



BANYAN NEWS



Year 15

NEWSLETTER OF THE BANYAN TRUST

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Sanjeevani has been through some eventful months! The project wrapped up its collaboration with partner organisation SLUM and entered into an exciting new partnership with DRRA/Niketan with regard to daily management in the field. You'll still find our wonderful Director Rabeya Neela at the helm, but the change of partner means that she finds herself now surrounded by a team of administrative professionals and new colleagues who share her approach and goals for the project. Sanjeevani is now also able to pool resources with a network of other projects – accountancy, linking with the government, healthcare services are just some part-time jobs now shared with affiliated projects.



Reregistering with the government with a new partner required renaming the project, which is now called Sanjeevani-Amar Joti Badda, a reference to the area of Badda where it is located. And the very first new step was a move to new premises.



Mothers having fun on an outing with the students

We are collaborating with DRRA/Niketan, not only to share the administration of our project with theirs, but also to embrace their experience of vocational training for our older students, and to develop our successful physiotherapy programme to include their children. This collaborative approach to working with disability has another bonus for us all too. The staff have already begun to benefit from sharing their experiences and learn a lot directly from their new colleagues. As we now have a much bigger project, it is possible to hold seminars and workshops for all staff in their own language and avoid travel costs and translators for just a few English speaking staff members only.

Vocational training will start very soon and includes students acquiring necessary social skills, a new attitude to their work and an understanding of hygiene rules in the workplace. Bangladesh has outlawed plastic bags (they clog up drains during the wet season for a start !) so it follows that there is already a big demand for paper bags in the local shops – ideal for us - to have easy distribution of our first product.

We have held very popular workshops for our Sanjeevani parents. They needed to understand and manage their individual child, find out how they can support each other and how to cope with complicated

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numerous instructions from various doctors, and the emotional demands from the rest of the family. These streetwise but otherwise uneducated people, will now have access to experts as well as our own staff, because we have created a dedicated budget for this very important workshop programme.

I hope you can see just how several things are developing, we have succeeded in attracting a willing partner to share in caring for the disabled children of a very poor country. We have done well, but by working together, we can achieve so much more and hopefully encourage others to make the same journey. All this progress has been made available by your practical support, so, on behalf of Banyan, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and a big, big thank you for your generosity.

Annie Larner, Chairman of the Banyan Trust



Rabeya Neela, Director (right) with her teachers and students.

LITON

On October 11th Liton passed away.

He was one of Sanjeevani's very first students.

His parents brought him to the initial assessment day in 2008 that marked the start of the Sanjeevani programme. Dr Naila Kahn and her medical team diagnosed Liton with a severe form of Marfan syndrome and learning difficulties. In Liton's case Marfan syndrome manifested itself with elongated limbs and an extremely thin body structure. Dr Kahn did not foresee a long life for Liton, but until briefly he did ever so well.

Liton was one of Sanjeevani's success stories. Extremely shy and withdrawn at first, he developed into a self-confident young man who graduated from Sanjeevani last summer and was able to take up a paid job helping out in a local shop.

He was quite a character, much loved by the entire staff. Although attending the second shift for older students, he would rush to Sanjeevani and get there hours early.



Liton (left) waiting for class with his fellow students

Every day you would find Liton waiting patiently on a bench on the school porch.

The young man had one great wish in life: a trip to the city of Sylhet, in North Bangladesh. Whenever we visited the project we asked him when he would go to Sylhet. Liton's face would light up and he always told excitedly he would go there next week, by train. This same conversation was repeated over and over again for years, with all visitors to the project. Until one day when I asked him the usual question an awkward silence fell. The teachers quickly shushed me. One of them whispered it's better to no longer mention Sylhet. What happened? Well, apparently for years Liton had driven his family mad with his wish. So his father had decided to save up and finally grant Liton his ardent wish. Together they travelled by train to Sylhet.

But what so often happens with great expectations: Liton hated it, every second of the trip. He hated the train and Sylhet even more. When two days later he returned to Dhaka he was rather traumatised. The thing with Liton was – he didn't like any change, anything new, anything out of his daily routine. We all felt sorry for Liton's well-meaning dad. It showed us though how much Liton was loved by his family. Over the years at Sanjeevani Liton truly blossomed and his family was ever so proud of him when he started his job last June. But then, last October he suddenly fell ill with severe stomach pains He was admitted to a local hospital, but they could do nothing for him. He was 24 years old when he died.

