



## FRIENDS OF KOLKATA'S ELDERLY

**NEWSLETTER: January - June 2024**

We began the year in good spirits, but we are mourning the untimely loss of our beloved Committee Member and Assistant Secretary, Arundhati Chaudhury. At the young age of 53, when she still had lots to contribute to society, life didn't give her a chance. We feel she was needed more in Heaven than on Earth.

The two homes and both Happy Classrooms' education programmes are moving towards our goals of caring for the elderly and providing holistic education to the children who need our support the most. From daily caregiving to improving the overall quality of life for our elderly members, we get support from our caregivers, students, teachers, and visitors. For the children we try to go beyond the boundaries of academics. We try to help their families in distress, providing scopes for vocational training, and including them within our programmes wherever possible, with the hope that they grow in the system, learn to see life in a different perspective and a second line of leadership can be created.



# OBITUARY



**Arundhati Chaudhury:** FOKE's blanket distribution was an activity which Arundhati enjoyed the most. Practically every year for about 15 years, Arundhati turned up in her red car, sitting at the driver's seat, taking the responsibility to drive us to the many different roads, lanes and by-lanes of Kolkata distributing the blankets on cold nights. She often said that this was an activity she looked forward to. Arundhati opened the door of her home to Parvati, a young vulnerable woman on the street. Not only did she give a secure home to Parvati; but allowed Calcutta Rescue's staff and physiotherapists to visit her home for Parvati's treatment and therapy. From time to time, in spite of her very busy schedule as a trainer and supervisor in the Industrial Training Institute, Arundhati drove Parvati to the Calcutta Rescue clinic for her check ups and medications. Asif, a staff member of Calcutta Rescue, shared that 'this was a rare selfless act'. Our members and staff will miss her visits in the homes and we will miss her presence in our meetings. Rest in Peace, Arundhati.



# Rest in peace

Sima Dutta - Sima came from Vidyasagar State General Hospital on 11th June 2022. She was deserted by her siblings after a brain stroke. Sima suffered psychologically as well as physically, and was difficult to deal with at times. However, she was happy to stay in Charunibas and later in Bhalobasa. She enjoyed the presence of both children and visitors. On 22nd February 2024, she passed away peacefully in Bhalobasa.



## ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS :

With the sudden and untimely demise of Arundhati, our new Assistant Secretary is Mrs. Piyali Sen- who was elected unanimously as she is the driving force behind the qualitative growth of Happy Classroom- our education programme. Mrs Sen as a retired teacher will do justice is what we believe. We welcome Mrs. Sen as the Assistant Secretary of FOKE and wish her a very satisfying time ahead. Mrs. Sen is publishing our first newsletter of HAPPY CLASSROOM with more details as we are not able to cover all in our general FOKE newsletter. We hope you will enjoy reading and seeing the colourful photos.

## Welcome Home

Arun Das was referred by responsible citizens. He was jobless, but worked for some time as a security guard in a housing. Without reason, the security agency refused to employ him and denied any compensation. Arun is unmarried and has only an aged brother who is not much in contact with him. We are encouraging Arun to do smaller odd jobs in the home and he is happy minding the gate. Listening to retro songs and singing is his favourite pastime.

