



CALCUTTA RESCUE CANADA

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CalcuttaRescueCanada

New projects, new energy

Hats off to the charity's 150 hardworking staff in Kolkata who, after the deadly second Covid-19 wave passed in the summer, have thrown themselves into supporting those most in need with renewed vigour.

In addition to running all the core medical and educational projects, they have launched a major vaccination drive, are running training courses for the unemployed and a supplementary food programme for more than 20,000 people whose livelihoods have been damaged by the Covid crisis.

In the schools they have launched not one but three important initiatives to upskill all the teachers and help students acquire key life-skills.

On top of that, the charity has now been asked by Citibank to coordinate a massive Covid-relief food distribution effort in the city which will see 250,000 people receiving dry rations over the coming six months.

This is a huge project for CR to take on, but Chief Executive Jaydeep Chakraborty explained that the very high levels of food insecurity now being experienced in the city means that he and the team were determined to do all they can to help.

Thirty of CR's senior students are being paid to register families for the programme in their spare time, and the charity is using its extensive network of partner organisations working in the slums to assist in



distributing the food.

And a third street medicine team is being trained-up whose primary role will be to empower people in the slums with the knowledge they need to improve their own health and well-being.

These new projects have seen only a minimal increase in staff, as the charity remains focused on keeping costs low while maximising impact.

Jaydeep said that dealing with the second wave had left the team feeling fatigued but that in recent weeks they have recovered and, with the new projects, morale is good now and staff feel confident and energised again.

Welcome to our very first newsletter! pg 2
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Welcome to our first newsletter!

We are very excited to share with you our inaugural e-newsletter packed with the latest news from the projects in Kolkata and from the support group here in Canada.

It may seem a strange time, after such a challenging year, to be launching something like this. But the need to increase support for the vital work of Calcutta Rescue has never been more pressing and, as they say, necessity is the mother of invention.

With the assistance of the UK support group, who have been producing a newsletter for several decades, we are now going to publish our own e-newsletter twice a year going forward. This will allow us to share information about events and activities in Canada on a regular basis with all our supporters plus potential supporters and donors.

So please do share this newsletter with as many people as you can - family, friends, work colleagues. It is part of a plan to significantly increase the size of our supporter base in Canada - and to recruit more activists and raise more money - see page 6.

Please do let us know what you think of this newsletter - via our contact details on the front page - and tell us anything you would like to see included in the next issue which will be out in summer 2022.

Vaccinating against Covid-19 and much more...

Getting people vaccinated has been a medical priority in recent months, and not just against Covid but a dozen other life-threatening conditions.

The pandemic has led to a big backlog of people, young and old, who need vaccinations against a wide range of diseases - from tetanus and polio to hepatitis B and Japanese encephalitis.

So CR's medical team have been working hard to catch up, and so far this year have protected 516 children against 11 serious diseases. They have also given 127 girls the HPV vaccine which will protect them from cervical cancer, and have given 168 vulnerable adult patients the flu vaccine.

With fears of a third wave of Covid in India soon, getting people in the slums vaccinated against the virus has been a huge priority for the charity. It has managed to arrange

mass vaccination sessions and laid on transport so that now 4,350 of its beneficiaries have had at least one dose.

Almost all CR staff have now been double-vaccinated against Covid and over half have also had a flu jab. Dr Ghosh who heads CR's medical team said: "Calcutta Rescue is continuing and expanding this cost-effective healthcare intervention not only to children but to vulnerable adults."



Healthy and happy again thanks to support from CR

Mustari arrived at Tala Park Clinic in January clutching her tiny two month-old son Azan.

Just 17, her health had declined markedly after the arrival of Azan because she was unable to afford the nutritious food she needed to recover from giving birth.

Despite her age, Mustari already had another son and her husband earns less than £1.50 a day selling incense sticks door-to-door.

Having run away from her own family when she was just 14 because her alcoholic father abused her and her mother, she had no one else to turn to for help.

Fortunately another woman in her neighbourhood advised her to come to Calcutta Rescue.

Sheila, the head of CR's Mother



All smiles: Mustari and baby Azan

And Child Health department said:

"The girl is too young to have two children. We immediately started giving her nutritional benefits and medicinal requirements like vitamins, folvite, calcium, iron tablets and vitamin drops for baby Azan."

