



Equipping women, children and families
in India to discover a brighter future.

Cathedral Relief Service Newsletter Autumn 2025



**In This Edition
Neil Swan, editor and
Friends of CRS trustee
writes**

Dear CRS supporter

In the last two editions we told you about the death of Dr Henry and the introduction of Weekend Schools. In this edition we describe how the health of the people Dr Henry served is now being dealt with. We also bring a report on how the first stage of the weekend schools has gone. As you will see we now have more pupils than was originally planned which shows the strong demand for what is being provided.

Regular visits from university students and older schoolchildren from the UK help raise the profile of CRS which in turn helps fundraising. The benefits are not all one way. In this edition, Lydia, describes how a visit while still at school in 2019 made a lasting impression on her.

In his personal message Rig David is generous in acknowledging the help received from around the world. He reminds us never to be put off the task of helping the poor of Kolkata just because the task is so great.

Teachers are the people on whom CRS depends. We asked a teacher at Sukantanagar to let us know what her typical day looks like. Anyone who works almost continuously from 5am until they finally sit down to dinner at 10.30pm is worthy of admiration of the highest order.

The treasurer's report is a reminder that the financial position this year looks satisfactory because of a one-off donation. The need for financial support is as great as ever.

Finally, David Rig raises the question of whether the time has come to recruit a fundraiser and seek additional funding from sources within India. I stress that this is not in any way in substitute for the existing funding from existing donors which continues to be vital.

Rig David - Weekend Schools



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There are now 10 weekend schools in the Kolkata slum areas of Brace Bridge, Hastings, Topsia, Bibibagan, Basanti Devi Colony, Sukantanagar, Dum Dum, Sonagachi and Kuberia. Around 310 children have enrolled, slightly in excess of our targeted figure of 300. At the schools the children are given lessons in singing, music, drama and crafts. The use of creative activities as a means of teaching in a way that is both enjoyable and memorable, has proved to be effective. The aim is to develop skills and values in the children that will help to make them good citizens.

CRS tries to work closely with parents as their involvement helps it achieve its objectives for their children. So far, it has had 120 meetings with over 200 parents. If they know what CRS is trying to achieve and can offer their support, it means progress is made more quickly and effectively. Their engagement directly affects their child's outcome. Since the end of March, the activities of the weekend schools have been merged into the normal activities of the schools involved. The fact that the activity is now mainstream is proof of its success.



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Health - Life after Dr Henry

Last year CRS lost a great friend, Dr L.M Henry. Until her death, she had used her medical expertise to look after children and communities in the slums. Hers was a difficult act to follow. Fortunately we have been able to continue the medical services she established through access to the Government health facilities made available to poor communities. We also have four medical doctors in general practice who provide specialist skills when required.

Our health program continues to focus on improving the health of communities that otherwise have little access to medical help. We do this by arranging regular medical check-ups, supplying medication, giving access to specialised clinics, launching health initiatives at our schools and holding health awareness sessions. Special attention is given to women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

An example of the work can be found at Bosekati. In the last quarter of last year, we held 13 clinics and saw a total of 302 patients, both new and existing. We also held specialised clinics to deal with skin, dental, gynaecological and ENT problems. With our school health clinics, we cover eight urban centres and now have 266 children in the programme.

We have also set up sessions to give instruction on good health and hygiene. Our 'Community Health Camps' attracted 135 women and children at three locations. Skin Camps were held at Bibbi Bagan and Brace Bridge and a Dental Camp was held at Bosekati. Additionally we held three camps for children and sex workers at Sonagachi which offered 170 participants the opportunity to have check-ups and receive any medicine prescribed.

We hope the comprehensive health programmes we have established will be the best possible memorial of the work done by the late Dr Henry.

Rig David

Congratulations to Lydia Scott on being awarded an BA for her dissertation based on the work of CRS



Lydia writes

I had the opportunity to go out to Kolkata with CRS in 2019 whilst at Derby High School and it was an experience which has stayed with me ever since. Alongside cultural visits to various temples and landmarks, we taught in some of the CRS schools and visited a couple of the women's empowerment programmes. Before the trip, I knew little about the work and aims of these programmes, but I was amazed to see at first hand the positive impact they have on the women's lives. The women had learnt valuable skills, such as sewing and tailoring, producing beautiful garments that not only showcased their talent but also enabled them to pursue independent livelihoods. Witnessing their confidence and determination made a lasting impression on me.

This experience influenced the focus of my university dissertation. As part of my BA Geography degree, I studied modules around development, humanitarianism and gender. Whilst studying these topics, I often thought back to my time in Kolkata with CRS. Throughout my degree, I developed an interest in gender and geography and decided this was the theme I wanted to base my dissertation on. I narrowed my research focus on the promotion and ethics of human care in Kolkata, using CRS as my case study. For the research element of my dissertation, I interviewed trustees of the charity who kindly shared their motivations for their involvement and gave insights into the charity's work as well as providing updates on recent progress.