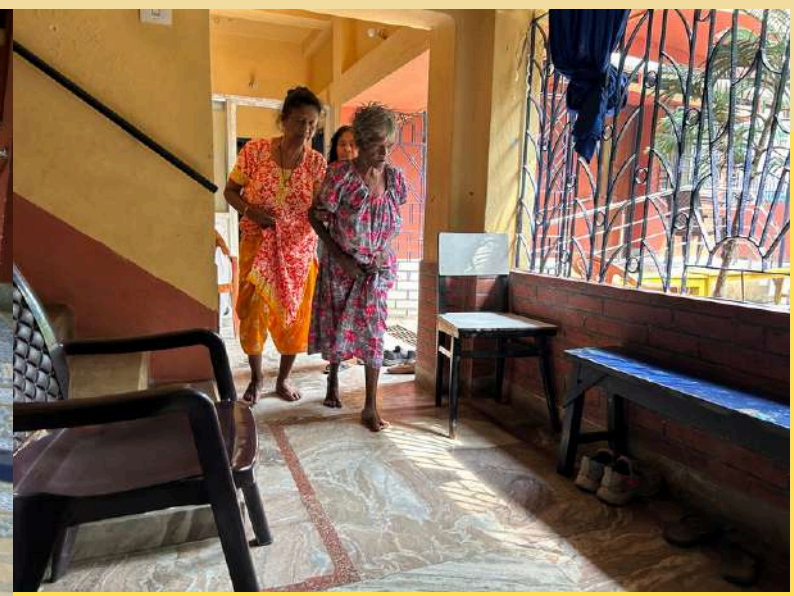


# Welcome Home



Balli's Homecoming is quite special: 18th of March 2024 was an extraordinary day at FOKE as we witnessed an unprecedented incident at Bhalobasa involving two ladies - one choosing to leave and one choosing to move in. Subhra Sarkar was rescued not far from Bhalobasa, but after a couple of weeks, she was unwilling to stay on and decided to return to her so-called nephew and was ready to get back to a life of uncertainties. Coincidentally, on the same day we spotted a lady in an alley very near our home and when we approached her, she readily agreed to come home with us. It was the easiest rescue we ever did. After a good shower and lunch in Bhalobasa, we took Balli, Subhra and the nephew to Thakurpukur police station to lodge the General Diaries for both.

We had mixed feelings of letting one go and welcoming another - but we managed both situations simultaneously. We had no vacant bed, but Subhra's decision to leave gave Balli the opportunity to stay on in Bhalobasa. ( Read the story by Auden and Petra in this newsletter)





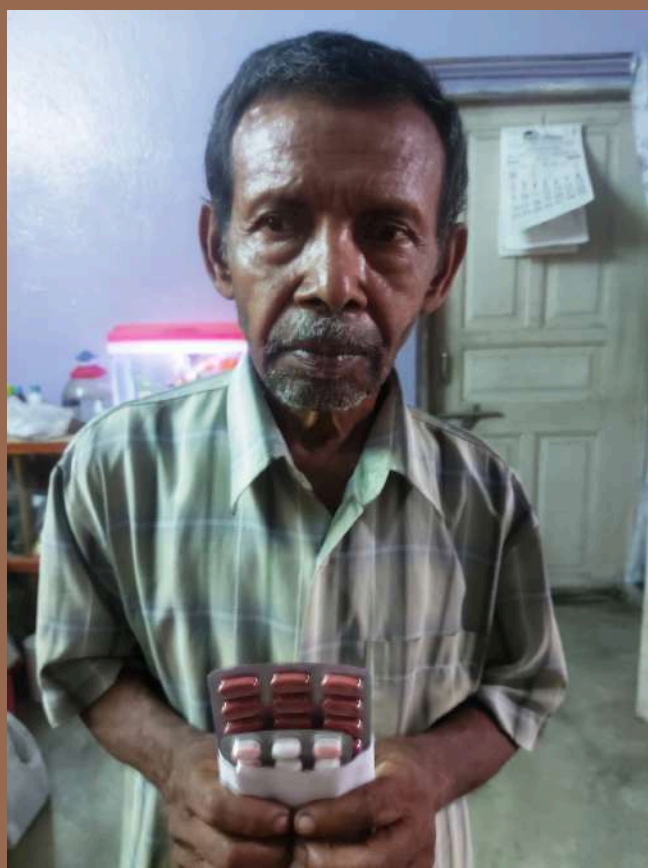
## Medical news



Most members are under constant medical care. Satyabrata, Sandhya, Uma, Salma Arun and Sova were all taken to Diamond Harbour Hospital for check-ups and treatment. Lovely, Khudiram and Kalpana were admitted to Hope Kolkata Foundation Hospital. Shefali, Mukundo and Sital were taken for treatment in Dr. Arnab's Hati's Nursing home. In Bhalobasa, Jyotsna is being treated by Dr. Swati Sarkar. Dr. S. Brahma is consulted on a regular basis for specific patients for changing of doses for their psychiatric medicines. Dr. Pravamoy Mahato visited Bhalobasa on 26.05.24 and on 21.06.24 for general check-ups of the members. He is a kindhearted person and is available over the phone whenever needed.

