

Empower the Children

Fall 2009



"Life is as fragile as a bubble!"

"Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together."



Rosalie's Message

Dear Friends,

Many citizens worldwide are experiencing uncertainty and fear. As homes and jobs are being lost in this global crisis, there is a sense that life may not "go on as usual."

For children living in poverty, life is *especially fragile*. Inadequate shelter, hunger, and insecurity are the norms of their existence. Their life of poverty is perpetuated by illiteracy. They have no childhood as they must take on responsibility far beyond their years, such as caring for younger siblings and assuming household chores while their parents work at menial jobs.

For the past eight years **Empower The Children** has successfully made inroads throughout the slums of Kolkata. Uneducated parents now realize that their children must be **motivated, educated and healthy** in order to climb the next rung of the ladder. **ETC's** six schools, two tutorial centers and lunch programs promise *a way out* for these children, offering every opportunity to reach that goal.

I would like to thank our administrators and support staff for their dedication. To the many volunteers who visit "our kids," we are eternally grateful. Lastly, it is *you*, our generous supporters, who make it possible to continue **ETC** programs in India, as well as in Mexico, Africa and the United States. And we are expanding. This year we were able to open two new schools to accommodate students, as well as their mothers, who want the opportunity to learn a vocation. Another step up the ladder!

A fresh blanket of snow, made up of an inestimable numbers of *fragile* snowflakes, is a beautiful sight to behold. By bonding together we are beating the odds and becoming stronger. Someday our vision of countless students going forward into mainstream society will be a reality.

Love,

Rosalie Giffoniello
Co-Founder
Empower the Children

Blessings upon ETC's Newest Schools....

Saraswati is India's goddess of learning, music and creative arts. Dressed in white, she holds a palm-leaf scroll indicating knowledge. She rides a peacock while playing music on a veena.

Preyrona 3

In India auspicious dates are chosen for special occasions. Preyrona 3 opened its doors on January 31st when *Saraswati*, India's *Goddess of Learning*, blesses all students.

Excitement was palpable as new students from Krishna Pur were welcomed into ETC's newest school by children from Preyrona 1 and 2. Soon after the first student was enrolled, the registry book filled up. To our surprise, five deaf/mute children also enrolled. *Saraswati's* blessings continued when Shalom Israel, a teacher of the deaf, joined the staff to teach these children communication and occupational skills.



Preyrona 3 is housed in a three-story building that was donated as a gift to ETC by a very generous benefactor. It is large enough to accommodate three separate programs:

- an after-school tutorial center
- an informal school for first-time learners
- an innovative vocational program for mothers of these students

With 60 children and 45 mothers currently in attendance, Preyrona 3 can be aptly described as *a school filled with blessings!*



Administrator Reena Das enrolls the first student

Kharmagachi

Khamargachi, an idyllic hamlet far from chaotic Kolkata, evokes quiet charm. The members of this tightly knit community speak Santali, their own tribal language. They are famous for their fairs and festivals which portray all aspects of their lives through popular folk dances and native songs.

However, the scenic beauty and cultural heritage of Khamargachi belie the undercurrent of poverty and illiteracy. The people are economically poor. Men and women labor side-by-side in the fields, returning nightly to their mud dwellings.



Over the years, children were not encouraged by local teachers to attend the government school. But during the last two years, our own ETC director, Shelley Chatterjee, actively engaged the parents of Khamargachi about the *importance of education*. Her hard-earned efforts have paid off. In January, ETC opened a school to accommodate 40 students. In two short months the space was doubled, as many Kharmagachi children decided to become the village's first-generation students.

Recognizing that art and culture are an integral part of Kharmagachi society, ETC partnered with friends at Project Ahimsa, in San Francisco to establish a music program.

Instruments were purchased and a music teacher was hired. The

Tamak and Tumdak drums and flute can be heard as children practice their unique and colorful native songs and folk dances. Now the children's newfound love for education is coupled with pride in their traditions and rich tribal culture.

A Hands-on Experience

by Professor Darla Shaw

Last January the Humanitarian Club of Western Connecticut State University embarked on a great adventure when we traveled to India to visit Rosalie. She made us feel completely at home in the bustling city of Kolkata, with its rich diversity of customs and culture. Her inspiration and endless energy made our visit an unforgettable experience.

