

Friends of Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service

Newsletter Issue 2

April 2006



How far is Adrian Whalley planning to race to raise funds towards the big expansion of CRS activities?

See inside and then decide your contribution

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- *Director Rig David explains the new strategy of empowerment to change lives*
- *Major expansion of CRS coverage planned 7 new colonies to supplement the existing 8*
- *Adrian Whalley's challenge to raise £6,000*
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Director Rig David Explains the Empowerment Approach

When I took the decision two years back to work for Cathedral Relief Service, I expected to be just handing out food and medicines to the underprivileged in the slums of Kolkata. I was surprised to learn through my experiences with CRS that this would not be the case. During my present tenure I have been privy to a plethora of experiences.

The organisation has undergone a paradigm shift from being service based, to enabling people to help themselves. Overall I was encouraged by this approach because it had all the hallmarks of a modern discourse designed to bring the less affluent of Kolkata slums into the 21st century. Initially, I was apprehensive due to the discrepancy between haves and marginalized. I thought it would be impossible to implement because the marginalized in Kolkata face extreme hardships that is very difficult to comprehend.

Poverty in Kolkata is more real than apparent and it is very hard for me to understand how a policy of empowerment can help the poor overcome the overwhelming odds and adversity they face in their everyday lives. For me, my first thought was that a service based approach seemed like the most sensible way to help these people in their daily lives. However, while meandering in the program I came to realize that its possible for a service based approach to actually contribute to, or be part of, the cycle of poverty that the correlation between give and take might now be dogmatic.

“Through local level meetings and its training programmes, CRS has paved the way for homegrown leaders to flourish.”

The process of empowerment is designed to encourage people to realize their Rights, (education, health, right to participation). Lack of awareness means that people miss out on their inventions, handicraft designs and artistic

impressions. The result is a loss of gains to the creators; they give away their cultural patrimony to business people.

CRS seeks to reduce inequalities and discrimination. The people CRS works with face legal, social, economic, cultural practices norms and values that conspire against them. CRS learns from the people to enable and empower communities to plan, implement, manage, monitor and evaluate their programmes. CRS staff realizes that people’s participation is essential in meeting objectives of self-reliance. The presence of community members allows CRS to deliver its services more effectively with little resistance and greater acceptance from community. Through local level meetings and its training programmes, CRS has paved the way for homegrown leaders to flourish.

These people are sensitive to the community and are considered to be of greater value in the development process. Due to its pragmatic nature, CRS recognized the need to network and form partnership with NGOs and grassroots level organizations with similar ideologies and missions. By adopting this strategy, CRS is able to increase awareness and desire to help its cause through involvement. This template facilitates accessibility to the credence of self-reliance.

The poor in Kolkata have dignity. In the program areas the residents always greet each other with a warm friendly smile and more than willing to share what little they have (Even though they have no idea where the next meal will be coming from)

The Ethos of its work ethics coupled with friendliness of its staff and members have provided a window of opportunity to glimpse into lives of the marginalized in the Kolkata slums.

CRS Plans Major Expansion into Kolkata's Remaining Slum Colonies

Education is one of the greatest gifts from which we can all benefit. The children in the colonies in and around Kolkata are living in extreme poverty and, because of both their situation and a lack of access to educational resources, are forced to shoulder the burden of family life, make a contribution to the family income, to care for their brothers and sisters but, as a result, to go without any education at all. The CRS currently provides schooling for around 700 children in schools that it has set up in 8 of the 15 colonies in which it operates in and around Kolkata. The Ashakiran project has targeted the setting up of a school in each of the remaining 7 colonies making up the 15. This will provide education at the kindergarten and primary levels to an additional 2,000 children in the colonies. So that will be 2,700 kids to which CRS is giving a fair start in life.