**Non - residential programme : Since May 2023 we have started to provide dry food and prescribed medicines to the following :**

Rasamay Naskar is unmarried and 60 years old. He lives with his elder brother's family. He suffers from various diseases and though both his nephews care for him, it is difficult to procure medicine and pathological tests from their restricted income.



Shanti Mondal is aged about 69. She and her husband are both sick. Their 3 daughters are married but cannot afford the regular medicines for their parents, though they all contribute towards the daily living costs. Since April 2024, Foke has been providing their monthly medicines.

Lakshmi Das is about 60 years old. She has a married son and a daughter. Though her son doesn't take any responsibility, Laxmi's daughter tries to help from her own meagre income. Sometimes when health permits, Laxmi does little jobs in Kolkata. Her main requirements are some dry food with grocery items which we are happily supporting.



Joseph Sarkar and Nilima Sarkar, a couple aged about 65 and 60 years, have two married sons and one daughter living separately. Joseph used to work in a private company. With the sudden closure of the company, he started to earn money as a rickshaw puller. Sadly, he had a serious backbone injury seven years ago. Therefore, he is unable to walk much and has to rest a lot. The younger son sometimes provides financial support when he has some extra money from working overtime. Some dry food and grocery items are being provided to ease their daily living.

Reba Nandi is a resident of Madhyamgram. After a brain stroke she became bedridden. Her son Sukhendu found us on a social website and requested medical support for his mother. We responded and are paying the monthly physiotherapy bills since April 2024. We will continue for as long as the support is needed. Baranagar Petal is looking after their dry food and other medical expenses and our collaborative effort will surely help Reba to gain the ability to be mobile again.

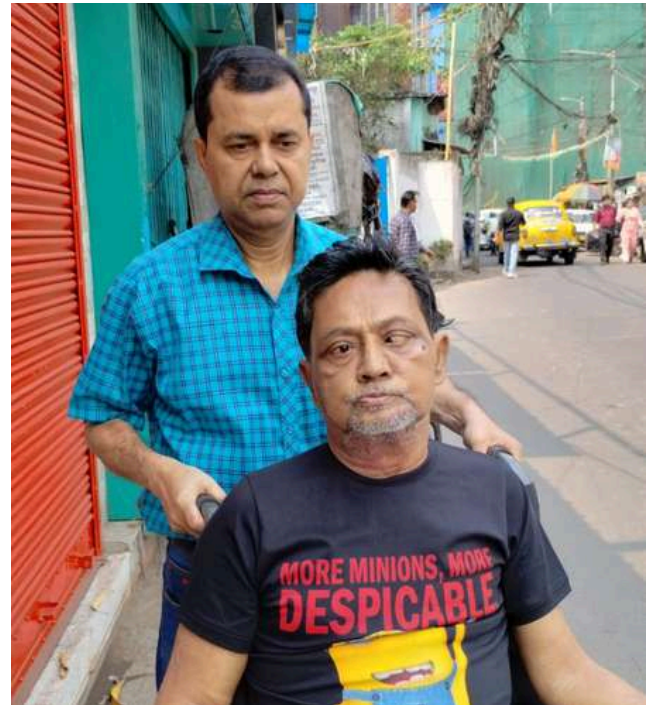


Manju Das has been receiving monthly monetary support (INR 500) and prescribed medicines as well as pathology tests for several years now.

# Rescue and Rehabilitation :

Montu Roy was provided medical support in Dr. Fuad Halim's Nursing Home after being rescued by Sahadeb Some.

Though Montu has a son and wife, he is abandoned for reasons not clear. We responded to his immediate medical need when he was nearly dying; he is now settled in Apna Ghar Ashram.



## Sabar Community Food & Medical programme

We are continuing the dry ration programme for the Sabar community in collaboration with Kaikala Chetana.. Presently there are 29 recipient of monthly rations and some are receiving prescribed medicines Since April 2024 we are paying the vendors directly for all purchase. medicines. Mr. Dibendyu Baidya – a friend of FOKE visited and sponsored food for 50 children at a Sabar Community centre. Thank you Mr. Baidya.

In February 2024 from FOKE we visited and met most of them in their own habitat. Further plans on their medical need was discussed.



The team members of Kailkala Chetana

Thank you Somnath and the team of Kaikala Chetana for your valuable input and practical suggestions at all tme .



