



Newsletter- April 2007

Dear Friends,

Greetings from all of us at New Light. It has been a while since we shared some news about our lives and work with all of you who make it possible. For many of you who are still enjoying the burst of life in the trees and the fields around you as Spring makes way for summer we wish hours of sunshine, color and happiness. And for those who are in the tropics or in other parts of the Indian sub-continent we send wishes of many cloud bursts to bring relief from the long hot days and the still nights that seem to go on forever.

Of all the seasons Spring is truly shortest lived in Kolkata. Even before we can begin to enjoy the sun and the surge of life in everything around us we have to deal with the hard realities of water shortage and long hours of powercuts along with the diseases associated with summer. It is not always easy to remember that we need to forget about everything else and keep our energy focused on the mission of New Light but surprisingly everyone does !!

Every few months i am faced with the challenge of finishing the newsletter when i dont know how much information is enough. Life and action at New Light is ever evolving and changing so it becomes that much harder to choose a specific point in time to say what is enough. The task seems to be getting harder for me with every passing month so i have to ask for much greater level of patience from all of you. The past few months have been filled with so much action that feel i need go on for quite a while.

Like in the other years our first visitors of the year were Mrs Juthica Stangl and Mr Peter Stangl of Shadhika Foundation, California . For the Stangls the new year does not seem to kick in fully till they visit all the projects they support and help all of us renew our energy.

For those of you who dont know about Shadhika Foundation please visit www.shadhika.org. for more information. We are always pleased to receive them at New Light. This time the Stangls were accompanied by three very accomplished women, Ms. Alexandra Prichard, an independnt video producer, doing a coverage for AOL-Netscape, musician-photographer Molly Zenobia and Ms Maninder Saini a cinematographer from Los Angeles. Ms Stones and Ms Singh were assisting Ms Prichard in her work. For all of them Kolkata proved to be a creative challenge and opportunity that they seemed to have enjoyed thoroughly. We thank all of them for spending many hours with the girls fo SOMA Home and the kids at New Light shelter.



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January 07 also saw the appointment of Mrs Shubhashree Roy as the new house mother for Soma Memorial Girls Home. We wish Shubhashree good luck and great success in helping the girls achieve their goals. On the 20th of January 07 New Light kids took part in the annual Sports day. We thank the Inspector General of Prisons, West Bengal Correctional Services for allowing us to use the grounds of Alipore Correctional Home for the event. It was a wonderful winter afternoon in the mellow sun where the mothers and the children were seen enjoying together. Thanks to all the staff of New Light for their hard work in making it a successful event. On the 21st of January 07, Guru Chitresh Das conducted an initiation ceremony for the girls of Soma Home who are training in kathak(an Indian classical dance form) and gifted them with special dancing bells that signify acceptance of an individual as a future disciple. It makes us incredibly proud to see the level of commitment and discipline that the girls have demonstrated in learning this difficult dance form. Republic Day was celebrated on the 26th of January with a short cultural event in the evening. On the 2nd of February 07, we received Mr Alban Del Pino Pardo of Mundo Cooperante, Madrid, Spain and Mr Javier Pinto Sanz, our volunteer from Madrid who came to assist us in finalising the purchase procedure of Soma Memorial Girls Home. It was during their stay that New Light celebrated the Annual day on the 12th of February 07. The excitement and energy that the kids

showed in practicing and participating in the event left us overwhelmed. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped us organize the evening perfectly. It was during this visit that Alban and Javier started to search for a plot of land for setting up the HIV/AIDS care center with us which currently is our biggest challenge. We need the land, the money and the experts to help us set it up.

On the 22nd of February 07 after a long and difficult search we found our trained nurse Mita Mondal to help us at the clinic. Mita has a certificate in nursing and shows a remarkable quality of calm and peace about her in the midst of the chaos that is the clinic at times. We welcome Mita to our group.

28th of February 07 was a very special day for New Light. On that day we completed the purchase procedure of Soma Memorial Girls Home property located at 35/1 Moore Avenue, Kolkata 700040. This is a property that New Light has been renting for the past two years to house the safe shelter for young girls at risk of being trafficked and sold into prostitution. We thank each and every individual who came together to make it possible. We feel very safe and secure with the idea that this program has long term support and commitment from many people to sustain it.

From the 1st of March 07 Spanish volunteer Pablo Rodriguez started to give



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yoga training to the children of New Light. Pablo uses totally unorthodox method of teaching and has managed to accomplish a huge deal in brining about greater concentration among the children. Currently he is taking a short break and renewing his own energy to continue doing this workshop with the kids all through the summer.

The month of March is the beginning of real Spring time in the subcontinent and it usually begins with the celebration of Holi (the Indian festival of color) which this year was on the 3rd of March. It was also the day when Dr Loren Seibold, a Pastor from The Seventh day

Adventist Church and a member of the Board of Amistad International arrived at New Light with fifteen other group members. Dr Seibold and the team expressed their deep appreciation for the project and a great deal of understanding of the conditions under which the children and the mothers live in Kalighat. He also brought us good wishes from Karen Kotoske of Amistad International, California who has been instrumental in helping New Light start Soma Home in July 2005. We thank all the members and donors of Amistad International. In this regard we also

thank Mr Gaurav Dhillion representing Monua Janah Memorial Foundation for helping us sustain the programme in the initial phase.

