



# Newsletter- December 2007

Dear Friends

Every time I return after being away for a while I insist on a window seat. Of all the images that crowd my consciousness about this land and this city the image of endless acres of palm fringed rice fields are the most enduring. The morning light shimmering over the small water bodies of rural Bengal make me feel a woman of this part of the earth. It was a long and hectic travel for more than two months this summer and in spite of my best intentions I couldn't bring you a newsletter in the meantime. Consequently a lot waits to be said and shared.

The good news is that my months of travel has been hugely productive and has given us renewed energy and zeal to carry the work of New Light forward. It is to receive this energy that I long for the first sight of my beautiful bountiful land from the window of the airplane. Sadly the same rains that keep this part of the world lush and green often leaves scenes of total destruction and untold human suffering. This year the flood situation has been far worse than in others leaving millions of people in the subcontinent devastated both economically and emotionally. The most recent suffering of lakhs of people in Bangladesh occurred as a tropical storm unleashed its fury on this region almost at the beginning of the dry winter season. Experts say these are the effects of global warming and while those who know expound theories many get busy putting their lives back together again.

Returning at the end of July I found myself pulled right into the vortex of one exercise to make people aware of what awaits us in terms of the effects of global warming. Our old friend and mentor Hernan Zin was in Kolkata with the President of Mundo Cooperante, Sergio Carmona. They have been on a rain-chasing mission recording the impact of global warming, climate change and the shift in rainfall pattern from Africa to Asia . Simultaneously they are compiling material on how climate change has affected the lives of nomadic communities and the displaced people. You could find the result of their work on the 2008 Calendar, [www.calendariosolidario.com](http://www.calendariosolidario.com)



After the storm- Bangladesh  
( File Photo )



# Newsletter- December 2007

This duo was followed by our big group of volunteers who arrived on the 1st of August to organize the annual Carnival. The theme this time was Water world ( [www.mundodeagua.org](http://www.mundodeagua.org) ).

Children from all three programs of New Light enjoyed the extraordinary experience of creating an audiovisual presentation that was conceived by the volunteer team leader Marco Mendes. Marco, a musician-composer and a special educator had been preparing this for the last one year. This year there were also many returning volunteers whose commitment to the children of New Light needs special mention. We thank Carlos, Julio, Maria, Carmen, David, Olga, Ross, Justin and all the others for their effort and love.

I need to make a special mention of our returning volunteer Alberto Lizaralde who did a 24 hour photo documentary for two of our kids at New Light Rakesh Singh and Puja Sardar. His energy and love for the children leave me mesmerized. Thankyou Alby !!! You can see his work at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lasfotosdealberto/sets/72157603270846157>

At the beginning of July our much treasured volunteers from the US , Rachel Davis, returned to New Light with a team from Amnesty , the students group from Walla Walla College in Washington State . Rachel and her friends had conducted a campaign against child prostitution and almost created a movement within their student fraternity. During her stay Rachel joined hands with Reuters contributing photographer Parth Sanyal <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/parthsanyal/waterworld> and created a photo essay/documentary on Hogar Meridional/Soma Memorial Girls Home. The project was supported by Karen Kotoske of Amistad International based in California who had provided New Light with the seed money to set up Soma Home. Karen and the members of Amistad must feel proud to know that the little seed that they planted has now grown into a huge tree giving shade and protection to thirty girls whose lives have been altered in irrevocable manner.

