

FRIENDS UPDATE

For UK supporters of Kolkata's Cathedral Relief Service (CRS) | Summer 2021

Women at the Pally Mangal centre practise their beauty therapy skills.



Hope perseveres despite lockdown

**Clive Brown, Friends of CRS
Honorary Secretary**

You'll no doubt have read that earlier this year, India was hit by a severe second wave of COVID-19. Distressing stories emerged of seriously ill people being turned away from overflowing hospitals, and a critical shortage of oxygen and equipment. A desperate plea from a priest in the Diocese read: *'I do not know what to cry for anymore. The situation has spun out of control with the people who are supposed to lead least bothered about the gravity of the situation*

People are dropping dead like flies. Please pray.'

At the time of writing, it is mid-June and Kolkata is still in lockdown, with this expected to be extended well into July. Public transport isn't running, and markets are open for just three hours each morning. The vaccination programme is slow, mainly because of a shortage of vaccines.

We are relieved to say CRS staff have so far escaped any serious infection and are continuing to work, although only a quarter of

them can attend the office at any one time. They are being transported to and from the office in the CRS vehicles.

The resilience of the people is, however, extraordinary and there is a lot of good news to celebrate, as you'll discover in this newsletter. In the midst of this challenging time, great things are happening, and it is incredible supporters like you that make this possible. Thank you for all your generosity, in particular in the past year. I pray you're encouraged by the updates you're about to read.

Extension completed at Pally Mangal centre

Thanks to two very generous supporters, the Pally Mangal centre has been extended, with a new floor and staircase added.

The previous building contained just one small room, making it a tight squeeze for the women attending classes.

We want to thank Paul Stuttle and Jo Whitehead, whose generous contribution of £2,400, along with Gift Aid, was enough to cover the costs and create more space for the women the centre exists to serve.

Structural work was completed last year, after being put on hold due to the pandemic. The local committee is raising funds to paint the building, which will take place once the current lockdown has ended.

The centre is now in use for skills training in sewing and the beautician programme, and the women are being trained in how to use a newly installed Jack 4 industrial sewing machine. This will vastly improve the quality of their products.



Above: The Pally Mangal centre, where a new floor and staircase have been added to create more space.

Renovation work completed at Brace Bridge

Thanks to funds raised through St Peter's Derby and Derby Diocesan Schools, CRS is in the process of building a new combined school and community centre in one of their most deprived project locations, Brace Bridge.

Construction work has been completed despite the pandemic. However, like the Pally Mangal centre, painting of the building is on hold. An opening ceremony is planned for July. Until the building is available, a local councillor has kindly provided a room in which women and parents can meet for online teaching via smartphone.



Above: Building work at the Brace Bridge centre last year.

More than 100 children between the ages of 3 and 13 currently attend classes at Brace Bridge. With children in the area frequently falling victim to

exploitation, abuse and violence, projects like this are key in providing education and opportunities for the younger generation.

Feeding the multitude: a new project

No child can learn when it is starving.

Malnutrition among children is ever-present in the slums, but the pandemic has made matters far worse. Loss of employment, particularly by those working as day labourers, means that many families are finding it difficult to feed their children.

While the Government is trying to address the issue, the magnitude of the problem is so great that what is being done is not nearly sufficient.

Some NGOs in Kolkata have already introduced nutrition schemes, and CRS intends to do the same by providing a nutritional meal each day to around 1,000 children in fourteen centres. A professional dietician will be asked to advise on the meal content, and mothers of the centres' children will form self-help groups to prepare and serve the food.

CRS will also be introducing screening of children to identify those at risk of malnutrition and provide nutritional guidance as part of the health care project. The estimated cost of the nutrition scheme is £14,500, and that is the focus of our current fundraising.

CRS intends to introduce the scheme in stages. We recently received a generous donation of £1,000 from Carsington and Hopton C of E Primary School, with a request that it be used for the two Bibibagan centres. This covers the budget for providing meals at the two centres, and so the money will be used to pilot the nutrition scheme there.

A further donation towards the programme has been raised through a sponsored walk organised by Tania Sanders and friends. The group, whose ages range from 40 and 80, took on the 5km walk in June. So far, their efforts have raised £968 – an incredible 387% of their original target! A big thank you to all who took part.



Top: Families receive food parcels in Bibibagan. Above: The fab group who took on a sponsored walk in aid of the nutrition appeal.