# Happy Classrooms

## Bhalobasa HC

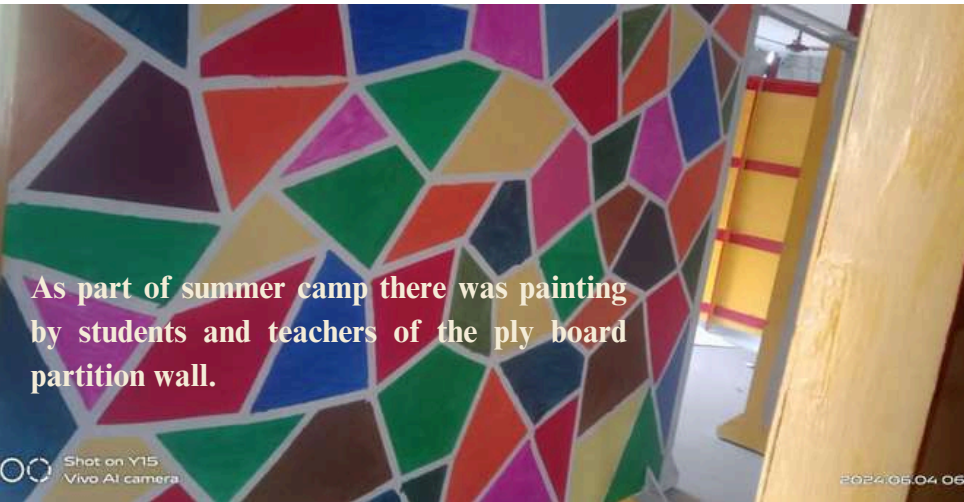
- The Annual Sports Day was on 26th January for the younger students in Bhalobasa, while the seniors were taken to Madhubati for a joint Annual Sports Day.
- An awareness programme was conducted by “Bigyan O Juktibadi Samiti” to prevent prejudice
- A musical programme was conducted by Blue Grass Journeymen
- We had to bid farewell to two teachers, Koustav Bose and Avijit Sarkar. They are both missed by all.



- A workshop on renewal of plastic material conducted by the voluntary group “Helping Hand”;
- A workshop on Gender sensitivity was conducted by Rima Bardhan.
- A workshop on evolution was done by Ritobrata Das
- A musical programme was conducted by Geetanjali Sarkar.



# Happy Classrooms



In Charunibas HC we had farewell for two teachers .

- Aparna Mukherjee, who taught since we began the education programme in 2007, retired in January 2024 after years of good service. Her contribution was not only in the education programme, but also in the lives of the elderly residents and staff members. Thank you, Aparna.
- Supriya Halder, our ex- student, joined last year but had to resign due to family matters. We hope she will join when she is free as she was very dedicated and did her job well.
- Annual Sports Day with students of Bhalobasa HC was organised in Madhubati this time, which was much enjoyed.
- International Language Day was organised by Rangamala Memorial Trust where there was elocution, extempore and drawing followed by prizes for the winners and snacks for all.
- As part of summer camp there was painting by students and teachers of the ply board partition wall. A day was dedicated for discussion and sharing on religious prejudice by Atri Bhattacharjee
- Yoga Day and World Environment Day were also celebrated
- Suparna Roy, based in Bangalore conducted online classes in English and Maths on Mondays and Thursdays during January to March 2024.
- A day was dedicated for discussion / sharing on religious prejudice by Atri Bhattacharjee



**National Days and Festivals - Republic day, Saraswati pujo, Holi, Good Friday, Easter and Eid were celebrated where children shared about the importance of the days.**

**Teachers Training : For teachers of both centres - Mrs. Piyali Sen conducted a training on pedagogy.**

**Both centres celebrated the birthdays of great personalities, senior residents as well as staff members.**

**The total number of students in Bhalobasa is 79 and 72 in Charunibas as on 30th June 2024.**

## **Supporting students / educators for Vocational training :**

**Nursing training : After their class X board exams, our two students Simran Parveen and Suparna Batang completed the GDA theory training and received their certificates. After the completion of their theory classes, their 6-week practical training was completed in Hope Kolkata Foundation Hospital. They received not only the best training, but also the support of all the staff members. To ease their financial burden, we paid their daily travel costs to Hope hospital during their practical training. We appreciate the opportunity provided by the Management of Hope Kolkata Foundation Hospital.**



