

Dear friends

Hope this finds you and yours in good health and spirit wherever you are!

As another very difficult year draws to a close there is much to be thankful for. When we welcomed the first dawn of 2021 most believed that the pandemic was already behind us. Everything seemed better and brighter after the global suffering due to the pandemic in 2020 but we couldn't possibly have been farther from the truth. The year began with much hope and renewed energy. Seemed like the world had begun to plan in all earnest to try and adjust to the 'new normal'. 2020 had taught us how things could no longer be in control no matter how hard we tried. The year was devastating for all in one way or the other. Most of us lost family and friends while some had to rededicate their time and energy to look after the sick and the elderly. Many lost their jobs while others had to work harder than they ever had before. Thousands of people felt more comfortable relocating and being closer to their friends and family at the cost of jobs and businesses. At New Light we are grateful to have just been able to keep our doors open and the women and the children safe from the pandemic. It is hard to believe that even during such challenging times New Light has been able to offer the support and sustenance to people the way it did. And this wouldn't have been possible without your help every day. So just to share briefly this is what became possible during 2021 because of you...

While India and more broadly the world was hit with staggering loss of life - through its determination and care for the community, New Light managed to keep all the children, mothers and elders of the community safe. Fortunately, not one life was lost due to Covid-19 in/around all of the operational areas of New Light.

And while that is a remarkable, laudable feat in itself, New Light has never been an organization to sit idle in quarantine waiting-out the pandemic. Instead, the tireless team of New Light Community Warriors continued, and even expanded its work in their own communities – and beyond. To share a more immediate and closer view of what was possible during the second wave here are some activities which New light engaged in during the hardest year ..

### **Nutritional Support**

- Distributed 1.2 million hot meals, in the last 6 months
- More than 7,000 hot meals delivered door-to-door to families whose members were infected with COVID -19

### **Vaccination support**

- Distributed 5,000+ bottles of water & juice to people waiting in line for vaccinations
- Created awareness and mobilized various communities to get vaccinated – New Light is still operating the registration desk for COWIN , the national portal for vaccinations handled primarily by the young graduates from the program.

### **Education & Child Safety**

- Delivered high quality digital learning platform to students in rural areas
- Provided hand held devices to older children to ensure access to digital learning
- Organized awareness and security campaigns to prevent trafficking in north and south 24 Paraganas , areas which had experienced unprecedented numbers of child marriage and trafficking during the first wave

### **Post-Cyclone Support**

- Provided support in the following areas most affected by the cyclone Yaas:
- north and south paraganas, Kultali, Pathar Protima, Hingalganj, Katamari, Hasnabaad.
- Set up community kitchens and distributed dry rations hampers in: Rajabajar, Khidderpore, Kalighat, Tollygunge, Chetla, Sovabajar, Kashipur in Kolkata.

### **Basic Needs support**

- During Durga Puja festivities, distributed clothing to children and more than 500 sarees to women
- Continues to improve the quality of life of women in the rural areas of Murshidabad through our project New Light Dhuliyon Farakka Unmochon program with an aim to reduce potential trafficking and child marriage
- Conducted registration process for social security (Adhar card, Voter) and bank documents, so community members could be included in Government benefits

### **Operational Growth**

- Extended operational support to assist transgender community
- Relocated Sonar Tori, home for young adults, to a more spacious and secure location.
- Expanded services to Urban, Rural, National and International locations.

Through its first international intervention NL USA has reached out to support Afghan girls and young women in the largest refugee camp in Greece. This was possible with the partnership of The Footage Project.

As things began to fall apart around the precious lives that New Light tries to nurture it became evident once again how important stability and structure is for young children. The best tool to maintain that was starting the first day of the year engaging in the practice of mindfulness and yoga. Nothing inspires us more than to see young minds sitting in stillness or engaging in mindful breathing. As these sessions got underway we thanked all our volunteers who over a long period of time have dedicated their love and energy to bring this precious gift to the kids.



In the first week of January 2021, New Light took its team to **Maheshpur, Farakka, Murshidabad** to meet the participants at its **Unmochhan** life skill training center. The warmth and the enthusiasm on display by the students leave New Light amazed time after time. In the past four years since the inception of the project more than two hundred young women and girls have been trained in tailoring and knitting at the center.