Through these conversations, I learnt about the importance the charity attaches to building long term relationships with the women they are working with to understand their aspirations and help them achieve them. My research findings were that the charity has found the right balance between care and control and avoids imposing well-intended solutions without agreement. I also learnt that the benefit of the work being done by CRS is not confined to Kolkata but extends to the sense of purpose experienced by those involved with the UK Friends of CRS and doubtless by supporters in other countries.

Writing my dissertation gave me the opportunity to reflect on my time with CRS and share its important work both with my university peers and lecturers. I was delighted to receive a high mark for my dissertation, along with positive feedback from my supervisor who was impressed by the effectiveness and culture of CRS.

A Typical Day in the Life of Teacher, Lakshmi, and her thoughts about her work



I wake at 5 a.m., say my prayers, and prepare food for my family. After sending my son and daughter to work and college, I arrive at school by 9:45 am. We start with a prayer and take the attendance roll call before singing songs and chanting rhymes with the nursery children while the older ones revise what they have learned from earlier lessons. Throughout the day, we have lessons in English, Maths, and Bengali. After school, I return home by 3:00 pm and rest before tutoring children at home from 4:30 to 6:00 pm and again from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. I return home, prepare dinner, and we eat together as a family by 10:30 pm.

There are 49 children enrolled at my school. They come from families that are living below the poverty line. Many mothers work as domestic helpers and fathers as daily labourers. Some fathers are unemployed, often alcoholic and remaining idle at home.

I teach Bengali, Maths, English, and Arts & Crafts. The children's favourite subjects are Bengali and Maths.

The CRS education programme makes a significant difference to the lives of the children living in slums by teaching them to read, write, and count - skills which they might not otherwise learn and which build their confidence. The program also gives them a safe and caring place where they feel supported. Most importantly, it helps them feel that a better life might be within their grasp and gives them hope for the future.

I love being a teacher. The best part is when the children greet me every morning with "Good morning, Ma'am." Their eagerness and smiles make my day.



Rig David – Why we do what we do

The task that we face is enormous. About 1.4 million people live in the slums of Kolkata. That is about a third of the population. This year we were able to help about 400 children and 300 mothers and women who are leaders in the communities, providing them with health facilities and food supplements, as well as giving them skills that will help them achieve a degree of independence. We might only be reaching a small percentage of the people who need help, but what we bring to them makes a huge difference to their lives. If we always thought in terms of statistics, we might be overawed. Instead, we like to think about individuals. That is why I would like to tell you about two people we have helped.

Bishal Das joined us as a pupil at the start of the Hastings project and attended both pre-primary and primary classes. He was sponsored by the Gabbi Basra Bursary programme to attend a government school. Having now successfully completed state higher education, he is preparing to continue his academic career. The way he has used the good start CRS gave him to do well in the government school is exactly what we are seeking to achieve.

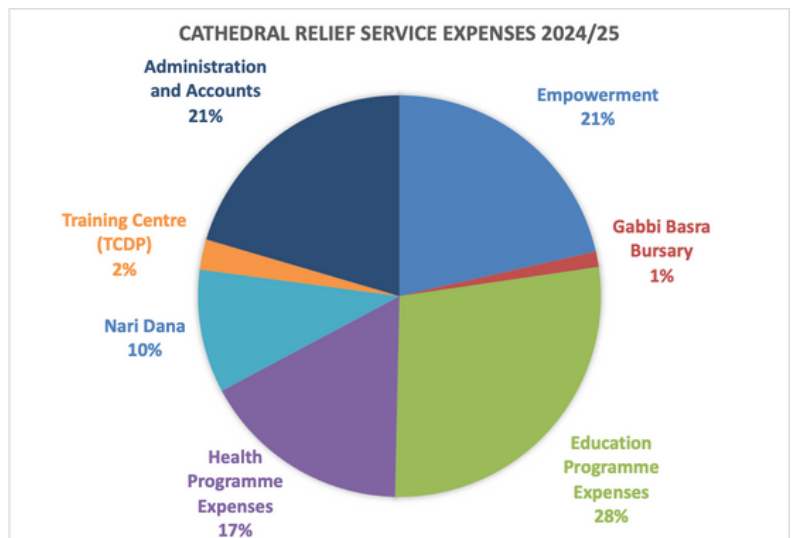
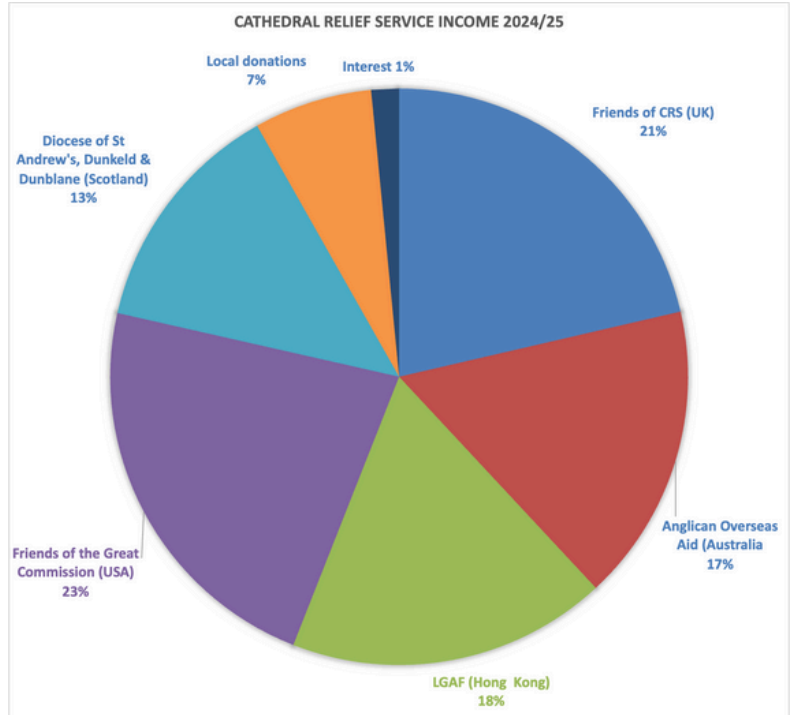
Sunita Devi is an example of a mother following in a daughter's footsteps. She was so impressed when her daughter, Dipa, completed her training course at Pally Mangal in 2022 that she decided to join up for it herself a year later. After passing the course, she set up a tailoring shop in her one-room home. She and her daughter run the shop together, earning close to Rs. 3,000 per month, enabling her to put her other children through school. This shows how our philosophy of 'teaching people to fish rather than giving them fish', works in practice.