You can support the nutrition appeal by donating at justgiving.com/fundraising/A-BROWN29

Nari Dana perseveres through lockdown

We're delighted that the Nari Dana project, which empowers poor and disadvantaged women through skills training and self-help groups, has continued to run during the pandemic. The women have been focusing on producing masks, as well as handbags, key rings and mobile

phone covers for local communities. Some have continued to work from home, while, when restrictions have allowed, transport to the centres and food has been provided by Larsen and Toubro. Meanwhile, a space has been allocated to the project in the

Bishop's house, named Dorcas. This was opened in February following funds generously raised through the Lent Project at St Peter's Derby. Dorcas will provide a production centre for Nari Dana products. An outdoor sales counter has been set up to attract visitors to the Cathedral.

You can support the project by purchasing brooches made by the women from recycled fabrics at tabithaliving.com/product-category/brooches. 100% of the proceeds will go towards the Nari Dana women.

Left: Cutting the ribbon to open the Dorcas centre in February.



CRS projects set up in two new locations

CRS has set up projects in two new locations in collaboration with the Diocese of Calcutta.

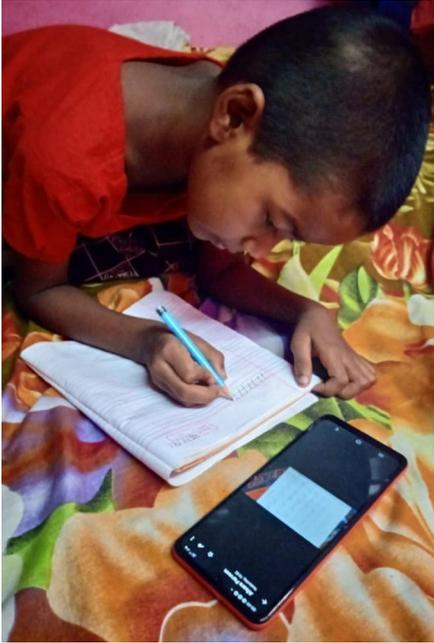
A new project has been set up in Geonkhali (or Geokhali) in the Purba Mindapur district, which includes a child development programme and a women's empowerment programme to support the local community.

In Kulberia, in the North 24 Parganas district, a project has been launched which also includes an education programme and a women's empowerment programme to support a tribal community in the area.



Above: Photos from the new Geonkhali centre, opened by Bishop Paritosh Canning of the Church of North India.

Education project thrives with provision of smartphones



Above: Smartphones have enabled children in Kolkata to learn online.

The annual visit to Kolkata by teachers and head teachers from the Derbyshire link schools and students from the University of Derby unfortunately could not go ahead in January 2021. We hope to visit again as soon as the pandemic situation allows. We remain in close contact with the CRS team via Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp, and link schools and teachers are in regular contact with the teachers in Kolkata. A virtual CPD training session had been planned for May but was postponed due to Kolkata being in lockdown. We now hope to hold it in September.

Along with the regular contact with Kolkata, the education project continues to develop. The provision of smartphones for the teachers and parent

groups has enabled schools in Kolkata to transition to online learning and we have been very encouraged to receive videos of maths and phonics teaching (based on previous CPD programmes) using the phones.

Smartphones have been distributed to seven centres and mothers' groups, and teachers are able to communicate with parents and with one another to share ideas through WhatsApp.

The Education Coordinator, Kuheli, works remotely with the schools three days a week from the CRS office. As time goes on, we hope that the impact of the phones will enable greater sharing of resources, both amongst the CRS teachers in Kolkata and with teachers and schools in Derbyshire.

Health clinic opens in Bosekati

As part of the CRS health project, St Luke's Community Health Clinic was opened in June to provide care for the poor communities of Bosekati, Kolkata. More on this to come in your next newsletter.

Right: The health clinic in Bosekati is now up and running.



Fund set up in memory of Gabbi Basra

We are sad to say that Gabrina Kaur Basra – Gabbi – who was amongst a group of Derby High School students that visited Kolkata in 2019, died earlier this year.

Gabbi was a joyful and compassionate young woman who took a keen interest in the work of CRS and the needs of vulnerable children. During her visit, she spent time at various CRS schools teaching English and doing fun activities with the children.

CRS has set up the Gabbi Education Memorial Project, which will provide financial help and mentorship for particularly bright students who lack the resources to complete their education.

According to Government studies, out of 300 million Indian children of school-going age, only 180 million are in school. 48% of India's children are not enrolled in higher secondary school due to financial problems.

So far, more than £16,000 has been raised through a fundraiser set up by Gabbi's friends and family, with the bulk of the proceeds going to the memorial project. If you'd like to donate, please search **Derby High School is fundraising for Cathedral Relief Service at [justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com)**.