After six months of support Mustari and Azan are now both well. Azan, who was born prematurely weighing just 2lb 8oz, has gained healthy weight and now weighs 11lb.

"We are glad that the mother and the baby improved so well," said Sheila, and Mustari has now received advice on reproductive health and contraception.

Mustari said: "I am so happy I found Calcutta Rescue at the right time. Both me and my baby are now out of all dangers."

New course helps replace livelihoods lost to pandemic

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of people across India with estimates that over 60% have had to survive on two meals a day.

The poor have been hardest hit with tens of thousands in Kolkata either losing their job or earning a lot less than at the start of 2020.

To help people develop a new income stream in January, using money raised by last year's Kolkata Covid Challenge, CR launched its Restoration of Livelihoods Project.

This involved converting its fair-trade handicraft project into a training centre and using the skills of the team to teach people tailoring and embroidery.

Twenty people signed up for the three month programme and, as a reward for excellent work and to help them start up their own businesses, six students were given a sewing machine at the end of the course. They have since been employed by CR working from home embroidering masks.

A new batch of 20 students began the course in September.

Arunava Ghosh Roy, head of the handicraft unit, said:



"We are happy to train these students who have shown courage and energy during the course. This is an opportunity for us to find their talents and help them improve their living standards in line with CR's motto - Creating opportunities, transforming lives."

...and Manika is now able to feed her family



Manika Patro lives in a tiny rented room with her elderly father and mother-in-law, her six-year-old daughter and her husband, Bijoy, who lost his job as an electrician in March last year during the first Covid lockdown.

Since then he has been unable to find a job, so when Manika heard about CR's Restoration of Livelihoods Project she jumped at the chance to take part.

She always wanted to start her own business and loved her embroidery classes at school.

Manika said: 'I had learned embroidery and stitching baby clothes in the work education class back in school. Those lessons helped me pick up lessons quickly here. Our teachers here are very helpful and they teach us with a lot of kindness.'

Manika was one of the star students on the first course and was delighted to be awarded a sewing machine so that she can fulfil her dream of running her own small business and feeding her family.

Calcutta Rescue's founder, Dr Jack Preger MBE, has been awarded a Lifetime's Achievement Award by the UK Bengali Convention for his humanitarian work in the slums of Kolkata over the past 40 years.

Sixty three Bengali organisations gathered at Cambourne in Cambridge for the convention where Dr Jack, now 91, received his award via video link.

Dr Jack said his achievements were really thanks to the NGO's staff, some of whom started working at his side in 1979 and are still there - now supporting thousands of poor people affected by the Covid crisis.

Thanking UKBC for honouring him with the award, he said: "I am very happy that so many Bengalis in the diaspora living and working all over the world are coming together to help the people back in Bengal. I admire the efforts they are making."

Black belt and botany

"It doesn't matter where one has been raised. We can all achieve our dreams with the right kind of help," says Sourav, who grew up in a slum but is now studying Botany at university in North Kolkata with the help of Calcutta Rescue.

His grandfather brought him to the city from Bihar when he was four and was always determined Sourav would have a better life, which is why he enrolled him at CR's No 10 School.

Sourav, now 19, became one of the best students Calcutta Rescue has ever had, always top of his class. But he has many other talents, which the school has encouraged, from singing and playing the guitar to public speaking and karate.

"I am really mad about Karate," says Sourav who has won eight medals in competitions up



to national level and has been awarded his black belt. His dream is to represent India at the Commonwealth Games: "I want to inspire the young generation to do something for the country in my own way."

Calcutta Rescue's Head of Education Ananya Chatterjee is very proud of him: "Sourav always gives hundred per cent in everything he pursues and was awarded a Telegraph Scholarship for his outstanding performance in academics in 2020."

Sourav said: "I can't express my gratitude for Calcutta Rescue enough. I consider myself very lucky that the teachers took me under their wing at a very young age.

Everything I am today is all thanks to Calcutta Rescue."

Course empowers girls

Girls are getting extra support to succeed at school and in life thanks to a new programme which kicked off in September. It is funded by the Azim Premji Foundation which assists organisations working with the most vulnerable in India. In addition to practical assistance such as the purchase of textbooks and stationery, the 126 students taking part in the scheme are being taught core life-skills such as critical thinking, self-awareness, interpersonal skills and coping with emotions. The older students are also being coached to become change-agents in their communities, mainly focused around improving health, as well as running monthly courses for younger students. Twelve of these have already been selected to work with CRs street medicine teams in six slums where they live.