**Computer Training : Prita Roy is a college student and a maths teacher in Bhalobasa HC. She helps with computer teaching and administrative work as well. To empower her and develop her abilities, we have sponsored her computer course on advanced excel training for 6 months.**

**Educational Sponsorship : Monisha Mondal passed her Class X exam this year and we are happy to sponsor her admission and study materials for class XI. Monisha has the eagerness to learn and is a great dancer. She helps the weaker students as well as teaches dance in Bhalobasa HC. We are glad to pay her a token amount.**



**Suchismita Das is a brilliant student and knows that education is the way out. She is sincere and focussed and hence passed her Class X Board Exam with brilliant marks. We have sponsored this child since Nursery in Loreto Day School Sealdah. She is now in Class XI studying commerce and is elected as Class Executive. We will continue the sponsorship as far as possible.**

## Exhibition cum sale:

**Happy Classroom Bhalobasa exhibited handmade craft by students, teachers and elderly residents. Visitors and guests encouraged us like last year. We will do one in Charunibas soon .**



## Eye Check up camp:



**On 6th March 2024 we had another free eye check up camp where 200 people were checked and 155 people received free spectacles in May 2023. We are thankful to the associates of Vision Rx Lab Pvt. Ltd for continuing their services for the benefit of the poor.**





**Training on Tailoring:** The last group of 24 students completed their training in February 2024. Unfortunately, there were 10 dropouts for various family and personal reasons. On May 11th 2024, another batch of 21 students started and will continue for 6 months. The syllabus consists of making 2 kinds of petticoats, 2 kinds of salwar pants, churidar, blouse, palazzo, ankle pants, night dresses, umbrella cut gown and punjabi suit. Suprabha Bera is a dedicated trainer with a very pleasant personality. She lovingly involves herself with the elderly residents.

**Staff appreciation :** This time the Annual Staff Appreciation day was organised at Rishika Garden with hearty support from Raja Das (who did all building works in Bhalobasa in the last 3 years). The speciality of this year's picnic was the enthusiasm of the many young teachers of Happy Classroom. We had dance and songs with a special music system on hire. We also had some lovely recitations. Making reels was the highlight along with team building games and other games. This year the best staff award was offered to Aradhana Singh. She has looked after Charunibas home excellently for a number of years now, and continues to do so through thick and thin..



# Experience shared:

**Auden Nedrelid and Petra Lapvetelainen, a Norwegian/Finnish couple, are both freelancers within media. They have done films and photography for many NGOs in Asia. They were glad to share their experiences in FOKE :**

**OUR TWO DAYS WITH FOKE** It is March 2024 and we are in Kolkata as part of a work trip to Asia this winter. We travel as a media team to document projects for different aid organisations. FOKE is a project that we have followed for a long time, and when we met Sanghita it was natural to ask if we could come and document FOKE's important work at Charunibas and Bhalobasa as volunteers.

**CHARUNIBAS:** We drove out of Kolkata into the countryside and onto narrow roads to the red house, which is beautifully located next to a small lake. Everyone who has visited FOKE knows that it is like entering someone's home, where both those who live there and those who come to visit know that it is a safe and good place. The residents sit in the shade on the veranda and welcome us with their big smiles. We have a cup of tea and a nice talk before we go up to the second floor.

We hear the familiar sound of school children reading. The second floor is divided into three small classrooms where children from different grade levels are taught by teachers volunteering at Charunibas. They provide teaching and help with studies and homework to the children who live in the villages around.

On the first floor, singing and a health check-up is planned before lunch. Once a week, the nurse Champa comes to take the blood pressure and does other health checks on everyone who lives there; she is there to see if there is anyone who needs medical attention.

A little later, the whole house is filled with songs. A volunteer, Monimala Bhattacharya has come and will sponsor lunch today, and she sings songs with the residents before lunch. We hear famous Indian songs from Bollywood and other traditional songs. She is happy to be able to contribute to creating joy among the residents.