Typical Street in Downtown Kolkata

Of these, it is anticipated that around 15% (or a minimum of 300 children) will be mainstreamed into the formal education system. In addition, the project intends to provide vocational training for a life of work to around 100 young people and to continue to build the pressure on government for the inclusion of the education that CRS is providing into the state government's education scheme. The message is that these kids too have a right to be educated. The project has been fully costed and we need to raise £6,000 to make this project happen. This £6,000 will provide funding for the training of the additional teachers who will be needed, the provision of education materials, educational training for the setting up of a school health programme in each of the new schools for which 2 doctors, 4 health workers and 2 counsellors are needed and to assist in the involvement of parents who will be invited to join community development committees.

The Ultimate Human Challenge—in more ways than one!

The Ashakiran or "Ray of hope" project

Adrian Whalley's 56 mile Run!

To seek to raise the £6,000 funding for the expansion, on 16 June 2006 I am going to take part in the 81st running of "The Comrades Race" (www.comrades.com), a 56 mile undulating race from Durban to Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. This race was established in 1921 in memory of those from South Africa who fought and perished in the first world war. The race is recognised in running circles as being one of the greatest feats of human endurance that exists. This ultra marathon takes place on "Youth Day", a national holiday, and is supported by just about

"I will take part in the 81st running of "The Comrades Race", a 56 mile undulating race from Durban to Pietermaritzburg in South Africa.

the whole nation. This is something that I have wanted to do for some time and I ran the London to Brighton race last October (55 miles) to make sure that my air fare would not be wasted! But the London to Brighton is over easier terrain.

I am keen to use this experience to raise some useful funding for the CRS. I am wondering whether this ultimate challenge for me may encourage the financial support of the "Friends" to enable the education of these kids. I may get some support if only out of sympathy! It will be fantastic if you are prepared to let me

have your financial and prayerful support for this venture. If you can, please could you make your cheque payable to:

"Friends of the Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service"

and send this to me:

Adrian Whalley
The White Cottage,
Main Street,
Botcheston,
Leicestershire LE9 9FF (tel: 01455 828506).

Each and every penny of what you are able to give will be put towards this "Ray of hope" for these kids. If you are a taxpayer make sure you complete the Gift Aid form with your contribution to enable me to add a further 28p in every £1 from Mr Brown!

You will appreciate that it is important that as many kids as possible have the gift of education. I am absolutely sure that we can meet this £6,000 target. Thank you for your support. I will report back in the next issue. **The ultimate human challenge – in more ways than one!**

New South African "Friends"?

Whilst I am in Cape Town, I am going to be meeting with David Farquarson – see about David's recent trip to Kolkata in this issue – and perhaps talking and showing photographs at a meeting David has set up with the aim of starting a sister "Friends" support group in South Africa. So too, I will be meeting with a lady contact in Durban to investigate what may be the way forward for CRS there.

The Growth of the Gobinda Banerjee Lane School

Tolygunge Jaihind Club is situated at 31 Gobinda Banerjee Lane. The residents and well wishers of the community were always very keen to improve the environment of the locality. One such person, the late. Mr. Chittaranjan Das, took the initiative and started Jaihind Abaitanik Vidyalay (school) in the area. Small children from the underprivileged background started joining the school. Two youths from the area Pritikona Mazumdar and Dulal Mondal volunteered to help in running the school cost free. In order to run the centre, contributions from the local people was raised. Besides that, grants were also received from well-wishers.

The classes started in a small tin-roofed room. The club members mobilized financial resources through cultural events and subscription raised through puja festivals. Through this a single storied building was constructed.



A local youth named Samir Mazumdar and his friend Late Susanta Duttagupta, contacted Cathedral Relief Service This was the turning point in our work. CRS started assisting the children with school books and stationery. The local people started bringing their children to school. But we had to restrict admissions due to lack of space. The club started mobilizing funds for building a staircase, the second floor and a toilet.

The New Floor of Gobinder Banerjee School, which was built with funds raised from Adrian Whalley's run in the 2001 Chicago Marathon.