While Rachel was volunteering at the Home for the Dying Destitute of the Missionaries of Charity she came across a young girl (14 years) named Sabita Indu Das who was a resident there. Sabita has no family as far as she can remember she has always begged on the streets and handed over her money to a Mashi (an older woman like an aunt). She also remembers being sick most of the time. There came a time when she became so sick that she couldn't even move. The mashi suggested that she should go to the



Sabita the day she arrived



# Newsletter- December 2007

Sisters of Mother House and request them to take her in as she was too close to the end of her life. Sabita having no other option did just that. Rachel followed the light within her and asked me if New Light could accommodate her at Soma Home. After much debate and discussion we agreed and Sabita was shifted to Soma Home on the 1 st of August at that time she weighed only 34 kgs and needed insulin shots three times a day. While shifting Sabita our biggest fear was of losing her because of our ignorance of her health status. No record of her medical history or treatment strategy was available to us. Upon consulting Dr Shukanto Sarkar, she was admitted to a private clinic for a week and kept under observation. The series of tests and investigation revealed that she was suffering from juvenile diabetes. Today after five months Sabita weighs 44 kgs, attends the evening classes at Soma Home with other young girls and is getting ready to begin her primary education from April 2008. She goes for a walk every morning in the park and her health is getting better steadily. A few days ago she also went back to meet Sister Glenda at the Missionaries of Charity who couldn't even recognize her. We are sure that somewhere along the line Sabita had crossed the threshold of Soma Home with a guardian angel and we thank her.



Sabita as she looks today

It was also in August that we had volunteers Aristrides Barmejo, a friend of New Light volunteer Maria Parias from Sevilla who brought a special gift for the older boys of New Light. Ari, along with Henrique, Maru, Justin , Raja, Abhishek and Inaki accompanied 12 adolescent boys of Saturday Club - the adolescent forum run by New Light, to Puri and Chilka for a short trip between the 18 th and the 23 rd of August 2007.



Besides taking them on the tour of the coasts of Orissa, the trip was utilized to motivate the youth to take up leadership for conducting and arranging the tour.

Though the staff were there, the children were allowed to manage independently. It was a learning experience for them as some of the young people had gone outside of their birthplace for the first time in their life. During those days they experienced the sea, the community life along the coastal areas, the rich heritage of Jagannath Temple in Puri and the exotic Chilka Lake . The over night journey from Kolkata to Puri was no less exciting. It was a great experience to observe the children at their best in executing the duties they were entrusted



# Newsletter- December 2007

with and they did the job with great enthusiasm and discipline. It was a learning experience for us too. We witnessed how a different and congenial environment can play a vital role in the changing of behaviour of the children. The children who sometimes behave in a rebellious manner in Kalighat, turned completely different when they were away from the unpleasant atmosphere where they stay. The innocent smiles on their faces remind us that childhood is the best part of our lives and it should be properly protected and nurtured, so that each one of them can grow up as responsible citizen of the country and become a future leader.



In the month of September Sudhangshu Dutta joined the organization as a social worker. His understanding of developmental endeavour and his flexibility to work within the constraint of limited resources deserves mention. We consider ourselves lucky to have him amongst us.

The other significant incident of this period was the voluntary take over of the child development project of SANLAAP - a national level NGO with a working experience of 15 years in the field of child protection and development in the state of West Bengal . SANLAAP handed over their child education programme at Kalighat to New Light with effect from 1 st September 2007 with 54 children



and 6 staff members associated with this programme. The new children who joined New Light after the takeover have accepted the other children, care givers and the system without any hesitation and are happily participating in all the activities of our programme. A sudden arrival of 54 new children initially made us nervous but within a couple of weeks, sheer effort and dedication of the staff made it possible to cope with the changed situation. We also welcome Niladri Dutta, Pintu Roy, Shila Chatterjee, Maya Roy and Geeta Mashi to New Light and thank them for their patience and cooperation.