This was soon followed by observing **National Human Trafficking Awareness Day** on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January which helps New Light realign itself with the fight against human trafficking.



January being the coldest month in this part of the country many friends and donors reach out to New Light offering blankets, shawls and woollens to be distributed to communities in need. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January the New Light Team accompanied by our ever enthusiastic supporter / mentor **Mr K P Sengupta of United Way, Kolkata** distributed woolen primarily to children and elders with disabilities in the remote areas of the Sundarbans. New Light thanks **The Rotary Club of Calcutta Chowrenghee** and **MCKS Food For Hungry West Bengal** for their generous contribution to the drive.





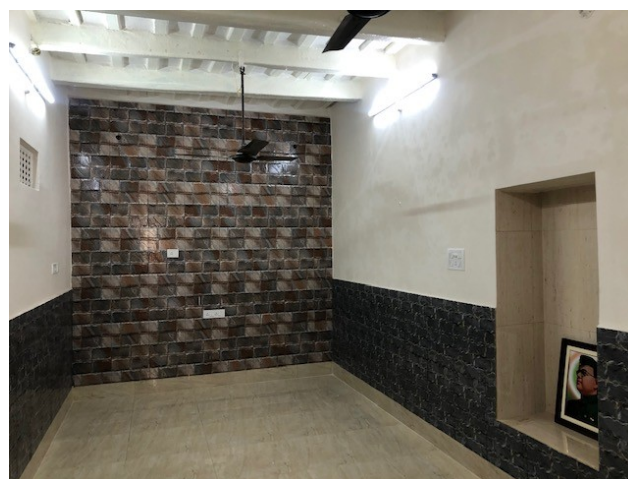


It was on the **30<sup>th</sup> of January** that New Light graduate Avijit Gayen walked up to the stage at the Stepping Out Night Market event to receive the **Jewel Of Bengal award** given to Founder Urmi Basu . The moment couldn't have been more meaningful as Avijit also happened to be an ex student of **International Institute of Hotel Management** , the sponsor for the award. It indeed was a moment of great pride for the entire team.



Thank you **Ms Sanjukta Bose and Dr Subarna Bose** for your generous support to New Light..

After months of struggle and many obstacles New Light finally reopened its shelter **HTS- Starfish** at Sonagachhi, notoriously known as the hardest red light area in this part of the world, on **the 5<sup>th</sup> of February**, in its new avatar. The space now fully renovated with the support of **SKS Capital and Research Private Ltd** and its inspiring leader **Mr Amitabh Sonthalia** provides care and early learning opportunities to the kids of the area in a clean and safe environment. Nothings makes us happier than hearing peals of laughter as kids as young as three years old walk into this shelter.



**One Billion Rising** conceptualized and initiated by feminist- author- choreographer –activist **Eve Ensler**, is a significant campaign that New Light participates in. Every year on the **14<sup>th</sup> of February** New Light participates in the rising along with numerous other organizations based in Kolkata. In 2021 the theme for the rising **Rise for Revolution** was based on creative and artistic expressions, multi sectoral involvement and provided a unique space to engage people from all



walks of life. It used imagination, art and political actions allowing every group to localize their campaigns. Unlike in other years due to the restrictions around COVID -19 large gatherings were avoided. The movement gained strength in smaller and localized events which were contributed to and participated in by many groups from across the city of Kolkata.

One must believe that everything has a specific moment in the universe to come into reality. For a number of years New Light was trying to make professional skill training available for the young women **residents of Sonar Tori**. It wasn't till the beginning of 2021 that things seemed to fall into place. Many of the young residents joined professional skill training workshop under the guidance of experts from respective fields. Young residents **Shikha Pal and Kajol Mullick** began to give shape to their dreams and ideas with clay on the potter's wheel at **Aorang Studio** found by ceramist **Falguni Bhatt Sanghvi**. Others like **Anjali Das, Shahnaz Khatoon, Reshmi Pal and Barsha Sarkar** continued with their training in beauty and aesthetics at **June Tomkyns Beauty Academy** under the expert guidance of **Ms Priscila Corner** by the **21<sup>st</sup> of February**. Thanks to **United Way Kolkata** for making these unique opportunities available to the girls.