During this period donors and well-wishers of CRS visited the Gobinda Banerjee School and enquired about the requirements. It so happened that Mr. Adrian Whalley from Friends of CRS visited GB Lane and witnessed the situation. He assured to help in building the third floor. Mr. Whaley returned to UK with the assurance, that money would be raised to construct the additional floor to accommodate more children in the school. A Marathon race needs stamina, skill practice and perseverance to achieve the long distance run. Committed as ever with the goal to construct the school building at G.B. Lane, Mr. Whalley ran the 2001

Chicago Marathon and did what he promised, raising nearly £5,500 for the construction of the 3rd floor of G.B. Lane school. As a result more underprivileged children of the area get educated in this school and are ready to be mainstreamed into Government schools to continue their education. From a small number of 12 underprivileged children, the Roll strength of the Education centre has increased to 200 and each of them feel committed to come

back and do something for the centre's future development.

G.B. Lane Committee Members:

Md Yasin, Dina Bandhu Mondal, Dulal Mondal, Subroto Sarkar, Samrat Naskar & Santosh Singh.

Not Just for Christians

Bibi Bagan Colony

Ours is a Muslim community and about 10,000 families live below the poverty line. Most of the people are daily labourers. The Muslim women are very conservative, most of them illiterate and not motivated enough to send their children to school. Our small club, with enthusiastic members, from time to time raises some funds to initiate programmes for the benefit of the community.

"We people of Bibi Bagan stand on our own feet raising our heads high up. We want all our children to be literate and all the women to be empowered."

In the 1991 we came in contact with CRS medical unit and immediately clinics were started for children and women. Gradually non-formal education programmes for the children aged 7-14 years and skill training programmes for women were initiated. The aim was to make the girls literate so they are able stand on their own feet. Seeing the progress the adult education programme for women groups was initiated.

The women's groups soon came forward to seize the opportunity to fulfill their dreams. Initially CRS was working in a small pocket, but gradually as interest was generated among the community, the community Club grew stronger to work with more poor families. Over the years it was observed that more and more children and young girls have joined the education and skill building centres.

We are very proud for **Bibibagan** and to tell you honestly now many girls have joined the skill programme and are earning an income through the SHG (Self Help Groups). They have formed WEGs (Womens' Empowerment Groups) who are responsible for the money, and getting loans from the Banks to start small enterprises of their own.

Members of the Awami Committee Club, which is situated at North Kolkata, near Beliaghata and Tangra, registered under societies registration Act-1961 – Regd.No.S14/6535. Address – 14 Bibibagan Lane, Kolkata-700 015. Md Aslam , Zamuddin Ahmed , Md Soyel , Md Fahem , Harim Khan

Besanti Devi School and Women's Self Help Group



Clive Brown's CRS Visit - Besanti Devi (BD) Colony

Last year, two young members of our congregation at Little St Mary's in Cambridge joined the Friends' tour to see the work of the Cathedral Relief Service at first hand. They returned full of enthusiasm for all they had heard and seen, and so I was delighted that I was able to make my own visit in March of this year. I had arranged to tour India with David, a friend from Cape Town, and we included Kolkata in our itinerary. While we were there, Rig David gave up a day and a half of his time to show us what CRS was achieving.

We were first taken to the Besanti Devi (BD) Colony, one of the sixteen city slum areas in which CRS is active. The community there were squatters who had been displaced by the Government – a general problem as Kolkata expands – and CRS had provided the materials with which

houses and a school had been built. We were taken to the school which at present provides primary education to 250 children. An extension is being built so that a total of 400 children can be accommodated. The school is run by the community, with teachers and the committee all being local people. One of the people to whom we were introduced was Bishu Chakraborty, who is a walking example of the success of CRS. Bishu was born at BD Colony into a desperately poor family which he helped to support as a child labourer in a factory. At the age of 8, Bishu joined the CRS education centre, and was the first BD Colony child to be mainstreamed into Lee Collins High School. From there he earned a place at Medical College where he obtained a string of qualifications, and he now works in the Colony and is one of the leaders of the community there.

