



Friends Update

July 2018

Welcome to the latest update from the UK Friends of CRS! There's plenty to share since our previous newsletter last summer. There are updates from staff in Kolkata on the Nari Dana project, the rural centre at Mahamaya, the work in Jharkhand, and the new initiative to teach children computing. There are reports from people who have visited Kolkata recently and reverse trips of Indian staff to meet overseas supporters. There are also some updates about the UK Friends Trustees and policies, and a financial overview of the past year.

How your support makes a difference

Sutapa's story

Sutapa Das received skills training at CRS's Pally Mangal centre in south Kolkata. Immediately after the one-year course she began working locally to support her family.

When she found out about the Nari Dana project she was keen to join full-time to improve her sewing skills and prepare high quality products. She was trained on the Juki machines and has now been using them for two years. She is very pleased with how she has developed her sewing techniques.

"I like working at the Nari Dana Production Centre with so many other women like me. I have much more confidence now and I can earn a good income to support my family."

The Nari Dana project goes from strength to strength. Find out more on the next page.



Sutapa Das working at one of the Juki sewing machines at the Nari Dana Production Centre

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Working towards a better future

By Ritu Ghosh, Quality and Production Manager, Nari Dana

In the three years since its launch, CRS's social enterprise project, Nari Dana (Women's Wings), has made significant strides.

It was built on the successful skill training programmes for women at different CRS centres, which have taught courses in sewing and embroidery, jewellery making and beautician skills for many years.

Many graduates of these programs have used their skills to start micro-enterprises at home or in their local communities to generate a small income.

The vision for Nari Dana was to become a business for women to develop and sell products for the domestic and overseas market, and in the process, earn a decent and secure living.

The Production Centre, housed adjacent to the main CRS office in the grounds of St Paul's Cathedral, was officially opened in October 2017. This dedicated space is equipped with a set of new Juki sewing machines, thanks to financial support from the German Consulate of Kolkata.



Guest of honor, Mr. Jürgen Thomas Schrod, the Deputy Consul General from the German Consulate (left) at the inauguration of the Nari Dana Production Centre in October 2017

Here, women have received additional training, with a focus on the quality and consistency of products.

To date, 150 girls and women have been trained on the Juki machines and are producing a range of quality home accessories.



Around 150 women use the Nari Dana Production Centre at different times. Space is tight but they enjoy being together and making products.

For the local market they make men's and women's clothing, table cloths and mats, cloth bags and much more.

They sell items at local fairs and festivals but the regular overseas visitors to CRS are also keen purchasers of the goods, taking these beautiful handmade items back home across the world.

The number of Nari Dana women is growing day by day. For vulnerable young women from the city's slums, travelling into the city to work for the day and being paid fairly for that work gives them dignity, independence and hope.

Stop Press: The CRS premises at Dum Dum in the north of the city is going to be rebuilt so that it can become a second production centre for Nari Dana.

Funds needed for new multipurpose building in Mahamaya

By Masha Cleminson, CRS supporter, Cambridge

Mahamaya is a small village with a population of about 500 families in the 24 South Parganas district of West Bengal, about two hours' drive south from Kolkata.

Since 2012, CRS has partnered with the community-based organisation Mahamaya Bandhan Samity which was founded in 2006 to provide education for the children of the village.

There is currently a pre-primary education programme attended by about 350 children and a women's empowerment programme benefitting 450 women.

Funds are needed to complete construction of a multi-purpose building in the village, which has been on hold for over two years.

The project was started with government funding and an initial grant equal to about £4,800. There was an understanding that further grants would follow, but that did not happen because of a change in government.



The partially-constructed ground floor of the Mahamaya centre

The ground floor is already in existence, used as a school in the morning and by women's groups the afternoon.



Women's empowerment group meeting inside

The vision is to have three floors to accommodate the school, a medical clinic, and a workspace for the women to make products for the local market and potentially beyond through CRS's Nari Dana venture.

The costs for completing the construction amount to just over £14,000 including bricks, sand and cement, doors and windows, painting, and labour.