March is always a month of many activities at New Light. This year New Light received support from and partnered with **Disha Eye Hospital** headed by **Dr Debashis Bhattacharya** CMD to offer eye check up and follow up treatment for more than a hundred women from New Light's operational area in Kalighat on **the 6<sup>th</sup> of March**. The team and the women of New Light's community of beneficiaries always look forward to celebrating International Women's Day with great enthusiasm. Keeping COVID protocol in mind this year's celebration of **International Women's Day** was limited to having a small gathering at the main shelter on the **8<sup>th</sup> of March**. The presence of three young interns from the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Anuneeta, Rudrani and Salsabil who had extensive interaction with the women added a new dimension to the event.

Thank you **BMW OSL Kolkata** for celebrating the **#unstoppableforce** that women are on this special day by creating a platform for inclusion of all. It was a moment of great pride for all at New Light to have Mili ( name changed ) one of the mothers, a survivor of trafficking at age 13 talk about her struggle and fight to gain her life back. Congratulations Mili for your courage and fortitude ...we learn from people like you every day.



**Holi , the festival of colour** and advent of **Spring** on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March brought much joy and celebration for all at New Light.



Despite making an earnest bid to keep things normal the reality of COVID -19 pandemic hit the country again by the end of March. Even though there were enough information available on a probable second wave most people, still recovering from the impact of the first wave took the situation rather lightly. At New Light we needed to gear up immediately and followed through with the standard of procedure as set during the first wave. Sadly both the Central government and the State government got their act together way too late. When the members of New Light met at its end of financial year meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March little did we know the horrors that were going to face in the following weeks?





The second wave of Covid –19 that exploded in the beginning of April left the country reeling under a staggering loss of life. What followed was a country wide crisis of oxygen cylinder once again brought us present to how ill equip the country is in managing a medical emergency. India , a country that prides itself over having the best trained doctors and nurses failed its people at a moment when the need for medical support was at its highest. With each passing day as the number of new infections and death increased the country plunged into a state of total despair. The mortuary and cremation ground workers had to flee their posts for want of adequate resources while doctors fell like flies to the virus. No matter how much is spoken or written about the crisis the actual extent of the suffering and the horror will always remain unfathomable. The following images are just a snapshot of what India witnessed in the summer of 2021.

( Viewers / Readers discretion necessary )

In the beginning of April, challenging the odds of COVID -19 and disregarding the scorching heat of the summer, New Light team had to keep its promise of completing the environmental project initiated in the Sundarbans in partnership with # **KolkataKnightRiders** popularly known as **KKR**. This was made possible by the single minded effort of **New Light's Goodwill Ambassador Ms Ushoshi Sengupta** .We thank the members of **SGEA , Sundarban Green Environment Association** and the women of various villages in south 24 Parganas for being the much needed eco soldiers and planting more than **3000 Sundari ( mangrove )** saplings in the cyclone ravaged island villages of the delta. The campaign also had an extension of distributing **2000 fruit trees** to assist the women of the villages in having a source of sustenance.







In the weeks that followed the situation with the rate of new infection and death due to COVID rose to such an extent that the whole world began to watch the crisis in India story in absolute horror. Within weeks all one could hear were the hooters blaring from the ambulances. The acute crisis of oxygen cylinders and other medical aid brought on an absolute breakdown of the healthcare system. And like in most crises it was the poor and the marginalized that were pushed to the brink. The fearless COVID warriors of New Light began to distribute dry ration hampers and door to door hot meals to families with the sick members and those confined to their homes.



By the beginning of May New Light had to restrict the number of children attending its various centers and a campaign of distributing hot meals in boxes was set up. Thanks to the prompt response of donor foundations like Bono - Direkthilfe, Aura Freedom International, Chance Swiss , Terre Des Homes , Mundo Cooperante , Village Volunteers and innumerable domestic and international donors that the campaign was sustained over months,



It was also necessary at this point to give special attention to the young kids who continued to be in the care of New Light. Without the tireless effort and constant vigil by the caregivers and teachers at New Light this would have been totally impossible to accomplish.





Almost exactly a year after by the calendar **Super cyclone Amphan** that had devastated the entire south Bengal region, this part of the country once again saw the wreckage caused by cyclone **Yass on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May**. Days before the cyclone hit the south Bengal coast, New Light team went to meet with its multiple partner agencies and assisted them in preparing for the oncoming cyclone. New Light helped the partner agencies with stocking up with supplies , food , medicines , tarpaulins and packaged drinking water in designated storm shelters. Having experienced the super cyclone the previous year the joint effort of all the groups involved made things much more manageable in the days that followed the cyclone.







