

# Kolkata 2018

**Day 8 –Friday 26th January 2018**

**An amazing, yet challenging day.**

Today was my second last day in Kolkata, but it could well have been the most challenging. So far, we had spent all of our time in the city centre and the slums that sprawl around the centre. It is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and that is not hard to believe – there are people everywhere. However, today we went south from Kolkata to an area called Diamond Harbour near where the Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal to see one of the CRS projects near there. However, for part of the day I was to leave the main group to go and look at a possible project that we could support as a school.

It was a rural project called Mahamaya, which is a group of 13 villages way off the beaten track. We were told that over 5,000 people lived in these villages and there was very little or no infrastructure for these people. There was one charity called Mahamaya Bandhan Samity who were working in partnership with CRS to support the people of Mahamaya. Their vision was to build a school that would also be the hub of the villages – doing much more than teach their children.

When I asked CRS if there was a project that we could support – this is the one that I was told about and they were most keen to proceed with.

Mahamaya's dream was being turned into reality. They had a government approved grant to start the work and so they did. They built the first storey of a three-story building but then the government changed and the funding dried up and they still needed more to continue and complete the project. Undaunted, they forged ahead with the project in the unfinished downstairs bit of the building. They are currently educating 350 children in the mornings who come from all of the surrounding villages. They have five classes in one room, which is about the length of the Old Hall but not quite as wide. In the afternoons, this room is transformed into a women's empowerment zone where single mothers and married mothers alike come to learn a trade (mainly sewing) that they can use to earn money so that they can better support their families.

We met many of the children and women although by no means all as we were visiting them on a public holiday called Republic Day. However, the room was packed with lots of people there to welcome us. They performed dances and songs and made us feel very special.

During the visit, I was able to discuss the project with the people who were running it. In order to complete the project they need approximately 1.1 million rupees. This sounds a lot, but in pounds sterling, it is about £14,000. I found it hard to believe that for the price of a family car the building could be completed and have two new floors and be plastered, painted and furnished. If this were to happen then the village of Mahamaya would have social care, health care and education on their doorstep and have a place that they could all use and be a real centrepiece for the village. I was really excited about the project and wondered how much that we could raise. It would be brilliant if the International committee at Scargill could commit to raising money towards this wonderful cause. Imagine if every child at Scargill could raise just £10 then we would be nearly a third of the way to creating this new school. I hope that, working in partnership with the Diocese of Derby, we can raise this money so that the Mahamaya project can be completed. Now that is what I call a challenge!

Tomorrow, on my last day in Kolkata, we will be completing the second day of training with the Indian teachers. I am really looking forward to it. I can't believe that, as I write this, you are just

finishing school on Friday and all being well I will be back in school to see you when you are next in on Monday even though I am still around 5,000 miles away at the moment. See you soon!

