to be learnt here is to encourage our young children to be proactive and do their bit for those in need. I am the proudest grandmother that my children and my first grandchild are part of the FOKE family. Welcome Ella, our youngest volunteer ever, and I hope this inspires other volunteers both abroad and in India, to have empathy and compassion to do what is right and just, for others less fortunate, by including our youth.

With the money Ella raised we got beads and wool for the members to engage themselves. There was also toiletries, mosquito nets, cotton towels for all.

I will write my experiencing of volunteering in both homes for the next newsletter of FOKE. Thank you.

- Adrienne Millar Conroy.

Thank you Rishi for updating / redoing the FOKE website from time to time .



During this term, ex-students of Mrs. Piyali Sen volunteered in Happy Classroom Bhalobasa. Saptadeepa Mahapatra taught thrice a week and Shreyoshi Bannerjee taught twice a week in the primary section. Ayush Kayal did maths remedial classes once a week. Rishav Pal taught English Grammar once a week. Adrija Bhattacharjee and Srinjoy Bhowmik did weekly music lessons.

Thank you all.

For making the Summer camp so interesting and happening we thank Sudhriti Chandra, Shiuli Sikdar , Chitrolekha Ghosh , Saheli Ghosh , Krishnendu Das, Champa Majumder, Nirmal and Sohini Sarkar, Kailkala Chetana group.

Thank You

SPECIAL DAY CELEBRATION:

We thank all our friends and well-wishers who celebrated their special days with us, Dolly Jha, Amrita Das Uma Manna, Sayan Mukherjee, Maya Nath Swarnalata Das, Swati Sarkar, Debosmita Mukherjee, Rajni Dhanuka, Namita Dasgupta, Avipsha MUKherjee, Souvik Choudhury, Sudipta Mondol, Subhoday Das, Rishav Mitra, Sonali Das Gupta, Sourav Bhattacharya, Keya Basu, Gaver Chatterjee, Papiya Ganguly, Koushik Loomer, Archana Ganguli, Raja Ghosh, Pradip Chakraborty, Sumit Halder, Puspita Gupta and Shreya Das. They visited the homes and celebrated with gifts and food.

Groups like Diamon Harbour Lady Police group, Sri Satya Sai Seva Ashram & Yoga, Bondhu, Samriddhi Foundation, Srabondhara and Neer, came with gifts as well.



Charunibas now has solar power, 24 hours hot water, fire extinguisher and several other infrastructural developments due to the generous donation from **Concentrix Daksh Services India Private Limited**.

Several furniture for storage, a new sofa, installation of CCTV and construction of a roof connecting the two buildings in Bhalobasa was kindly sponsored during this term by **PC Chandra (Jewellers) Private Limited**.

Our special thanks to **SD Ahuja Foundation, Humaquest Private Limited, 41 Club 12, TCP Advertising Private Limited** for supporting specific bills on a regular basis .



We are grateful to **Rajesh Buxani, Swarnalata Das and Tilak Shankar Majumder** for their support.

Shubhankar Mukherjee our very dear friend and his musical band **ABOHOBIKAR**, performed in Bhalobasha. The special guest was **RJ Arvind**. Thank you Subhankar for your love and interest.



The **Ladies Club of State Bank Of India- Diamond Harbour**, donated a water purifier for Charunibas.

ANUBHAB for donating a new refrigerator for Charunibash on occasion of their 10th Anniversary.

On the occasion of Women's Day , we received a new sewing machine from **Open Arms Education and Charitable Trust**.



The associates of **Marsh India Private Limited** visited Bhalobasa to spend time with the children and residents. They sponsored the art work of the boundary wall of Bhalobasa and came with food packets for all. It was a real fun time.

The students in Charunibas Happy Classroom received shoes from Mr. Mrinmoy Das.

We are very grateful to **Gaver Chatterjee** and the associates of **Concern India Foundation** for arranging this entire event and celebrating her beloved husband Partho Chatterjee's birthday with us.



Many thanks to **Mr. Pradip Arora** for the donation of 50 blankets which **Baranagar Petals** distributed in the brickfield they are working in.

SRABONDHARA organised a drawing competition in Charunibas and donated a cheque of Rs. 12,000.



Dr. Swati Sarkar was very kind to visit Charunibas to do a medical checkup of our members. **GKB Optical** needs special mention for their continued support in providing free eye check up and free spectacles.

The **Women's Police Cell** from **Diamond Harbour** arranged a lunch in Charunibas and encouraged our youngsters, specially the girls, to consider joining in the police force, as their career.



We are grateful to **Sean Garvey**, family and friends for their major annual support which is of great help. **Cobra & Mongoose, Australia** made their annual donation.

This year we were happy to welcome **Mags O' Donnel**, **Aine Macken** and **Norah Merriman**, from Ireland and **Margriet Jensen** from Holland. It was good to see them after the pandemic. We thank them for their donations and visits.



Fr. Pat Hogan, **Margaret** and **Pat Finnerty**, **David** and **Helen Cusson** from **Calcutta Calling** visited and we appreciate their support. **Adrienne Millar Conroy** visited after nearly 3 years for one month and we will share her volunteering experience in the next newsletter.

Dr. Fuad Halim, **Dr. Brahma**, **Dr. Arnab Hati**, **Dr. Provamoy Mahato** and **Dr. Avijit Dam** helps with medical advice and treatment. **Sahadeb Some**, our President, for reaching out in rescuing and rehabilitating people in need. **Shyamal Mohanty** for helping us with medical emergencies.

Suparna Mondol helped in designing this newsletter and the annual report while **Erin Lior** helped with the edit. **Veda Aggarwal** did the final professional check.



Happy Classroom is thriving under the leadership of **Mrs. Piyali Sen**. **Keya Basu** enjoys training students in elocution / recitation which they are learning very well. **Our staff** deserves a round of applause for taking such excellent care of our elderly members.

Warmest regards
FOKE Team