# Newsletter- December 2007



At the end of September Debanjan Das, a professional photographer, conducted a photo session for all the ongoing programmes at New Light. It is a valued addition to the New Light's photo archive. This material was sponsored by Bono-Direkthilfe of Cologne , Germany , one of our donor agencies. We specially thank Stephan Weber of Bono-Direkthilfe for his effort and guidance in making this project a success. The girls of Soma Home and two elder boys from New Light were taken on a trip to the northwestern state of Himachal Pradesh between the 10 th and the 24 th of October 2007. This trip had two definitive issues. One - to give them more exposure of the world they have seen on television and in the movies, two - to keep them away from Kalighat. This is necessary as during the festival there is an additional influx of customers for the sex workers in this area and therefore also arrival of many procurers. Our past experience has taught us lessons in pre-empting a dangerous situation where young girls fall prey to the methods of trafficking. On this trip the girls visited the hill stations of Shimla, Manali, Naggar, Kulu and the majestic hill station of Chail. All these places are famous for their scenic beauty. The lush green valleys, the wooden huts on the hills, the exotic varieties of flora and the evergreen trees of the Himalayas revealed before them a totally different kind of ambience which was far beyond their imagination. The most exciting moment for the children was the snowing at Rohtang pass. The children played in the snow and with the snow and a few of them went on for skiing . Their journey





# Newsletter- December 2007



concluded by visiting the national capital, New Delhi . There they visited the Lotus temple, the Qutab Minar, the India Gate, Humayun's Tomb, The President's House, The Parliament and the diplomatic enclave in the city`s most beautiful part. The girls also did some shopping for themselves and their families in the Sarojini Nagar Market.

The month long festive season of Bengal starts with Durga Puja. Like in other years this time too the children were taken out for puja hopping on the 17 th of October. They went to visit different Puja Pandals in and around the city. They started from the Kalighat centre at 10:30 a.m. and returned in the evening. Unfortunately this trip was not as enjoyable as it is usually. The raingod played foul and the children came back tired and unhappy. We apologise to the children for not having a better plan and hope we can make up for this day in future.

Our thanks to volunteers Berta and Luchy Villar from Santiago for suffering this day with the children. After Durga Puja, Diwali - the festival of light is celebrated in a big way in the Eastern and Northern part of our country. Diwali 2007 was very special for the children of New Light. Unlike in other years this time we were able to give each child a gift for this occasion and treat all of them to a great meal. The children at Newlight celebrated the festival by lighting innumerable





# Newsletter- December 2007

fireworks like morning glory, fountain, glitter, cone, bottle rocket, beehive effect, sparkle, barrage etc. This evening was made possible by a very generous support of Ms Michelle Bonn-Paul and Mr Angad Paul. We convey our most sincere gratitude to this special couple for remembering the grandest festival of India and sharing the joys of it with the children of New Light who also convey their thanks and best regards to Michelle and Angad.



A day after Diwali, Myriam Noor, the founder members of Les Enfants De personne from Sion, Switzerland came to Kolkata for three weeks. For Myrium this was a very emotional journey as she was returning to Kolkata after nine years with the purpose of meeting the children of New Light. She visited all our projects, interacted with the beneficiaries and the staff. She expressed her satisfaction with the way the project is running and assured us of future collaboration and support. Her visit was very inspiring and motivating for us.

For the last seven years i have been personally nurturing the dream of setting up a care center for HIV/ AIDS affected people in Kolkata. The idea is to have a mutidisciplinary care center for PLWA who have no other place to go to for treatment. After many years of waiting and talking to many people about this idea today we can see the beginning of this dream taking shape in reality. During my travel this summer i was fortunate enough to meet the representatives of Xunta de Galicia , Spain who have promised to help New Light procure the land for the proposed care center. The purchase procedure would be complee in the next few days and all of you can look at the location through Wikipidia earhserach if you wish to.



I also had the great opportunity of meeting the HIV specialist Dr Manolo Leal at the Hopsital Virgen del Rocio in Sevilla who has offered us the possibility of sending



# Newsletter- December 2007



our doctors for special training there. In this regard i wish to go back a couple of years and recall my meeting with Dr Trevor Hawkins, Mr David Barret , Ms Winoeah Veikly and Dr Rajan Gupta who are all great crusaders of this casue at South West Care Center , Santa Fe, New Mexico( SWCC ). We thank all of you for your encouragemnt and look forward to your support in making New Light - Sanjivani Welfare Care Center (SWCC-Kolkata) a model for HIV/ AIDS Treatment and research in this country. Friends this is a huge task and i feel overwhelmed just thinking about it. So your e mails and messegas need to keep on coming constantly !! We thank Mr. Anindo Tarafdar, an alumnus of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata for sponsoring the dinner for children on 19 th of November. This initiative was talken by a select group of alumni members who wanted to celebrate the birthday of a special friend among them hosting this dinner. We deeply appreciate their gesture.