Liton leaves behind a family heartbroken with grief and at Sanjeevani we shall never forget him.



Liton 1990 - 2014

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NEW PREMISES

Sanjeevani was bursting at the seams. The classrooms were too small, not because the groups of children were too large, but simply because the students needed more space for their particular class activities. The building was never designed to be a school, but to be apartments. So the classrooms were actually the size of small bedrooms and a living room. Every inch was used by the students, including the building's ground floor communal spaces. Now Sanjeevani has moved house. It was difficult to find something within the same area of Badda. Dhaka is one of the fastest growing cities in the world and space comes at a high premium, even in the slums.



The new premises, in an unfinished building, are far from ideal and still too small, yet an improvement. However, the search is still on for a better place, hopefully to be found in 2015.



Teacher Sadia (right) on an outing with her group of students and the kind assistance of a mother.

SPREADING THE WORD

Sanjeevani-Amar Joti Badda not only works hard in the field to offer services to children with multiple disabilities, but through our new partner DRRRA/Niketan is rapidly becoming an active player in the field of advocacy and awareness. DRRRA/Niketan have officially been appointed by the government to coordinate and oversee the implementation of new neuro disability legislation nationwide, a big honour and responsible task for our partner organisation. Within this framework Sanjeevani as grassroots slum project is garnering a lot of attention and receives many visitors, amongst them the Bangladesh Minister of Social Welfare and the General Secretary of the Department of Health. On World Disability Day on December 3rd the students of Sanjeevani-Amar Joti Badda were invited to perform for Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister for Bangladesh. We'll share some photos of this event in our next issue of the newsletter.

These are important steps forward, not only for our small project itself, but also for the cause of disability at large in a poor country like Bangladesh.

There is so much work to be done in the cities' countless slums and deprived villages. A rapidly growing network of disability projects and initiatives can create a sea of change. That is why your continued support for a project like Sanjeevani-Amar Joti Badda is of such value.



A NEW CHANCE IN LIFE

New premises mean more space and the capacity to admit new children to our day centre.

Since the move eight new students from the waiting list have joined the Sanjeevani programme. They have multiple disabilities and require a lot of individual attention. With them come the parents that have become part of the on-going parent programme. Their common perception is that the children are just ill and Sanjeevani will cure them. Through gentle guidance and intensive coaching from our staff the parents learn to understand their child's condition, how to cope with it and they become an essential partner in the process of improving the quality of the child's life.

Admission to the day centre is a new lease on life for these vulnerable children and the parents not only build up a whole new relationship with their child, but also find a warm network of other parents and often a whole new circle of friends. We'd like to introduce some of the new children to you, with some details provided by the staff:



Aisha is a two year old girl, born deaf and blind. She also has cerebral palsy and her spine is seriously curved. Aisha has very young and destitute parents who had no idea what to do with her. She also has learning difficulties.



Sani is a 7 year old boy with learning difficulties and a speech impediment. He is an only child of supportive parents who are relieved Sani has made it from the waiting list into the Sanjeevani-Amar Joti Badda day centre programme. The boy can walk, he needs only minimum assistance with his daily living skills and he is a cheerful and very social child. Sani will do fine at Sanjeevani, make many friends and achieve plenty!



Chadni is two and a half years old and an only child. The girl is suffering from restricted growth (dwarfism). She has physical deformities, her speech is delayed and Chadni displays a variety of behavioural problems. She often spontaneously bursts into tears and does not like to interact with other children, preferring to play by herself. However, Chadni has a sharp intelligence, she is a very quick learner. Until now Chadni has not managed to smile at anybody.



Raihan is twelve years old. This friendly boy has learning difficulties and delayed speech. A very sensitive and vulnerable child, he can manage all basic daily living skills. Raihan is very restless, unable to concentrate on anything for very long and always getting up to start wandering around aimlessly. All staff are fully confident Raihan will find his way at Sanjeevani and achieve to the best of his abilities.



THE BANYAN TRUST

*Our work would not be possible
without the consistent and generous support
of our regular sponsors.*

*For more information
please contact The Banyan Trust:*

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