New Light is extremely proud of its long association with **Bees Tress and Water** group from **New York** that has over the years helped many areas of South Bengal access safe drinking water . This project received a totally different significance as numerous villages began to obtain safe drinking water from a lone tube well sunk by Bees Trees and Water deep inside the Sundarbans villages. Often the drinking was carried in barrels by boats. Thanks to **Sundarbans Green Environment Association** for being the foot soldiers in this action.





Within days after the cyclone New Light was able to set up multiple community kitchens in various locations of south Bengal which were seriously affected by it. **Thousands of hot meals** were served at those community kitchens which continued to operate for weeks.





For weeks the team also continued to visit the cyclone ravaged areas and brought essential supplies to those who had lost their homes and livelihood once again.



By June as the COVID morbidity rate began to be in check and the national vaccine drive started in full force New Light set up multiple vaccine registration desks with the help of its young graduates. A special word of thanks to **Mr Hemant Goenka of Diamond Beverages , Kolkata** for helping New Light reach out with **five thousand bottles of drinking water** to individuals queuing up for vaccination in the burning heat of the summer days.



New Light wishes to thank **Mr Devesh Sonthalia** and the **National. Restaurants Association of India** for organizing a special vaccine camp to accommodate the young women residents of New Light's **Sonar Tori Program**.



In the closing weeks of June , New Light continued to distribute food hampers to multiple locations of the city namely in Rajabazaar, Khiddirpore , Chitpur ,Chetla among others. The community kitchens also continued to provide cooked meals in the villages of south 24 Parganas.





Despite restriction in movement and regular activities New Light continued to care for the young students who couldn't attend the center regularly by providing them with hot meals in lunch boxes. This strategy worked very well as it took away the burden off the mothers who were still not able to go back to full working mode.



Far away in **Farakka , Murshidabad** the **Unmochan center** reopened with few students coming to the center.



July saw the team at New Light get busy with setting up **Sonar Tori**, the safe house for young women at a new location as the previous location was no longer available. The team worked hard in helping the residents plan and move with as little disruption as possible even though things had not returned to complete normalcy by then.

As August came around and most people were returning to work New Light had to have a team building meeting. The meeting proved to be vital as most people were still suffering from the personal losses and difficulties they had faced. It was also an opportunity for the team to plan the days ahead in a completely different way as most members were very low on morale.





**15<sup>th</sup> August , the Independence Day** was celebrated at all the shelters of New Light when a number of local groups brought snacks and small gifts for the children. After being in confinement and isolation for many months it was a day when the children could once again feel free and enjoy to the fullest. The day however was observed keeping the safety and COVID protocol completely in place.



At the beginning of September, members of the New Light Team visited Farakka , Unmochan center and the remote rural tribal areas of **Pakur, Jharkhand** which were previously covered through the program Girls not brides. Having seen and understood the difficulties all the girls students were facing without any digital access group handed over mobile phones to three groups of girl students in secondary, higher secondary and college level to facilitate their on line education. The groups decided to use one central location for their classes and the parents even though extremely impoverished agreed to take care of the expenses involved in keeping the

phones connected. It was indeed a very small and simple act that had a huge impact in the way the girls began to access on line education.



**National Teachers Day** was celebrated with much enthusiasm at all the shelters of New Light on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.

( I have no images from this day )

As the schools reopened and the young residents at New Light, s various shelters were able to return to their class rooms a marked improvement in the attitude of the students was noted. At the residences also the students began to demonstrate a much higher degree of concentration, diligence and attention to their environment. They also often commented on how happy they were to see and be with their peers again. One of the students Rajib Bhattacharjee who was studying at Dr Graham' s Homes was shifted to St Thomas Boys High school in Kolkata and became a resident of Khela Ghar on a permanent basis.





In the last week of September festival clothes were distributed among the children at the shelters of New Light.