Preyrona School was the main focus of our volunteer efforts. We were welcomed by loving students and their parents. Their enthusiasm bubbled over as we worked together to create artistic peacocks with "handprint" feathers that will be used for "Thank You" and holiday cards.

In order to share our Kolkata experience with members of our home community, Rosalie suggested a photo shoot during which young students were taught how to use cameras. We then accompanied them into the *bustee*. It was culture shock as Connecticut met Kolkata! Watching a film or reading about slum conditions cannot compare with actually being in the midst of the teeming neighborhoods in which these disadvantaged children live.

On the day of the shoot, young and old alike turned out for the excitement. The *young photographers* did not lack subjects, as everyone clamored to have his or her photograph taken. The end result is an astonishing collage of *life in the bustee*.



A *bustee* consists of one room that has no windows, no running water, no sanitation or cooking facilities. As many as eight people live in one *bustee*.

Meet our Photo Geniuses!



Mona - Age 13

Farida - Age 9

Saboo - Age 10

Goray - Age 7

Farzana - Age 14



After working with these young children, we were amazed to learn of their particular circumstances. One had been found begging in the streets. Others work as child laborers, while some are forced to cook all the meals for their families. We were astonished to see young students *babysit* even younger siblings by bringing them to school as their parents are occupied trying to eke out meager wages. Often toddlers can be seen sleeping or crawling around the classroom while their older, caretaking siblings are engaged in learning activities. Unfortunately, one of our *photographers* had to drop out of school in order to support his family. All of these children have aspirations....mostly to become teachers or social workers to help other children in similar dire circumstances.



Kajal - Age 14

Salma - Age 12

Sanaz - Age 9

Sahid - Age 13

Rozi - Age 8

See Centerfold For Selected Pictures!

Thanks to ETC, our Kolkata *hands-on experience* became a *life-changing one* as well. In spite of enduring hardships and heart-wrenching stories of life in the bustee, we witnessed hope, pride and a sense of achievement in ETC's children. Through continued education, the arts, and positive reinforcement, ETC is making a real difference in Kolkata, and we are so grateful to be part of it. This photo-journalistic slide show is documented in the following websites: www.preyrona.org and ETC's website, www.empower-children.org.

LIFE IN THE BUSTEE



Mona... "With the support of my teachers and new friends, I have found love at school."



Farida... "I am wearing rags, so how can I afford to buy you new clothes?" answers Farida's mother.



Kajal... "I don't believe in slavery at a young age."



Farzana.. "I have a new direction in life."

Saboo... "I am from a very poor family and must work as a domestic helper. How can I spare the time to attend school?"



Sanaz... "I have learned how to sew."



Sahid... "I want to return to school."
Rozi... "I haven't missed a day of school."



Goray... "I want to help poor children."



Salma... "I love drama."

Learning to Survive.....

There are literally hundreds of compelling stories within any one slum area of Kolkata. Atmaraksha has always had its share, with slum dwellers living in substandard conditions. Striving for self-sufficiency, men work as day laborers, women as servants and older siblings care for younger ones. Often parents must leave home to seek work outside of the city. In spite of these hardships, a degree of stability had been achieved within this harsh environment.

However, two years ago disaster struck when a raging fire swept through hundreds of Atmaraksha's ramshackled homes. Children were separated from their parents. It was especially tragic for Sumana Naiya and Raj Kumar who each lost a parent in the blaze. The one-room school did not escape the pain of this tragedy. The classroom was halved because space was needed for other purposes. Two years later life goes on as before, but the embers still burn for those vulnerable children who remain traumatized—unable to learn, laugh and play.



Empower The Children continues to aid the children of Atmaraksha by providing nutritious lunches six days a week. In further support, **ETC's** board members have increased the teachers' meager salaries to a standard wage. **ETC** upholds the school's determination to raise awareness amongst parents about the importance of education, to empower girls to become independent, and lastly, to encourage students to stay in school until graduation. And thanks to our generous donors, these children delight in receiving much-needed holiday clothing and other small gifts each year. We trust that with **ETC's** continued support, the children will once again feel secure and protected. We hope that with much love and kindness, they will again laugh and play.



Inspiration, Love and Generosity...

Empower The Children would like to acknowledge a special group of individuals whose unflinching efforts generate hope and positive change in the lives of many Kolkata children.

