

# SUPPORTING DESPERATELY POOR WIDOWS



A well-established part of the work of Khasdobir Youth Action Group is a monthly payment to 70 widows, who live in extreme poverty in the area served by the Project in Sylhet. Mike Sherriff, Chair of Trustees, met some of the widows during his extended visit to Bangladesh in the autumn.

Every month on the 5<sup>th</sup> day (or the subsequent Sunday if the 5<sup>th</sup> is on a Friday or Saturday) the widows come to the office of KYAG to collect their payment. Some of the widows are too frail to come to the office so they send a representative on their behalf to collect the payment. The monthly payment from KYAG is 700 taka (equivalent to approximately £7 depending on the exchange rate).

In Bangladesh there is no government support for elderly people. People living in situations without a working

family member struggle to survive.

I asked the widows how they used the monthly allowance. Everybody spent some of it on food. They said they could only afford one meal a day, mainly vegetables at lunch time. Several mentioned that specific items of food including rice, potatoes and fish were too expensive for them to afford. Some of the widows also used part of the allowance to buy medicines. Some receive additional support from KYAG to purchase medicines. A few widows used part of the

allowance to contribute to the rent- typically about 1,000 taka a month for a single room.

I asked the widows how they found money to pay for their daily expenses. Many went door to door collecting money from better off people they knew. Some received occasional support from a relative. A few of the younger and physically able women did some work to supplement their allowance.

One of the widows I met lived

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Web Site

Supporting



## Supporting Widows

with her daughter, who was disabled. She had another daughter who was married. She lived with her disabled daughter in one room. She has received support from KYAG for 5 years. She is now in her mid 60s. She had done some work on the paving of roads but recently a stone fell on her foot and she is no longer able to work. She used to earn 40-50 taka a day from this work. She sometimes receives financial support from another family in the same village.

The widows vary in age from women in their 30s to very elderly women in their 80s. The young widow who I met had sole responsibility for two children. She lived in one

room with the children in a house owned by another family. Her youngest child attends the School Under the Sky and her older child attends the Khasdobir Government Primary School.

Another of the widows I met had no children and lived with her sister. One of the widows, in her 70s had two children. Her husband died when they were both very young. One of the children is mentally ill. The other works in a shop.

Most of the widows could not read or write. They sign for receipt of the monthly allowance using a thumb print.

## Hatfield Meal

There will be a fundraising meal at 7 pm on Monday May 22 at Taste of India Restaurant, 33/34 Salisbury Square, Old Hatfield, AL9 5HB. Cost: £20. The restaurant is close to the rail and bus stations and there is ample parking. For more details or to book your place please contact John Burgess ([johnburgess@ntlworld.com](mailto:johnburgess@ntlworld.com)) or phone 01707 891286

## Cycle Ride

The final total raised the London – Paris cycle ride is £14,732.62. A triumphant success! And a number of new, exciting fundraising initiatives are in the early planning stages. Watch this space!

## Dental Health

During the official visit in November Mike Sherriff arranged for a group of nine trainee dentists to visit three of the schools which proved to be highly entertaining and extremely worth while.

In the space of no more that three hours they inspected the teeth of 250 children (and some parents and passers-by!), filled 150 cavities and made 18 extractions – all recorded for Channel S, the UK Bangla TV channel.



## Workshop Highlights

There have been significant changes in the lives of the people of Khasdobir since the early days of the project. Many older women are now able to read and write and find jobs. Young people

have mobile phones and use the internet. Both government and NGOs have started nursery classes.

It was suggested that KYAG should put less emphasis on

**Some conclusions from the workshop run by Phil and Mike and attended by more than 20 staff and committee members.**

providing warm clothing, food and the repair of houses. It should give priority to education including in future considering computer training and income generation from making clothes for sale.

# Budgetary Revision for KYAG

The official visit to KYAG on behalf of the Trustees was made in November by Phil Watson. His visit coincided with Chair of Trustees Mike Sherriff's extended stay in Bangladesh and the primary purpose of the two of them was to analyse the expenditure in the light of the fluctuating exchange rate and the changes in the community since the inception of the project. We print below some extracts from Phil's report on his visit.