On the second floor, the sound of children studying has been replaced by the sound of sewing machines and women talking. FOKE organises sewing training for the women of the village and they gather once a week to sew and make different garments. They showed us the beautiful, colourful garments they have made.

With the evening approaching everybody was getting ready for a double birthday celebration. It's Piu's birthday, who is one of the teachers and Mukundo, one of the resident of Charunibas. A cake is placed on the table in the middle of the yard and they each get to blow out their candles. Everyone claps and sings the birthday song and each gets a gift. For Mukundo this is a special day, because it is the first time in his life that his birthday is being celebrated. We join the others in the celebration, eating cake and chatting. The atmosphere is joyful and it's wonderful to see how everyone, from the young school children to the elderly residents, are enjoying spending time together. We see why the work that FOKE does is so important.



**BHALOBASA:** A few days later we get to visit Bhalobasa. Today Jhinku Banerjee, who is a photographer and treasurer of FOKE and a friend of Sanghita, was introduced to us. She has followed FOKE over several years and we share experiences around both photography and this project. We visited CHARKA workshop who provides training on sewing and block printing for the women referred by FOKE. On the way back, we saw an elderly woman lying on the street sleeping in the scorching sun. Flies were buzzing around her and we realised that this is not a normal sleep. Sanghita walked over, woke her up, asked her name and offered her to come for food and a shower at Bhalobasa. She was disoriented but gets up and on unstable legs walks with us to the house and said her name is Balli. She gets a shower, clean clothes and her lunch. After lunch, Balli sits on the bench, smoking a bidi and smiling happily with her one tooth. We were still wondering if she wants to stay or walk away.

Beside Balli on the bench, Subhra sits with her nephew. She came into the home a couple of weeks ago after living and begging on the streets for several years. Subhra was missing her nephew and despite the hard life on the street, she decided to return to her street life. This is a choice that we must respect, says Sanghita.

The home is actually full, but now that Subhra decided to leave, there will be a bed free for Balli. In order to be formally registered they must go to the local police station to report that Subhra is moving out and Balli has been rescued and will be moving in. An auto arrives and both women join Sanghita and Jhinku to the police station to lodge the general diaries.

In the afternoon, the house is filled with children from the local community who receive extra lessons and activities together with the residents. A couple of psychologists, Nirmal and Sohini Sarkar, were doing physical training and art therapy with both the elderly and the children. We watched Balli smile as a little girl was holding her hand; she will adjust to life at Bhalobasa very well, we think. The subject for the art therapy class was the Holi festival, which will be celebrated soon.

Before we left, we interviewed Sanghita and Dipti sang for us; she has a beautiful voice and a strong story as to how she got to Bhalobasa. We could sit there and listen to all the stories from the elderly and the sounds from the youths who are still there doing different activities, but we had to say goodbye as it was getting late. It has been two days full of experiences, and we are happy that we can be involved in this important work with FOKE. Both our hearts and hard drives were full of good memories that will be used in films and documentations in the future.



# Thank You

We thank each and everyone who either visited the homes to celebrate their special days , sponsored a lunch, made financial donations or donated in kind. Many just came to spend time with the residents. We appreciate your contribution in this journey.

Asset Donation : We thank Anubhab Welfare Society for donating a washing machine for Charunibas and State Bank of India - Diamond Harbour for their donation of 6 wheel chairs of great quality.



We enjoyed the visits of our friends : Calcutta Calling, Kerry Luxton, Michael Hopkins, Margriet Jensen, Jenine and Rajesh Buxani

## Donors towards monthly bills

### **SD Ahuja & Foundation**

Sponsors our monthly medicine costs.

### **Humaquest Pvt Ltd**

Monthly cooking gas cylinders

**Mrs. Nandita Bhaduri / Mrs Punyarupa Bhaduri & Mr. Prosenjit Das -  
Electricity Bills**

### **Veda Aggarwal**

Website domain

### **41 Club 12**

partly towards grocery

## Our Annual Donors

Mrs. Adrienne Miller Conroy & PSN School - Ireland

Mr. Sean Garvey family & friends - Ireland

Calcutta Calling - Ireland

Mrs. Kerry Luxton & friends - Australia

Cobra & Mongoose- Australia

Mr. Pat & Mrs Margaret Finnerty -Ireland

Mrs. Swarnalata Das

Mrs. Margriet Jensen - Holland

Mr. Rajesh Buxani .

