

# Meider Jonno Asha (Hope for Girls, Bangladesh)

## Report to PAWA February 2016

### Sponsorships

We were able to connect with all of the 15 girls presently sponsored for school by PAWA. We discovered that 4 of them were finding difficulty paying the new year school admission charges. After visiting the homes of these girls we privately gave extra assistance of 3,000 Taka to each so that they could take admission.

This is likely to be a recurring problem for them and possibly some others if family income falls. 1500 Taka monthly is a great help but it does not pay all a girls needs if she is in the higher grades of school as charges for admission, books and exam fees are all proportionally higher. This means that parents do have to contribute towards their daughters education and we consider this to be a good thing to keep the parents involved and recognising the importance of education for the whole family future. However, a contributory factor this year has been that the Solmaid High School, which these particular girls attend, has raised its charges significantly for both admission and monthly attendance and this has made it difficult for families to budget.

The drop out rate amongst older teenage girls who lack the support that we are able to offer is very significant. The government claim that some 93% of children attend school in Bangladesh. This is a ridiculous assertion. The truth is that probably 90% do attend school at some point in their childhood, but many have long breaks in school attendance and, for girls in particular, never manage to complete the upper stages of school education. This, coupled with very low teaching standards in many schools means that even those who have managed to attend for several years of state schooling may still be largely illiterate.

Because we have a good support structure we are able to know when girls are struggling financially and we will commit ourselves to helping those with genuine problems by offering a little extra finance so that they can continue in education. We also need to assess whether it might be sensible for girls to move schools if charges become too high or if teaching standards cause concern. We did this for two sponsored students this year.

We also expressed to each of the girls the necessity of saving towards the extra costs that come at the beginning of the year and we have a voluntary savings scheme that they can participate in. If the girls can put aside 200 Taka of their money each month then they will save 2,400 by the end of the year and we are offering to add an extra 600 to make the total up to 3,000.

We passed on the letter PAWA gave us to each sponsored girl and together they expressed their gratitude and the desire to take good advantage of the opportunity your assistance now gives them to learn well and take control of their lives.

### Coaching and Computer

We had intended maintaining the coaching groups at around 40 girls but because of demand we have expanded to include 60 now. This has meant opening another class. The advantage has been that we are now able to run a separate class for each year group from Year 4 to Year 9. This is an improvement on the composite age groupings we had before. The girls of Year 5 (a key year in Bangladesh) were so pleased with their exam results that they gave little presents to Rosey and

I to show their appreciation! All the students who attend are zealous in their studies and really appreciate the opportunity to have free coaching time.

The present system of state education relies heavily upon children doing significant study at home, but the curriculum is demanding and, particularly in the higher stages and with limited parental support, pupils struggle to gain sufficient knowledge to progress the rigid exam system. The richer families pay for personal tutors to overcome this problem. The poorer children fail and drop out.

In our coaching classes we provide a friendly and pleasant working atmosphere where not only do children receive explanation and instruction to help them do their studies well, they also receive encouragement and advice from staff and occasional healthcare if it is needed. They also have some fun and relaxation together from time to time and share some food! I suppose we should call it a Coaching Club!

We purchased 1 more computer system so that now we have 4 for teaching purposes. With 3 hours allocated for computer teaching each afternoon this gives us presently 60 hours available for girls each week. This means that some 30 girls are presently taking part in the Basic Computing course and having two hours computer time each week.

We hope to purchase another computer in June with the next tranche payment.

## **Ladies Literacy Training**

We now have 3 teachers working in Ladies Literacy work. A new teacher, Lipi, is working alongside Maksuda and Shimoly for the next few months to see how she takes to the work.

There were 45 ladies altogether receiving teaching in two separate groups when we arrived in January. Some of these had been studying for 18 months, which was longer than we had intended. The problem of course is that everyone loves to attend the lessons as they serve a social need as well as an educational one and nobody wants to stop!

We sorted out those with the best skills and had a ceremony where they were issued with small prizes and certificates of competence for Bangla Level 1. This group was then released from teaching with the promise that a new more advanced course would begin soon, and also they would be able to come in for our occasional health talks and social meetings.

This left a group of around 15 who will continue working towards certification in 6 months time, and a newer group of 12 who will be on a course for the rest of this year. We shall now be able to open a new class for a further group of 12 in the coming weeks.

Following this pattern with present staff we will expect to have around 36 women at any one time on one of three Literacy courses, each lasting about 12 months.

We shall also be having monthly meetings when all the ladies can attend and discuss issues such as contraception, healthcare and social issues. We have several local acquaintances and professional friends we hope to call on to assist in these.

We shall be reviewing progress again in July this year.