1st December is observed as WORLD AIDS DAY through out the world. To commemorate the occasion New Light participated in a HIV / AIDS awareenss rally. It was a gathering of about 200 people with posters and banners and the rally covered one of the busiest parts of our city where it was possible to draw the attention of a huge number of people.





# Newsletter- December 2007



The organization also conducted a week long awareness drive against HIV / AIDS in four different colleges in the city to sensitize the college students about the dangers of HIV / AIDS exposure. The programme was a huge success as the students actively participated in the session and this could be easily understood in the anonymous question answer session held at the end of each programme.

1st of December is also a very special day for us. New Light celebrated its 7 th birthday this year. The celebration started in the evening. The place was beautifully decorated and we specially thank Bertha, Luchy, Marie Carmen and Inigo who took the leading part. Snacks and cakes were arranged and distributed among the children, the staff and the guests. The children enjoyed the whole evening with great music and dance.



On the 13 th of December ,Alban Del Pino from Mundo Cooperante, arrived at Kolkata This is his third visit. The main purpose for this visit is to monitor the smooth operation fo Hogar Meridional / Soma Home and also oversee the purchase procedure of the plot of land to set up the AIDS Care Center at Amtala.





# Newsletter- December 2007

Mrs Harrinder K Dhillon and Diljot Dhillon Grewal, mother and sister of Mr Gaurav Dhillon representing Monuah Janah Memorial Foundation visited New Light for the first time. We always remember that the first big support to New Light was brought by this foundation through Shadhika Foundation , California . We feel honoured by their visit and deeply appreciate their interest in New Light.

We also take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the President Mrs Juthica Stangl, the Secretary Mr Peter Stangl and all the Board members of Shadhika Foundation, California for their continued support and encouragement. Year after year we remember how important was



their singular support at the beginning of New Light as a project. On the 16th of December 2007, New Light was invited to be a part of 'Save the girl child' campaign organized by YFLO (Young FICCI Ladies Organization) at Pat Williamson Ground, at the centre of the race course, Kolkata. The programme started with a documentary made by CRY (Child Rights and You) on female foeticide followed by a panel discussion. The girls from Hogar Meridional / Soma Memorial Girls' Home were also present at the programme. The incidents of cruelty on girl child deeply moved them. At the end of the programme the dignitaries, the

participants and the audience got the opportunity to watch the YFLO Invitation Stewart's Cup Polo Match. It was a rare and unique experience for our girls and they thoroughly enjoyed the electrifying atmosphere of the polo ground. The girls also had the opportunity to talk to Bollywood filmmaker Mr Manish Jha whose documentary, 'Matrubhoomi-a land with no women' has received international acclaim. He is a fellow crusader of women's rights and child protection issues.

Finally it was just last night that we had a big celebration for Christmas at New Light. While the halls were decked with much color and beauty we managed to get a real tree to make it special. We also hear that last night Parth Sanyal's photo from New Light creche cum night shelter was shown at New York Times Square giant screen !!! We don't know who bought it off Reuters but we are thankful and happy !! Such is the magic of Christmas. You can see some of those images:



# Newsletter- December 2007



<http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/parthsanyal/TodaySPixChristmasPartyForChildrenOfSexWorkers>

Friends as I sign off for the next couple of weeks I thank each one of you who all through the year has somehow touched the lives of the children of New Light.

The children and the staff of New Light join me in wishing you a Merry Christmas and a very happy and healthy 2008.

## See you in the new year !

Best regards

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