Above: Gabbi during her visit to Kolkata in October 2019.

The people you help

Your support helps people like Ashif, who lives in the Hastings area of Kolkata with his family. Their father earns a small income through his work as a painter, but it is not enough to maintain a family of four.

Alongside his sister, Ashif is studying at the Hastings education centre, where he enjoys computer classes and loves to draw.

Their mother is also being supported by CRS. She is learning tailoring, a skill she hopes to someday use to support her family.



Keeping the show on the road: an update on staff restructuring at CRS

Any fundraiser will tell you that it is far easier to raise money for a specific project, such as a new building. It is essential, however, to meet the day-to-day costs of running the charity, in particular ensuring that the people at the coalface are properly looked after.

A substantial part of the general funds which the Friends send to CRS are used to meet these costs. CRS has a small but dedicated team based at the offices in the Cathedral grounds, some of whom have been loyal employees for many years. Plus, there are the teachers, trainers, doctors and other field workers, many local, who work in the project centres.

There has been a recent restructuring of staff, meaning CRS now has a core team of only six full-time employees, including the Director, Rig David (pictured below).



There are four people employed on consultancy contracts, who work three days a week, one of each of whom is responsible for education, health, women's empowerment and Nari Dana. There are three further part-time support staff. Rig reports to an Executive Committee which is chaired by the Bishop, and receives considerable

support both from the Bishop and from members of the Committee.

The Trustees of the Friends take a particular interest in the charity's governance. They receive regular reports from Kolkata, and provide advice and support to the team wherever possible.

A sad farewell and a warm welcome from the Friends

The Friends have sadly said farewell to one of our long-standing Trustees, Jenny Lunn, who stood down earlier this year.

After living in Kolkata when she was writing a thesis on faith-based NGOs and being particularly impressed by CRS, Jenny became a Trustee in 2009, and has been the person responsible for producing our newsletters and managing the website.

A few years ago, Jenny moved to Washington DC and continued to give her time as a Trustee from there, regularly joining

meetings on Skype at what was, for her, a very early hour in the morning. Work commitments have caused her to resign, and she will be sadly missed both as a friend and as a colleague.

We are very pleased, however, to welcome to the team Gemma Pask, who has stepped in to look after our communications.

Gemma works as Senior Copywriter for Christians Against Poverty (CAP), a national debt help charity.

She has been inspired by the work of CRS since visiting Kolkata in 2014 as a member of St Peter's Derby, and is looking forward to helping out.

Income and expenditure update

During the twelve months to 31st March this year, the Friends of CRS' income was approx. £50,000, of which over £45,000 was from donations (including Gift Aid tax recovered). A substantial part of this income was the marvellous response to the COVID-19 and Cyclone Amphan appeals. Over the same period, we sent a total of £49,988 to CRS in Kolkata.

CRS itself had a total income of £97,000 during the 2020/21 financial year. In addition to the money transferred by the Friends, CRS received £21,500 from other overseas donors and

£24,000 in local donations. Total expenditure over the period was £87,400, of which £70,600 went to support the projects (including staff salaries paid for that purpose).

Due to a change in Indian regulations governing foreign transfers to NGOs, we have not been able to transfer any funds to CRS since 31st March. The already onerous restrictions have been tightened up, and whereas CRS was previously able to receive money through a branch of Standard Chartered Bank in Kolkata, it is now a requirement that all NGOs open

an account with the Central Bank of India in Delhi, and foreign payments have to be made to that account, so that the donors and the purpose of the payments can be monitored centrally. As many NGOs have been affected, this has led to a huge bureaucratic bottle-neck.

CRS has, however, managed to open its account at the Central Bank of India, and we should now be able to start sending funds again. As of mid-June, we have £36,000 ready to send, including the funds raised in memory of Gabbi Basra.

Ways to support CRS

To donate towards general CRS funds, please visit [justgiving.com/calcutta-ccrs](https://www.justgiving.com/calcutta-ccrs)

If you wish to give regularly by standing order, or to make a bank transfer, please email secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk

Cheques made payable to 'Friends of Calcutta Cathedral Relief Service' can be sent to:

Friends of CRS c/o Reverend Anita Matthews
St Peter's in the City
St Peter's Street
Derby DE1 1SN

**Thank you for all your support during this exceptionally challenging time.
You are making a real difference to people's lives across Kolkata.**

Follow us online



Facebook
[/friendsofcrs](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofcrs)



Twitter
[@crsukfriends](https://twitter.com/crsukfriends)



Website
[friendsofcrs.co.uk](https://www.friendsofcrs.co.uk)