Friends in the UK have raised some money already: Scargill C of E Primary School in Derby Diocese, whose headmaster visited Kolkata in January, have given £4,000, and St Peter's Church in Derby has raised £3,100.

Please consider giving to this project. Over the years, the Friends have funded multipurpose buildings in two other locations – Balarampur and Gumla – which have become well-used facilities benefitting many people.

A warm welcome in Gumla Nagar

By Rig David, CRS Director

CRS's work is focused in West Bengal but we have one project in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand. We support a community-based organisation called Swarwagin Vikas Samati in the settlement of Gumla Nagar in Bokaro Steel City.

A donation from the UK Friends Legacy Fund allowed the construction of a multipurpose community centre, completed in 2014, which is used for a variety of activities to benefit about 250 families in the area.

In February 2018, I made a visit with two members of the CRS Executive Committee, the Treasurer, Kevin Roberts, and Member, Probir Ghose. It's a long drive from Kolkata – we left in the early part of the morning and did not arrive until 3pm.

But the long journey was worthwhile! We were met by nearly 150 children from the Swarwagin school and their teachers. They were so excited to receive visitors from so far away.



The 3 visitors from Kolkata welcomed in Gumla Nagar

It was wonderful to see the new building put to good use. It is made from concrete and has multiple rooms, as well as toilets – a vast improvement on the two-roomed hut made of bamboo and mud that was used before.

The children clearly enjoyed playing in the safe surroundings around the centre.

We were entertained by the children performing song and dance – a credit to their teachers who have taught them to proudly perform their cultural heritage.



Meeting members of the community in Gumla Nagar

While enjoying the company of the children, I was delighted to look over and see a group of women talking to Kevin and Probir, and proudly showing off the products and garments they had made as part of the skills training programme that CRS supports.

These women were so confident speaking with strangers and not shy of sharing their ideas. This is strong testament to the impact of our work in women's empowerment.

With a long drive ahead, we could only stay for a few hours on this visit, but we were given a very warm send-off and left knowing that the activities that we are supporting in Gumla Nagar are in good shape and are really making a difference for the community.

We will now spend some time planning how to improve and grow this work.

Kids learn computers

By Clive Brown, Acting Secretary, UK Friends of CRS

A few years ago, the UK Friends received a commitment of support from a bespoke software company in London who wished to make a small annual donation. Staff at the company also wanted to find a way to teach computing skills to children in Kolkata's slums.

They had great ideas for teaching a course remotely, but there were a number of substantial obstacles. First, the fact that the children speak Hindi or Bengali, with very little English. Second, the question of how much basic computer knowledge the children already had. Third, finding local computers for the children to use, as well as computer literate teachers willing to mentor them.

The CRS Director approached St Thomas' Girls School in Khidderpore, within the local diocese and, with the support of Bishop Ashoke, obtained the school's agreement to support the project by providing IT teachers and computer resources.

It was also decided to have a mix of children – 7 girls from St Thomas and 11 children from the CRS projects at B D Colony, Sukantanagar and Bibibagan.

During preliminary screening by the instructors from St Thomas', the children were found to have minimal computer knowledge so their classes, held once a week, have started with the basics. The children were thrilled during the very first session day as they have never before used computers.

In the meantime, we found out about Code Club (www.codeclub.org.uk), an initiative to teach computer coding to young people aged 9 to 13. Started in the UK, it is a network of volunteers and educators who run free coding clubs.

One of our new Trustees is the Head of a school in Derbyshire that has a Code Club. When she was in Kolkata in January, she helped St Thomas' to register with Code Club so that the teachers and children can access the free online materials.

Little by little this small group of students are learning something new. Familiarization with computers will hopefully help them as they proceed through education and eventually on to employment.



Class of younger children



Class of older children

A trip to Kolkata...and the zoo

By Andy Foulds, Recent graduate of Derby University

I recently completed a degree in Working with Young People and Communities at Derby University.

This year I had the opportunity to complete the professional placement part of the course working alongside the CRS team in Kolkata.