Soon after this we started the construction of the nursing room with the assistance of our friends and volunteers Laura Martinez Olivares, Elena Alcantara from Jaen and Luiz. Their untiring effort and commitment could not be appreciated better. Laura , Elena and Luiz thank you for your time and energy and know that you are always welcome back at New Light. We wish a great success for Project ASHA in Jaen, our partners in Andalucia. We also thank Jose Angel Ballesteros our drug inventory manager for his incredible support in getting the basics in order. The nursing room is complete and fully functional now. However we are yet to deal with the problem of a leaking roof at that location.

The kids started with their training in wind and percussion instruments with an idea of setting up a marching band from the 21st of March 07 under instructor Chandon Moitra. We are hopeful that by the beginning of the next year New Light kids would be able to send a marching band to the Republic Day Parade in the Maidan.

The end of March also saw the kids taking their final exams and now that the results are out we are very happy to share the exceptional performance of the kids. For those of you who know the kids personally it would mean a great deal to know their results and here are some listings of their performances



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Amar Gupta Class IX	1st
Anirban Chowdhury Class X.....	5th
Sukumar Roy Class VIII.....	3rd
Abhijit Gayen Class IX	4th
Sushmita Sarkar Class IV.....	4th
Bikas Das Class VII	5th
Babai Adhikari Class IX	5th
Subir Adhikari Class VII	10th
Barsha Sarkar.....	1st
Anjali Saha.....	3rd
Rukshana Khatoon.....	1st
Laxmi Karmakar.....	2nd
Sahana Khatoon	2nd
Monisha Das	1st

On an average a class comprises of 50 to 55 students. The rest of the students have all moved to the next level successfully.

In the last few days we have been able to arrange for a multiple valve replacement surgery for a 5 year old child named Simran Iqbal . Simran is admitted at the Rabindra Nath Tagore Memorial Cardiac Research Institute in Kolkata under the care of some of the best specialists in the country. We thank our sponsor Infancia Solidarida of Madrid for the total sponsorship of this surgery. We are very hopeful that Simran would get home smiling very soon.

Amidst all these moments of joy we had to stop for a while and remember Jamuna Das , our creche worker who gave her unconditional support and care to the kids of New Light from the very first day. Jamuna mashi as popularly known by the children passed away at the end of February. She was 65 years old. Jamunadi is fondly remembered and respected by all the staff members of New Light.

Our work in the field of HIV /AIDS has taken on a completely new dimension. New Light has been offering health care services for the sex workers community located at Ward 83 , in Kalighat for the last five years. What began as a small creche cum night shelter has evolved into a comprehensive community development project with its main thrust at HIV / AIDS intervention. New Light has emerged as a well recognized and effective community health care program due to the presence of its doctors, peer educators, community outreach workers



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and the STD/HIV clinic that operates bang in the middle of the red light area. Over the past years the work has expanded from only a primary focus on awareness campaign about HIV / AIDS to a full fledged treatment center for people living with AIDS. Not only the sex workers living within the area but couples and families from outside the area are getting referred for care and support at New Light. New Light prides itself over its effective management , care and support of men, women and young children living with full blown AIDS. Many of the patients have been assisted in accessing ART and for those who can not do so from government resourcses New Light raises money from various sources to support the treatment regime.

This would never have been posslibe without the financial support and technical assistance of Dr Trevor Hawkins , Medical Director South West Care Center , Santa Fe, California , Ms Wenoah Veikly and a special friend of New Light Dr Rajan Gupta. It is Rajan`s singular effort in raising awareness about the need for HIV / AiDS intervention in India among the Indian community in the west that we appreciate the most.

Polar Pharma Industries with its brand product of Adam condoms has recently agreed upon a partnership along with the association of Service Civil International in providing free condoms to the sex workers in the project area of New Light. They are also setting up a condom vending machine in the area which would be manned and monitored by one of the beneficiaries of New Light who is HIV positive.

Future plan The next big challenge for New Light is to set up a HIV/ AIDS care center not only for the sex workers but also for all women men and children who are not able to access treatment to the right extent. New Light is also hopeful of setting up a residential care center for children affected and infected with HIV/AIDS. The need for this was felt from the repeated appeals made by many women who attend the clinic at The School of Tropical Medicine for their treatment and are hopeless about the future of their children.

Over the past few months we have continued with and established partnerships with many foundations and corporations. Among those we need to thank Bono-Direkthilfe, Chance Swisse , Les Enfants de personne , Fundacion Meridional , Diamond Beverages Pvt Ltd. Xunta de Galicia ,

Inditex, Conseillos de Olleiros and many others. I deeply appreciate and acknowledge the support of all of you and am always open to receiving new ideas to better this project.

Thanks and best regards
Urmi Basu
For New Light