



Equipping women, children and families
in India to discover a brighter future.

Friends of CRS update | Winter 2023/24

Children rally against drug abuse and trafficking

Students from the recently launched CRS education centre in the Sonagachi district of Kolkata took part in a rally to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. Organised by the Human Development and Research Institute, the rally saw the students enthusiastically

march through the local area, carrying handmade banners and placards.

The annual observance was created by the United Nations in 1987. It exists to encourage action against drug abuse, combat stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs, and promote

a compassionate approach to drug policies. With poverty widespread across Kolkata, substance abuse and trafficking are a significant issue. It is extremely encouraging to see CRS students developing an understanding of these issues, and a passion to take action and drive change.



Above: The children were enthusiastic about the march, carrying banners and placards to show their support.

Excellence: a thread woven into the work of CRS

Karen Laister, Secretary, Friends of CRS

In October, I made my third visit to Kolkata, spending just under three weeks there. In 2017, I spent four weeks working at Ek Tara, a school in the Topsia slum established by three Hindu women. My second visit, in 2019, was a two-week stint with the CRS school in Sukantanagar. The trip last October was in my new role as a Trustee of the Friends of CRS and it involved visiting projects and spending time understanding the day-to-day running of CRS.

Charities recognise that governance and compliance enable them to be effective in meeting their objectives. Like the UK, CRS is required to comply with legislation and best practice. Several meetings took place with Rig David, Director of CRS, and his team to learn about the day-to-day aspects of managing the charity. The staff take pride and great care in the administration of charity records.

Excellence and diligence are also values reflected in the compilation of teaching syllabuses, certification and reporting. There is little doubt that CRS is a well-run organisation. Key to the success of the projects is the dedication of the CRS staff team, their operational efficiency and dedication to



Above: Karen meets Rig, Director, and Cheryl, Programme Manager.

excellence. It was humbling to visit the projects and observe the fantastic work that is going on. I left Kolkata knowing I had only experienced a glimpse of what CRS is achieving and the difference it is making.

In the past few years, CRS have worked hard at establishing themselves as an NGO with the state and national government. CRS is a respected NGO among local faith communities and seen as an organisation to work with to establish new projects. It has a reputation of being successful and a track record of working collaboratively with others.

During the past few years, CRS have established several new projects and, in a relatively short space of time, they have

become successful places of learning. In 2019, I visited a newly created project in the Brace Bridge district of Kolkata. To access the project, we had to walk across a railway line and walk through shanty homes. The school was in the centre of the community and in the early stages of construction. The building comprised of a concrete floor, a flimsy roof and no walls. Today, it is a thriving school with dedicated teaching staff (and walls!) The transformation was incredible, and this project is testimony to the difference CRS brings to a community. It is today a lively and busy school that is able to accept and welcome a regular intake of children and women from the local community.

Continued over page.

Excellence: a thread woven into the work of CRS

On a budget of approximately £110,000 per annum, this small organisation is changing the lives of children, women and families who find themselves in poverty. It can only touch the surface of the poverty of Kolkata, but we should not underestimate the impact on each individual that the charity teaches and trains. Your donations impact children who have little hope of an education and give women valuable tailoring skills to enable them to provide an income for their families.

If you would like to receive a detailed report of my trip to Kolkata, please email me at secretary@friendsofcrs.co.uk.



Above: Photo taken by Karen of children at the Brace Bridge centre.

I'd love to tell you another story from my visit to Kolkata about Bishal, a teenager who is being helped by CRS to fund his secondary education. Visit justgiving.com, search for the Friends of CRS and click 'Support gifted children'.

Nutrition project sees rise in school attendance

The Friends of CRS would like to thank all who have donated towards the nutrition appeal so far.

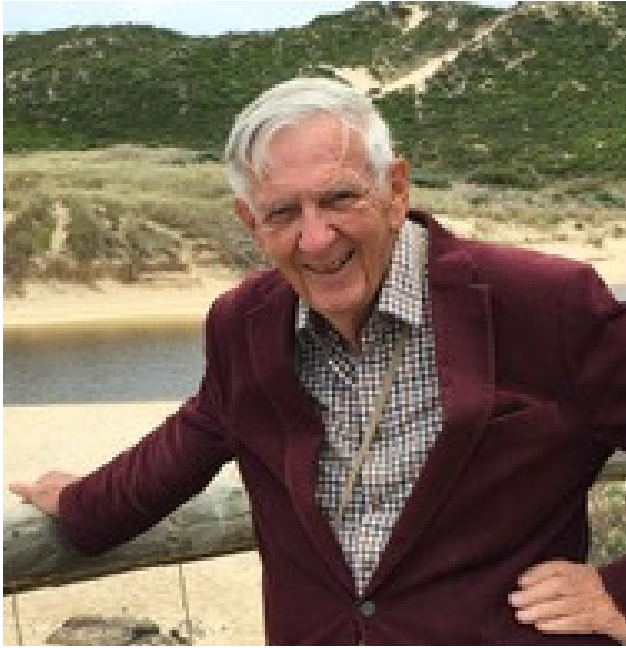
Since the nutrition project launched, attendance in CRS education centres has increased markedly, meaning more children are learning, socialising and developing skills for the future. Through the project, CRS delivers a healthy meal for students, providing them with basic nutrition that they may not be able to receive at home. This is more needed than ever before, with the cost of living still high across India.

If you'd like to donate towards the nutrition appeal, please see the last page of this newsletter for details.

Below: As well as food, children receive regular health check-ups through the nutrition programme.



Remembering the Rev'd Richard Butler



**Adrian Whalley, Hon.
Secretary, Friends of CRS
(2000-2018)**

It is with great sadness that I report the death of The Rev'd Richard Butler (preferring to be addressed as 'Dick') whom I succeeded as Honorary Secretary of the Friends. Dick died in late 2022 but we have only recently become aware, having re-established contact with his widow, Dr. Eleanor.