My only previous experience of India was a couple of family holidays in Goa ten years ago; Kolkata was completely different! To say it was an eye-opening experience is an understatement.

Witnessing the everyday lives and conditions of children living in the slums had an immediate impact on me. Entering the schools was an oasis of warmth, smiles and laughter from the children that will stay in my heart forever.

While spending time playing games and drawing with them, it was clear how resilient and supportive of each other they are, despite facing all the perils of life in poverty.

The teachers work in demanding environments and show incredible resourcefulness to teach the basics to children so that they have an opportunity to enter mainstream schools.

With a lot of logistical support from the CRS team, I led a trip to the zoo one day with 15 children from 3 different CRS centres. The intention was to create an informal learning environment where the young people could gain inspiration to draw some pictures of animals later. We found a nice seating area, had lunch, and then the children produced art work of a phenomenal quality, in my humble opinion.



Andy with the group of children at the zoo

I have finished my studies now and am looking at potential international aid work. I would like to revisit the wonderful team of CRS and will look for opportunities to support the work they do wherever possible. The young people deserve it!



Childrens' drawings inspired by the zoo visit

From Essex to Kolkata

By Rev Mark Meatcher and Rev Melanie Smith, United Reformed Church, UK

What can you say about travelling to Kolkata and spending some time with Cathedral Relief Services? It is an experience filled with so much.

From the welcome, and the gifts that we received at so many different places that we visited on the programme that Rig David arranged for us, to the simple “experience” of Kolkata, and its sights, sounds, and heartbeat that can only be felt when you are there, you come away wondering what to say and to share. “Speechless” probably best describes the experience.

A small group of us from the Southend area in Essex visited in January 2018. We came back changed (for some of us, again, as we had been before) and challenged.

Our short visit (just under a week) took us to educational settings, workplaces and St Paul’s Cathedral itself, right next to CRS’s base.



Mark, Melanie and their team visited several CRS Education centres....

We met lots of wonderful people, and saw lots of incredible sights and were pleased to have shared some of our time there with several teachers from Derby, who were teaching the children during their visit.



....and were impressed by the product made by young women as part of their skills training courses

We all realised how much we have in the UK compared to how little the vast majority in Kolkata have, and yet it is they who are so often the blessing to us, delighting us with their music, their work ethic, and their hopes and dreams for the future.

Our prayer and hope is that somehow we can get back there again soon, to be blessed by the people who we believe are blessed so much themselves – their smiles are contagious, so much more than what we generally see in spiritual places in the UK where there is so much more health and wealth.

From Kolkata to Canada

By Sheila Johnston, Founding Director, Canadian Friends of CRS

After an enormous amount of planning, in May 2018, three travellers made their way across 12 ½ time zones from Kolkata to Vancouver.

Rig David, Director of CRS, Rt. Rev. Ashoke Biswas, Bishop of Kolkata and Chair of CRS, and Rev. Abir Adhikari, Presbyter of St Paul's Cathedral and Vice Chair of CRS, had been invited by Archbishop Melissa Skelton, of the Diocese of New Westminster in British Columbia.

We Canadian Friends of CRS hold an annual Penny Pot Tea, where supporters bring along their 'penny pots' that they have filled with loose change during the year.

For our 8th annual event, it was so exciting for us to have the visitors from Kolkata among us. Bishop Biswas addressed the 70 people in attendance, and Rig gave an update about CRS programmes. We were all very honoured by their presence.



Young fundraisers for CRS at the Penny Pot Tea in White Rock, BC, with Canadian Friends Sheila and Sara, and Bishop Biswas

During the rest of the visit the guests from Kolkata enjoyed Sunday dinner at home with the Directors of the Canadian Friends, where we all enjoyed fellowship, great food, laughter and the opportunity to get to know one another.

There were speaking engagements too including a chapter of the Anglican Church Women's group in Vancouver, the Ladies Guild, and later the Men's Club at St Mark's Church in Surrey.

Each of these groups donate to the Canadian Friends and it was wonderful for them to receive a personal thanks from Kolkata.