After almost nineteen months, people were ready to be out and enjoy the festive days of Dassehra in October. Many of the residents at the shelter homes who had either joined back or had stayed in the safety of the homes wished to be back in their homes with the mothers and other family members if any. It was such joy to see things return to normal albeit by one step at a time. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, with the initiative of Ms Ushoshi Sengupta , the Goodwill Ambassador of New Light in India , JW Marriott Fairfield Hotel hosted an evening of appreciation for New Light. Many distinguished guests were present at the event which turned out to be a significant moment to remind the people of the city about the work and covid survival of New Light. A special mention must be made of **Mr Nikhil Jain of Rangoli sarees** , Kolkata who donated more than a 100 couture sarees for the women and young girl beneficiaries of New Light as festive offerings.



As the festivities died down it was time to get back to business and New Light began to arrange and conduct COVID vaccine campaign in all earnest. Many groups and medical institutions came forward to assist New Light in reaching out to as many adults from the red light districts as possible. With a few weeks most people in and around New Light' operational areas were covered by the campaign. Knowing that a large section of the population had already been vaccinated it was now possible to move around with a little more ease and less fear of the infection.



The festive fever continued well in the month of November as people were busy celebrating **Diwali**, the **Festival of Light** with grandeur on 4<sup>th</sup> of November. Pre- Diwali celebration took place at New Light with the children who enjoyed fire crackers under careful vigilance of their teachers and seniors. They enjoyed sweets and snacks after enjoying a spectacular fire- cracker show.



On 14<sup>th</sup> of November, **Khelaghar**, the boy's home, celebrated the birthday of their beloved Home which is also celebrated as **Children's Day** as a tribute to the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. **Children's Day** was celebrated at all the centers where children enjoyed



the day marked exclusively for them through various cultural programs. The children from New Light participated in the celebration of **Child Right's Week** on the 20<sup>th</sup> November on the invitation of **West Bengal Commission For Protection of Child Rights**. They went to Rabitirtha, New Town for the program organized by the Commission exclusively for children.



New Light volunteered to act as the **Secretariat of the RACSHA Network**, for a year which is an association of likeminded people formed to address Child Sexual Abuse . A significant and impactful event was organized by the Network was a Webinar on the 27<sup>th</sup> November. The webinar was conceptualized to observe **World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse** which is on the 19<sup>th</sup> November and the fortnight starting from that day is observed as #16DaysOfActivism against Gender Based Violence. The Webinar was moderated by Ms. UrmiBasu, Founder Director of New Light where eminent speakers representing the Police Department, Legal Fraternity, Gender fluid community and survivor of CSE shared their personal experiences and legal aspect on child sexual abuse.

In addition to the previous vaccination campaign, on 28<sup>th</sup> November ten students from New Light and other people from the community were mobilized for COVID vaccination in partnership with **Narayana Hrudalaya Charitable Trust**.

**1<sup>st</sup> December** is the **Foundation Day** of New Light. This day is also observed as **World AIDS Day**. Unfortunately this year a mishap happened in the community the night before and all the celebrations were cancelled as a mark of respect for the departed soul. Keeping thing low key and skeletal a free dental health checkup camp was held for the mothers and children from the community with the support of **Guru Nanak Institute of Dental science And Research**. A group of doctors and interns facilitated the camp at Kalighat. A small cake cutting ceremony was done in the evening and all the children were distributed packed snacks.



Volunteer Rebeka Sengupta , a musician, composer, performer conceptualized a performance by the students of New Light and helped them to record the song Imagine by John Lennon as a mark of peace as a process to healing. The students enjoyed this rare experience from start to finish with great excitement. Rebeka worked tirelessly for many weeks teaching various aspects of creating music , harmony and orchestration to the students. New Light is deeply appreciative of and grateful to Rebeka.





December being the last month of the year children got busy with their session ending exams. However, this time their assessment was done online. All the children were promoted to their next class. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December, a grand Christmas celebration was organized at New Light. The premises were decorated with lights and Christmas tree creating a beautiful festive ambiance. The children were all dressed in red and white enjoying every moment of the celebration. Christmas was celebrated in Soma Home and Khela Ghar respectively in the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December bringing a closure to the year 2021.





It is with deep appreciation and gratitude New light once again acknowledges the contribution of all of you friends, family, supporters, donors, individuals, foundations, ad hoc groups of friends and even complete strangers who have come together to help the various communities that New Light supports through the most difficult months of 2021. New Light was able to launch and sustain multiple campaigns only because you have stood by its mission of compassion and action every second of each day of the past year.