Left to right: Mike Sherriff, Kabir Ahmed (KYAG President) and Phil Watson

It was agreed that during the visit we would be looking to make short-term reductions in expenditure to try and balance the budget and then start to develop ideas for a long-term vision. About half the recommendations from the last visit had been implemented and some savings already made this financial year in addition to those made in 2015/16. Payment of two primary teachers has been stopped, one SUS has closed and one teacher has left. Much more needs to be done!

We ended up targeting three key areas for immediate reductions: Adult Literacy classes (poor attendance recently), Coaching Class teachers, and Welfare Payments

We wrote a paper for the Committee detailing our proposals, supported by Kabir, which we delivered at their bi-monthly meeting. Our hand was strengthened by an excellent full day's workshop, organised by Mike, and attended by staff, teachers from all elements of our work and Committee members.

(See page 2). The agenda covered changes in the local community since the inception of the project and visions for the future. The 20 who attended came up with ideas very similar to those we were proposing.

The Committee met the next day and agreed with the proposals except for the loss of Adult Literacy, so a compromise was reached whereby they would be offered work in the Schools Under the Sky in a new role working with parents. Mike, Kabir and Kobir (KYAG Secretary) then interviewed each of the 6 teachers individually – all opted to work in the schools.

It was agreed implementation of all the proposals would commence on January 1 2017. Overall saving from the proposals is very roughly Tk500000 (£5000) across a full year. This is necessary because of the changes in the exchange rate.

The budget is very tight, so we see areas that could be further reduced, but there are also areas where there has been

significant over expenditure in 2016. So we don't anticipate a full £5,000 will be realised and it may be necessary to send more funds this year. on a temporary basis, to help the project cope with the fall in the exchange rate. (£1 used to be worth about 130 taka but is now worth less than 100)

Our next task is to help the project establish a development fund for future initiatives to follow up recommendations from the workshop.

**Our AGM  
Saturday July 1  
11.30 am**

Our AGM will be held at Rosebery St Peter's Community Centre, Storer Rd., Loughborough LE11 5EQ. There is parking in designated areas. Do please try to come – but do let Kathleen Jackson (Phone 01509 557740 or email [derkat.46@ntlworld.com](mailto:derkat.46@ntlworld.com)) know so that we know numbers for lunch



We hope you enjoy this newsletter but should you no longer wish to receive it please let Ken Prideaux-Brune ([pbrune@olcs.net](mailto:pbrune@olcs.net) or 01494 433871) know.

## I'd like to help...

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**Please complete either Section A or B and if you are a UK taxpayer and have not already done so please sign the Gift Aid form in Section C, making each pound you contribute worth an additional 25p. Then send this page to:**

**Geoffrey Pool, 7 St John's Road, Stonegate, Leicester LE2 2BL**

**A - by Cheque** (*payable to Friends of Khasdobir*). I enclose my contribution of £.....

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To: .....

(Name of Bank)

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.....

(Address of bank)

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**Friends of Khasdobir**. At Barclays Bank, Town Hall Square, Leicester, Branch. Sort Code: 20 49 17. Account no: 20587192

The sum of £..... on .....20.....

And thereafter the same amount on the same day each month until further notice.

.....(Signature)

.....(date)

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### **C – Gift Aid**

**I am a UK taxpayer and would like Friends of Khasdobir to reclaim the tax I have paid on any donations I make to them.**

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Date .....

#### **Notes:**

**This declaration is in force from the above date until it is cancelled. It need only be made once.**

**You must pay in tax (income tax and capital gains tax added together), at least the total of all donations that you make to charities each year. The donation that you make to the Friends of Khasdobir, Bangladesh is included in this total.**

**If your financial circumstances change, and you cease to pay income tax or capital gains tax at a level at least equal to the sum that you donate to all charities each year, then please let Friends of Khasdobir know by writing to the Treasurer.**