Mr. Tilak Shankar Mazumder

**Caring Hands Foundation - USA has kindly sponsored the teachers salary for the FY 2024-25.**

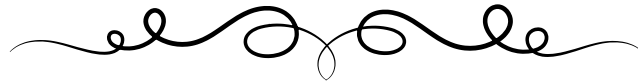
**Thank you Dr. Sakti Das for visiting and recommending FOKE.**



## Groups who visited and supported

Baranagar Petals  
Ballygaung WAVE  
Bangiya Grameen Bank Officer's Association  
James Residency ( Utsaki Commitee)  
Jadu Colony and Friends  
Anondodhara  
Anurag Foundation  
Amar Sahar Garia Charitable trust  
Baranagar Petals  
Rangamala Memorial Development Institute  
Sri Sri Niganamanda Seva Kendra  
Sri Satya Sai Seva Sanstha  
Sai Baba Sevashram & Yoga Research.  
State Bank of India -Diamond Harbour  
Tollygung Active Friends  
Jayatu Nigamananada Group.4  
Kalighat Aubhab Social Welfare Society  
Pushan

Thank You



**A Big Thank You to the ones who make  
it all possible!**



We are grateful to all visitors , friends and well-wishers during this term

Abhijit Sikder  
Anwasha Ganguly  
Anirban Ghosh  
Anulekha Chowdhary  
Asok Kr Sinha & Sarbani Sinha  
Aroti Chakraborty  
Avinash Kumar  
Avinash Srinivasan  
Arindam De  
Anil Baran Ghosh  
Anupam Mondal  
Anindo Roy  
Ankita Bhattacharya Achariya  
Anand R  
Anita Halder  
Archana Bayida Majumder  
Anjana Das  
Avijit Dutta  
Binda Duti Chowdhury Bhanu  
Mahajan  
Bikash Ranjan Dhar  
Bappaditya Chowdury  
Chandan Roy Choudhary  
Dr. Swati Sarkar  
Dipan Chakraborty Debosmita  
Mukherjee Debopriya Syam  
Dr. Pinaki Das  
Dipak Majhi  
Debesh Kumar Dey  
Dilip Mukherjee  
Dishari Chakraborty  
Geetanjali B. Sarkar  
Gita Biswas  
Gautam Devnath

Indrani Ghosh  
Kailash Ahuja  
Kunal Ghosh  
Kumkum Dey  
Kakoli Ghosh  
Keya Basu  
Kabita Mahto  
Krishno Das & Robi Das  
Koustav Kundu  
Lata Ghosh  
Manimala Bhattacharya  
Mili Bonik  
Mausumi Mukherjee  
Mouni Saha  
Manabendra Bhowmik  
M. Mary Anthony  
Mithu Sinha Roy  
Malay Ghosh  
Madhumita Dhar  
Manjari Chowdhury  
Mrinmoy Das  
Nirmalya Roy  
Nani Gopal Sikder  
Neelava Das  
Puspa Mitra  
Papiya Mondal  
Papiya Mitra  
Pratima Saha  
Paramita Neogy  
Promita Dhar  
Rimita Kar  
Rajdeep Chakraborty  
Ritushree Maity  
Rinku Banerjee

Rajni Dhanuka  
Soma Sen  
Subhara Dey Das  
S. Chakraborty  
Sampa Das  
Soma Das  
Surajit Das  
Soma Mazumder  
Sumitra Choudhury  
Sanchita Dutta  
Shamnebi Debnath  
Soumya Ghosh  
Soumya Chattopadhyay  
Shankhamala Sen  
Sthitodhi Ghosh  
Swapan Mukherjee  
Subhra Bera  
Sunny Mukherjee  
Santanu Samanta  
Suman Mukherjee  
Sayan Bhattacharya  
Sharbari Gupta  
Sushma Jha  
Sarmila Samanta Sarkar  
Sudipta Mondal  
Swati Halder  
Swapna Mitra  
Soumya Ghosh  
Sohini Dutta Roy  
Soma Chowdhury  
Sanjoy Ghosh  
Snehashish Chatterjee  
Uma Manna  
Urmi Mukhopadhyay



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