Fiona...Scotland

Over 90 guests enjoyed the festivities of *Bollywood Night III* held on May 9th. Fiona Clark, a frequent volunteer in Kolkata, sponsors the annual event and is excited to bring the flavor of India to her hometown of Perth. "Everyone is delighted to dress up in Indian saris, sample the Indian cuisine, and dance to exotic Indian music.... all for **ETC** kids," commented Fiona.



Basisschool de Browukadjf...Holland

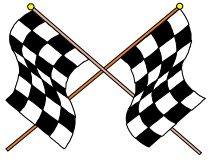


How did children from Basisschool make a difference in Kolkata? They held a one-day event called "*Boerenboeldag*" – where furniture, toys, clothes and books were sold. Add a Wheel of Fortune, an auction, baked "oliebollen" and very generous participants! The result was a huge check in the amount of 4,500 Euros which was presented to Dutch volunteer Willeke for **ETC**. **Thanks for all of your hard work!**

Erin & Brian...Brooklyn, NY

Congratulations on Erin and Brian's marriage, and many thanks for their generosity in asking their wedding guests to donate to charities in lieu of gifts. All of us at **ETC** celebrate their joy and wish them love and happiness forever!





A Sporting Day.....



The beat of the drum and the whistle of the flute signaled the start of Sports Day at the Rehabilitation Centre for Children, a hospital dedicated to orthopedic surgical care. All children participated — some in wheelchairs, some on crutches, many with walking sticks, and even toddlers — all of whom struggled against their disabilities. The most poignant event was the running race — as many of the children were *just happy to be able to walk*.



Congratulations to our New Head Teacher...Ashit Sur

Many teachers do double duty, but is it possible to do *triple duty*? Only our very own Ashit Sur can manage that! At 7 a.m. he reports to Preyrona 1 School, at 11 a.m. he goes to Preyrona 2, and then at 3 p.m. he heads to Preyrona 3. If this isn't enough, there's more!

At 5:30 a.m., long before the school day begins, Ashit and his mother, Reena Das, cook lunches for Preyrona 1. Ashit maintains this schedule six days a week. On Sunday, his only free day, he must shop for all supplies, including food, educational materials, vocational equipment, etc. Lacking personal transportation, Ashit spends hours on crowded trains and buses.

Ashit's dedication is not lost on the kids. It is a pleasure to see how he is repaid *trifold*. His tremendous efforts and commitment have been rewarded by the children's undivided attention in his classroom and their devotion to him.



A rare individual, Ashit gives selflessly of his time and energy. We can truly say that he has become an indispensable member of ETC's dedicated staff.



MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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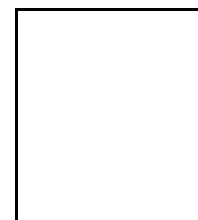
Website: www.empower-children.org

E = Encourage
M = Motivate
P = Protect
O = Opportunity
W = Wisdom
E = Educate
R = Rejoice

THE CHILDREN



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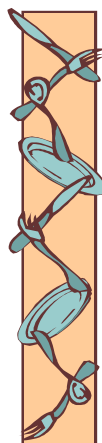


Lunch Programs

Perhaps it is difficult to imagine that

- there is no refrigerator door to open
- no cupboard to scan
- nothing to buy because there are no rupees

Through **your** continuing support, **Empower The Children** provides nutritious lunches six days a week for children attending our programs. Often this is the main reason parents send their children to school. Nutritious meals ensure happy and healthy students who can concentrate, learn and study. Please help us to change the statistics of our "global village" in Kolkata.



Preyrona 1

Preyrona 2

Preyrona 3

Nivedita Pre-School

Atmaraskha School

Benoy Badal Dinesh School

Only \$7.50 feeds 30 children for a day

OR

Only \$7.50 feeds 1 child for a complete month

"If The World Were A Village"

By David J. Smith

In this popular book, the world's population is represented as a global village with 100 people. There is no shortage of food in this village. If all the food were divided equally, everyone would have enough to eat. But the food is not divided equally. Of the 100 individuals in this global village, the sad reality is that:

60 people are *always hungry*, and
26 of them are *severely undernourished*.
16 other people go to bed *hungry*
at least some of the time.
Only 24 people always have
enough to eat.



Help us make a difference. Thank you for your generous support.

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