Clive Brown's CRS Visit - Besanti Devi (BD) School And Women's Self Help Group

We visited the school where children, studying geography, broke off their lesson to sing to us. After one boy had been called out to show us a particularly good picture he had drawn, we were besieged by other children showing us their pictures so that we could comment on them. The children were charming: well-behaved, and so willing to please and be praised.

"despite their poverty, dressed in saris"

We were then taken to the Women's Self-help Group where they were celebrating International Women's Day. There were about 40 women present, some with young children, but all, despite their poverty, dressed in lovely saris. David and I were asked to present prizes to members of the group, following which there were songs, and then a play enacted. The

Group works in several ways. First it provides training in skills to enable to women to earn a respectable living. Secondly, it provides a sympathetic forum in which women's problems can be discussed, and they can learn about their rights and how to enforce them.

Clive Brown's CRS Visit - Balarampur Village

On the second day, we were taken to Balarampur, a remote village involving a train journey of an hour and a half, followed by an 8 mile ride in a motorised rickshaw ("tuk-tuk") over a rough track. Rig explained to us that one of the causes of poverty in the City is the migration of rural people who are unable to sustain themselves in country villages. To overcome this problem, CRS has started to support rural communities, and is now working in four villages.

So far, CRS has established a school at Balarampur, and a women's self-help group. A medical clinic is planned. We visited the school where over 100 young children were waiting for us (the total complement is 270). As with BD, the teachers (mostly women) are from the village. They had gained an education under extreme difficulty before CRS arrived on the scene, but are now being helped to advance themselves. After we had been entertained by songs, and there had been speeches, we were asked to distribute parcels to the children. Each child, when called by name, came forward solemnly, saying "Thank you, uncle", as the parcel was handed over.

We had a traditional meal of dal and rice and fruit, provided by the village, before setting off on the daunting journey back to Kolkata.

It was a memorable couple of days. Seeing how much Rig and his co-workers achieve with such little resource is a humbling experience. They deserve all the support we can possibly give them. We also saw clearly how the role of CRS is changing from simply providing welfare, to enabling the communities to become self-sufficient. Building materials are provided, but the building work is done by the people. Schools are set up, but the teachers are recruited from the community. Health-care is taught, and health workers trained. Women learn skills which they are able to pass on, and people are taught their rights and how to enforce them. People are connected to the government agencies that provide schooling and health-care. Bishu described the role of CRS as that of a "social catalyst" to begin the process of empowering communities.

Some of the 270 children of Balarampur School Village



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Cathedral Relief Service
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COMMUNICATION BY EMAIL?

Many of you will appreciate that email makes an important contribution to both the speed and cost of communication. If you are able to receive future Newsletters and communication by email, the cost savings will go to CRS in Kolkata.

Please email your address to Adrian Whalley at whalleyallegro@hotmail.com. Your address will be kept completely secure with Friends addresses and will not be used for any purpose other than for communications in relation to CRS and its business.

Go on, you know it makes sense.

NEW WEBSITE: www.friends-of-crs.org.uk

We now have the first edition of a “Friends” website where information on the activities of the Cathedral Relief Service can be found and forms for contributions by Banker’s Order and Gift Aid declarations can be downloaded.

This website will be developed over time to use as a main publicity source and news link for Friends.

CALCUTTA or KOLKATA?

The official name of the city is now “Kolkata” which you will see (e.g.) on airport destination lists, although the pronunciation is little different from the English “Calcutta”. You will generally find Kolkata used in the Newsletter text, but to change the name of the “Friends” would require a tedious piece of administration with the Charities Commission. So we keep the existing formal name for the present, particularly as Calcutta remains more familiar to a British audience.