We cannot solve the problem of poverty for everyone, but we can help people like Bishal, Sunita and Dipa. They matter. Whenever I visit one of our projects, I am aware that our ability to help is only possible because of the generosity of our supporters in the UK and other countries. With your help we can maintain the work. That is why I want to thank you for your donations and your prayers. They mean a great deal to us at CRS and to all the people we work with.

Financial Report 2024/2025

The two pie-charts give graphic view of where CRS income came from in the last financial year (to March 2025) and how it was spent. The total amounts, when converted to sterling, were approximately £75,650 expenditure, and £84,350 income.

CRS remains heavily dependent on overseas donations. Until recently, the largest proportion of the income came from the Friends of CRS, but as we have previously reported, that has fallen back. Fortunately, other funding appeared last year to help fill the gap, in particular the large donation from the Diocese of St Andrew's, Dunkeld and Dunblane, which was the result of a diocesan harvest appeal. We cannot expect that every year!



Despite the apparent surplus, CRS struggles to make ends meet. Rig David is looking at ways to cut back costs, particularly in some of the older project areas. The loyal staff continue to be paid salaries which are below market rates, and there is a need for capital expenditure, in particular on vehicles, industrial sewing machines for Nari Dana, and office equipment. In short, if CRS had more, they could do more.

Thank you for all you do to support CRS in its vital work. The Friends of CRS are fortunate in having a loyal donor base, some of whom have given regularly over many years. We would, however, like to expand that, and are also always grateful for one-off donations, whether from a fund-raising event or individual gift.

And please remember the Friends of CRS in your will!

Clive Brown, Acting Treasurer

Fundraising: Progress to Date

Cathedral Relief Service (CRS) is funded by the generosity of individual donors, corporate sponsors and community groups. They understand the importance of our programmes which bring good nutrition, education and basic healthcare to the women and children in the communities of 'the poorest of the poor'.

To supplement external donations, the clothing brand of Nari Dana was established as a means of generating additional income for our work. As with any new business, it takes time and effort to become established. We have therefore been fortunate in this start up period to have been helped by Mrs Hira who has had long experience of exporting in the garment industry. She has not only brought us her wealth of contacts but from time to time she has provided materials for production and even solicited financial contributions from her friends and associates. Our hope is that with her help, we will be able to develop Nari Dana as a source of income.

Fundraising: Future Initiatives

While our overseas donors remain essential for our work – we could not operate without them – we recognise the need to find donors within India to supplement the money we receive from abroad. Additional funding from inside India will not only enable us to secure or even extend our work, it will also reduce our dependence on any one group of donors and make our financial situation more robust.

We are now intending to recruit a professional fundraiser to raise awareness of the CRS brand and seek out donors within India. It will involve making an investment in their employment costs but this is a necessary step if we are to strengthen our position and expand our work. If we can add to the funds raised by our much-valued existing donors we will be able to expand our work empowering women, nurturing children and transforming communities.

Supporting CRS

To make a donation by credit card or by setting up a direct debit, visit

www.friendsofcrs.co.uk

To give regularly by standing order or bank transfer, email

secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk

Send cheques to: Friends of CRS c/o Reverend Anita Matthews

St Peter's in the City, St Peter's Street, Derby DE1 1SN.

Registered address: 22 Sunningwell, Nr Abingdon OX13 6RB

Email: secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk Website: www.friendsofcrs.co.uk Charity Number: 266302