Outstanding care at CR schools

Calcutta Rescue was named as runner-up in the most caring school category for West Bengal at this year's Telegraph Schools Awards. CR's teachers took top prize in 2020 and in 2018 giving them a track record for providing exceptional care for students that even the most exclusive schools in Kolkata cannot match!

Helping hand for boys

With the emphasis today on ensuring girls in India get the chance to develop their full potential and overcome gender bias, there is a danger that boys get forgotten in this process. But not at CR schools where a new project developed with NGO Cloverleaf started in November.

Its aim is to work with boys to develop their understanding of gender issues such as child marriage, domestic violence, sexual health, the importance of helping with domestic chores, developing empathy, coping with stress and a host of other issues.

It is hoped that they will become role models, helping to spread gender-positive messages in their own communities. The programme will also seek to identify boys with mental health issues and provide them with counselling.

The government of West Bengal is allowing schools to physically reopen in phases as Covid rates remain low - starting with the oldest students. This is great news, except at No 10 School where the wiring is so ancient that staff fear it is unsafe. So the school remains closed until the electrical system is fully checked. This is part of a safety review of all CR properties after recent flooding led to fires and the collapse of a number of buildings across Kolkata.

You can now follow us on Facebook at [CalcuttaRescueCanada](#)

Teachers get two-year training course

Better teaching = better learning + improved life-chances for students

which is why a high-powered teacher training programme that started in September for all CR teachers is so exciting.

Calcutta Rescue's teachers are enthusiastic and determined, but most have had little professional training. On top of that, the traditional way of teaching in India is old-fashioned and ineffective compared to the methods now commonplace in British schools.

The 650 children being educated by CR face extra challenges, including the fact that most of their parents are illiterate. So giving them the best possible tuition is vital if they are to thrive at school and go on to get good jobs which will allow them, and their family, to escape poverty.

That is exactly what the two-year long teacher training programme, organised and funded by UK-based charity The Helga Todd Foundation, aims to achieve. On two Saturdays a month two teachers from the Heritage School, one of the most prestigious private schools in West Bengal, are coming in to train the 16 teachers. They will be covering everything from how to create lesson plans to bringing fresh thinking into the classroom and how to make the most of online learning.

The principal of the Asian International School in Howrah will be visiting to check how the teachers are implementing what they have learned. And the course facilitators in Kolkata are being supported by three education advisors from the foundation in the UK.

CR's head of education, Ananya Chatterjee, said: "I am sure that my teachers will not waste this golden opportunity. I want to see them upgrade their core skills and face the challenges in 21st century teaching to meet the needs of the students.

"I am dreaming of the day when all CR teachers will become more confident school leaders, better learning facilitators, catalysts for change, and excellent mentors in an open, happy, non-discriminating class environment."



A Christmas message from Jaydeep



"Like everybody around the world, we will be glad to see the back of 2021. The year will be etched in the memory for mostly the wrong reasons.

For those of us living in Kolkata representing Calcutta Rescue, this dark year has also had a thick silver lining. That silver lining is you.

The outpouring of support, money and messages, during and after India's brutal 2nd wave, was unprecedented and has allowed us to support thousands more people in a wide variety of ways.

On behalf of our staff, Governing Council and our service users, we would like to thank you all for your generous support at this time of crisis and wish you, and your families, a very Merry Christmas."

Jaydeep Chakraborty CEO

Help us do more in India

The pandemic has massively increased the need for a wide variety of assistance in India where tens of millions of people have been pushed back into poverty and many are now surviving on two small meals a day.

The team in Kolkata has really stepped up to the plate, launching a swathe of initiatives, some of which are covered in this newsletter.

All of this costs money and here in Canada we would like to do a lot more to help by raising funds and awareness of the situation.

But with only a tiny number of activists at CRC we are in urgent need of fresh volunteers with ideas, energy and enthusiasm to make a difference in the slums of Kolkata.

So if you, or anyone you know would like to get involved we would be absolutely delighted to hear from you.