Bishop Biswas accepts donation from Bob Pederson from the Men's Club at St Marks Church in Surrey

The final day saw a visit to Archbishop Melissa Skelton and her staff at the Diocese of New Westminster.

Bishop Biswas spoke about the history of both the Diocese and CRS, Rev. Ahikari described the work currently done by the Diocese of North India, and Rig talked about the work of CRS.



Rig with Archbishop Melissa Skelton

As we said our goodbyes at Vancouver airport, we reflected on a warm and wonderful week with nothing but one highlight after another.

New Trustees for the UK Friends

By Clive Brown, Acting Secretary, UK Friends of CRS

There have been a number of changes in the trustees of the UK Friends of CRS over the past year.

First of all, we said farewell to two of our longest-serving trustees, Adrian Whalley and John Rhodes.

Adrian was the Honorary Secretary for very many years, and also kept the accounts. For a long time, he ran the affairs of the Friends practically single-handed.

John's service as a trustee goes back into the mists of time, and his wise counsels have been extremely useful over the years.

Our thanks go to both of them for long and faithful service.

In the past year, the Reverend Dave Walker agreed to become a trustee and take over as Treasurer.

Dave is a curate in the Derbyshire Parish of Dronfield and Holmesfield, as well as being commercial director of Detectronic Limited.

We have also been joined by two teachers from Derbyshire schools, who have recently visited CRS in Kolkata and worked with the teachers and children there.

They are Elizabeth Stanley-Wainwright, who is head teacher at Stanley St Andrew's C of E Primary School, and Becky Clowes, who teaches at Clifton C of E Primary School.

The other existing trustees are our Chairman, the Right Reverend Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich; Clive Brown, who is Acting-Secretary; Jenny Lunn, who manages our publicity, including the website and this newsletter from Washington, DC; and the Reverend Anita Matthews, who is our lynchpin in Derby.

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The Friends of Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service keeps a database containing the names and contact details of people who support CRS in Kolkata, who have done so in the recent past, or have shown an interest in the work of CRS. If you receive this newsletter it is because you are on that database. If you are a regular supporter of CRS, the data we hold may include additional information, for example, to enable tax under gift aid to be recovered.

The primary basis on which the Friends relies for holding and processing data is that of legitimate interest.

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Financial Update 2017-18

By Clive Brown, Acting Secretary, UK Friends of CRS

Those who read last year's newsletter may recall that CRS had gone through a worrying time because their foreign bank account had been frozen.

They were not alone in this – many other NGOs and charities were similarly affected – but nevertheless, it was a difficult time, and CRS had to dig deep into existing reserves to keep going.

CRS also made vigorous efforts to fill the gap from local sources, with excellent results. As can be seen from the table below, local donations amounted to over £39,000. The figure for the previous year was just over £14,000.

A major contributor was Nilambar Construction, who donated nearly £22,000. There are other major local donors in the pipeline.

The results given below show a substantial excess of income over expenditure, but that is accounted for by the accumulated funds which could not be sent while the CRS account was frozen. It has also enabled CRS to replenish their depleted reserves. Expenditure has remained constant, showing only a slight increase.

Fortunately, the issues with foreign bank accounts are now resolved. The UK Friends and other overseas donors have been able to send their accumulated funds to Kolkata.

CRS produce their accounts in rupees. I have converted to sterling at current rates and so the figures are indicative only, and are in fact a bit below actual donations as the pound has strengthened against the rupee.

Summary of CRS Income and Expenditure for Year ended 31st March 2018

INCOME	Approx. £ equivalent
UK Donations	53,668
Other Overseas Donations (Australia, Canada, Hong Kong)	33,540
Local Donations	39,026
Other (Interest etc.)	2,692
Total Income for the Year	128,926
EXPENDITURE	Approx. £ equivalent
Direct Costs of Projects	66,162
Other Staff Costs	3,019
Overheads and Administration	9,476
Total Expenditure for the Year	78,657

**Thank you for your ongoing support for the work of CRS.
Every donation, however large or small, makes a difference
to the lives of poor and marginalized people
in the slums of Kolkata and villages of West Bengal.**