Dick, Honorary Secretary for many years, took a significant number of initiatives which laid the firm foundations for the UK charity we have today. He and Eleanor financially contributed significantly to CRS's projects in Kolkata and Eleanor's kind contributions continue.

When I took over Dick's role in 2000, there were four Trustees: Dick, Ray Brookes, The Rev'd Mike Harrison and John Rhodes.

We asked Mike to become Chair of Trustees in my tenure which he remains today. Dick recruited these Trustees as Rector of St. Margaret's Church, Lee, which he was for 25 years, to assist him in the management of the Friends which was growing apace

in its supporter numbers, largely as a result of Dick's efforts in spreading the word as to the extent of the need in the Kolkata slums (known as bustees) through talks and preaching. Dick visited the then-Director of Operations in Kolkata on several occasions to experience the extent of the poverty for himself and he established excellent links with the then-Bishop of Calcutta who chaired the management board of CRS. The management meetings took place at Bishop's House nearby St. Paul's Cathedral – a rather grand house – that I have visited on a number of occasions.

Back in the UK, Dick set up many speaking opportunities to publicise CRS's work to bring relief to the many bustee communities in and around Kolkata – be it to provide education, access to health care or the empowerment of

women. By doing this, he built up a network of supporter links around the UK and was able to hand over to me a significant alphabetical list of those who had or were continuing to make financial contributions for CRS's work. It was only subsequently that the official names of some of India's cities were changed and Calcutta became Kolkata, as it is now known.

Dick, too, had the idea of this very newsletter, proposing an annual issue consisting of a page of narrative to update supporters. This I was able to expand to use colour and pictures and a broader scope of articles.

Once I took over the Honorary Secretary role, Dick remained a Trustee for many years and, with help for publicity and managing events from Ray and Mike, was able to significantly raise the annual amounts that could be sent to Kolkata. Any expenses were borne by the Trustees so, literally, every penny given in the UK went to Kolkata to help fund CRS's efforts.

Through complete dedication to his vocation, Dick played a pivotal role in setting the course for today's UK Friends of CRS. We thank God for Dick, for his vision and dedication to what could be possible to bring relief and growth to so many. He is very sadly missed.

Sharing ideas and wisdom about education

At the end of January, two Friends of CRS Trustees and eleven teachers from Derbyshire will be spending a week working alongside CRS and CSS (Cathedral Social Service) schools in Kolkata. We will be exploring the theme of our shared friendship and being global neighbours through a range of curriculum activities and different subjects. The week will culminate with a sports and activity day bringing all the participating schools together for a time of fun and celebration.

Right: Derbyshire teachers prepare to meet their Kolkata counterparts.

This is the first visit that the schools link group have made since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the first one which is being organised directly through the Friends of CRS in the UK.

We're excited to renew old friendships, grow new ones, and learn from one another as we share ideas and wisdom about education across continents.



The people you help

Sayed

Sayed (pictured) is a student at the Gobinda Banerjee Lane CRS education centre. He joined in nursery and has now passed all of his exams in class four. Sayed lives with his uncle, without his parents, and does not receive much help with his studies, meaning school is his only way of learning.

Sayed's teachers say he has shown good improvement in both English and Maths which, according to Sayed, are both his favourite subjects! He is a very active student and works hard in class. He likes to read



story books in his spare time. This year, Sayed will be mainstreamed which will help him in higher secondary education.

Khushi

Khushi is undertaking sewing training as part of the CRS women's empowerment programme in Kulberia. She has been learning how to sew for eight months and it has opened up opportunities to work from home, sewing for people she knows nearby. This has given her a small income and she feels proud to be able to earn her own money. Khushi wants to support her family by increasing her income further in the future. She says, 'CRS helped me a lot. I want to thank everyone. They have benefitted me greatly.'

Financial update

Clive Brown, Acting Secretary, Friends of CRS

This is being written in mid-January and, so far, with two and a half months to go until the end of the financial year, the income of the Friends of CRS is £29,175. Of that sum, £20,965 has been donated by individuals, and £1,886 from schools and churches. Income from our investments was £4,190. If you are adding this up and wondering about the difference, the balance comes from tax refunds and interest.

This shows a distinct improvement on the previous financial year, but the position would have been very different

if we had not received an extremely generous donation of £10,000 from one supporter, and we are still likely to be well behind 2021/22 when we received over £56,000.

So far, we have sent £28,357 to CRS in Kolkata, and we are about to transmit a further £10,525, making £38,882 in all. That will leave the cupboard pretty bare, with hardly any general funds remaining over our reserve, although that is not unusual for this time in the year.

Director of CRS, Rig David, regularly sends us financial reports and, after converting rupees to pounds, the most

recent showed income of £46,700 and expenditure of £58,700, so they are running at a deficit and thus digging into reserves. Of the expenditure, over 80% was spent on the various programmes and projects.

The Friends have bank accounts with both Barclays and CAF Bank. Some of you will be aware that in October last year, Barclays suddenly closed our accounts. From press reports, it would seem that Barclays have recently made a name for themselves in closing accounts of charities, small businesses and even churches. Fortunately, our main account is with CAF Bank, but we receive numbers of donations by standing order through Barclays, so the closure was a serious threat to our income. We also use Barclays for making fund transfers to CRS in Kolkata.

I am pleased to say that after our Treasurer and I had spent many hours on the telephone to Barclays, we succeeded in getting the account reopened in December. Our opinion of Barclays is, however, unprintable.

Ways to support CRS

To donate towards general CRS funds, please visit **justgiving.com/calcutta-ccrs**

To give regularly by standing order or 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

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