There are a wide-range of things, large and small, that we need help with - from organising local fundraising to running our Facebook page and website, from approaching organisations who might donate to setting up group Zoom



We are also hoping that people of Indian origin living in Canada will want to join us. In the past few years there has been an influx of skilled and motivated Indians volunteering at our UK support group and we are working with it to see how we can best engage with the community here.

Launching this newsletter and setting up a Facebook page (check it out at CalcuttaRescueCanada) will allow us to start spreading news about our group and its activities more widely.

Calcutta Rescue is rapidly evolving into one of the most dynamic and effective charities in India. So this is a very exciting time to get involved and the

need in India has never been greater.

Please help by spreading the word to friends, family and work colleagues, by sharing this newsletter and by following and sharing our Facebook posts.

To volunteer or share any ideas you have please contact Gerry now via the details on the front page.

Together we can do a lot more!

Thank you for all your support in 2021

Dear CRC member,

To say that the past 1+ year has been difficult would be an understatement. Though it may not have felt like it, we in Canada, have been very fortunate compared to people living in Kolkata.

India's booming economy slammed into a wall when the pandemic hit, with an estimated 230 million people pushed back into poverty. A third of Kolkata's residents live in slums and many are now surviving on just two meals a day as a result of the pandemic.

Calcutta Rescue conducted a survey of its beneficiaries and found that two-thirds were suffering severe food insecurity. Time and again people have told us: ***We won't die of Covid but we will die of hunger!***

Your financial help over the recent past has helped enormously and, for this, I thank you profusely. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to the Landmann Family Fund and The Oakes Foundation which have supported us generously for several years.

The team in Kolkata has risen to the challenge of Covid-19 magnificently, now we want to do more to support them in Canada. Which is why in the past few weeks we have created our first newsletter, I hope you like it.

We have also set up a Facebook page at "[calcuttarescuecanada](https://www.facebook.com/calcuttarescuecanada)" so please follow us, and share our posts, if you are on Facebook.

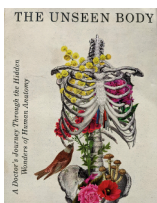
We really want to raise the profile of the charity and to raise more money for the charity, but to do this we desperately need more volunteers.

So if you can spare a little time to help in any way please let me know - and please tell friends and relatives too. With a bigger team we can do so much more!

I wish you and yours the very best of the holiday season and throughout 2022!

All the best,

Gerry Bissett (President)



INSPIRATIONAL READING: Jonathan Reisman, who worked as a volunteer at CR clinics as a medical student and set up our US support group, has just published a fascinating book about what really happens inside our bodies - to serious critical acclaim. Dr Reisman credits his work in Kolkata with allowing him to understand disease in a very different cultural and geographical context. His book, *The Unseen Body*, is published in the US by Gridiron and is available at <https://www.amazon.com/Unseen-Body-Doctors-Journey-Through/dp/1250246628>

You make it all happen...



From vaccinating children to curing people of TB, from giving hundreds of children from the slums the chance to get a good education to providing food for tens of thousands of people during the Covid crisis - you make it all happen.

It is your support that powers this amazing NGO, that buys the drugs, pays the doctors and teachers, buys the food and ensures that they don't have to turn away those in pain and hardship when they are in crisis but are able to give them the help they need.

Thank you so much - you are amazing!



Make a donation - make a difference

We are very grateful for any donation large or small. Calcutta Rescue Canada is focused on ensuring that every cent of whatever you give goes out to support the work in Kolkata. We have no paid staff and no offices in Canada and the team in India has a well deserved reputation, built up over 40 years, of maximising the impact of donations and keeping administrative costs to a minimum - currently just 14%, far less than most charities. Your donation to Calcutta Rescue Canada may also attract tax credits.

There are two ways you can donate:

1. Use the **DONATE** button at the top of our website <http://www.calcuttarescuecanada.ca>
2. Send a cheque made out to Calcutta Rescue Canada to:

Calcutta Rescue Canada

109 Thorndale Place, Waterloo, ON

N2L 5Y8

THANK YOU!

Have you got a hidden talent - juggling, music, dancing, dance, comedy, magic, balancing poppadoms on your nose...?

We are going to stage a Calcutta Rescue online talent show to celebrate Dr Jack's 92nd birthday in July next year, and to bring a smile to faces of people around the world.

There is plenty of time practise, so if you would like to take part please contact Sean on sduggan234@gmail.com

