

A Special Need For Hope

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it,” wrote Helen Keller, a woman who would know. Deaf and blind from the age of 19 months, she overcame her disabilities with the help of a dedicated teacher and became the first deaf and blind person to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Anjali is nine years old – just two years older than Helen Keller was when her education began and her life changed. Anjali has been blind since birth.

Born into a middle class Hindu family in India, she was rejected because of her condition. Perhaps it was shame; perhaps it was ignorance, but whatever the reasons, her parents couldn't see past her condition. She was little else but a burden.

In fact she was thought of as such a burden that as soon as she was old enough to survive, her parents took her downstairs and tied her up with a rope so she couldn't run away. Like an animal, she was given food and water and kept under the stairs in her parents' house.

She ate, slept and drank, but she had no love, no conversation, no touch and no education. For eight long years she lived like this. Eventually, she stopped trying to speak. She suffered epileptic fits and nervous breakdowns. People said she was insane.

When Anjali was eight years old, her father decided it was time to do something about the girl tied up under his stairs, and took her to Asian Aid's school for the blind. It is taking time, but she is beginning to respond to the care and love she is receiving there. She is learning to eat properly, and can comb her hair and brush her teeth by herself. She is learning that being touched can be a good thing, and no longer lashes out at anyone who tries to sit beside her or guide her. She is beginning to speak and is learning English and braille. Every day she learns something new about the world she was kept from. Anjali is starting to feel hope.

Raghavendra is eighteen and was born completely deaf. Deafness is difficult to deal with under any circumstances, but in a poor Indian village where there are no facilities, barely enough food, and very little understanding of deafness, the hardship is harder. Making do with gestures to communicate, Raghavendra got by, but was faced with a future of hard labouring work and the continuation of the cycle of poverty.



Anjali is experiencing love and care for the first time in her life. Raghavendra, deaf since birth, has big plans for the future.

When Raghavendra was ten, he came to study at Asian Aid's school for hearing impaired children. There, he learned sign language, which he teaches to his family at home so he can communicate better with them. Recently, he lost his father to sickness, and his mother now relies on him for financial support. Every holiday, he does labouring work to earn some money for her. However, his education means his future looks brighter and more hope-filled.

Raghavendra plans to go to university and study business so that he can run a fabric company. Despite his disability, he is becoming a capable and independent young man who may single-handedly lift his family out of poverty and bring hope to all of them.

Through special-need schools, Asian Aid gives hope to people often faced by the harshest difficulties. Dedicated teachers and holistic and specialised education are helping to transform blind and deaf children like Anjali into promising young people like Raghavendra.

“Hope doesn't come from calculating whether the good news is winning out over the bad. It's simply a choice to take action.”

Anna Lappe



Response

Bangladesh – The Potential For Hope

A land rich in culture and history, Bangladesh is the last wild home of the Bengal Tiger and boasts a growing economy. With an area about half the size of the state of Victoria, it has a population of approximately 158.5 million. However, it is also a country plagued by problems – both social and geographical.

About a third of the country floods every year in the monsoon season, stifling economic growth and leaving a large portion of the population landless. Waterborne diseases are rife, and diarrhoea, hepatitis, malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid fever claim too many lives every year. Their main victims are children.

The people of Bangladesh are mostly Muslim and primarily rural, relying on small-scale agriculture for survival. Only 47.9% of Bangladeshis over 15 years of age are literate. Many will be affected by human trafficking, with Bangladesh listed as a source and transit country for traffickers. Nobody is safe from traffickers in Bangladesh – men are regularly forced into bonded labour, and women and children are frequently taken for sexual exploitation.

Asian Aid sees a great need in this country.



With approximately 700 children currently sponsored through Christian schools and nine small village schools being supported, we have made a start. However, with our expertise in the protection of vulnerable people from trafficking, community health, and education, we aim to do much more.

Stay tuned for developments in our Bangladesh program as we work to spread hope further.

Lismore Visit – The Value Of Service

By Neville Leeson, via email

"I have just returned from a life-changing experience – a two-week missionary trip to Nepal, as part of a group of 20 volunteers from our Lismore Adventist church. We had a number of projects while in Nepal. First we conducted a VBS (Vacation Bible School) for the children at Zenith Academy; prepared a volleyball court and half-basketball court for them; and left them some sporting equipment and other gifts. We also funded and led out at a workers' retreat for pastors and volunteer workers and their wives. In addition we funded the building of a library and its contents at another school and interacted with the children there, too.

We will never forget the children at Zenith Academy (which Asian Aid sponsors) – their eagerness, spontaneity, excellent behaviour and love. They endeared themselves to us. At the pastors' retreat we were thrilled to note that at least two of the young pastors were sponsored children of Asian Aid (Rajendra Gautam, Kumar Adhikari). Again, it testified to the tremendous impact which Asian Aid has made."

Neville was one of a group of 20 people from Lismore and neighbouring Adventist churches who travelled to Nepal recently. We're grateful for their support.

Did You Know?

We can thank the 13th century Indian poet Gyandev for the game of Snakes and Ladders. It was originally called 'Mokshapat', and was played with cowrie shells and dices.

Although India is ranked among the top ten countries in terms of growth of income, it ranks at only 119 of 169 countries on the human development index. In other words, wealth distribution is a huge problem.

A Bangladeshi man named Muhammad Yunus is responsible for founding the groundbreaking Grameen Bank. The Grameen Bank is an institution that provides microcredit, or small loans to poor people possessing no collateral. He is a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Tea accounts for approximately 15% of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product, but it wasn't always this way. Before the British introduced tea to the country (then Ceylon) in the 1870s, cinnamon and coffee were the primary crops grown for export.



The group from Lismore with children from Zenith Academy in Nepal.

Meeting Arjun

By Quentin Campbell

Driving through the hectic streets of Bangalore in India, I was actually getting nervous about meeting the boy in the picture on grandma's fridge. My grandmother has been sponsoring children through Asian Aid since 1978 and Arjun is the fourth child she has helped to educate.

Having recently taken over the sponsorship of Arjun from Grandma, I was excited to be able to meet him and see what impact Grandma's contribution had made to his life.

Arjun needed sponsoring when he was a teen because his father contracted a bone disorder. His family was not able to pay school fees when his father could no longer work. With no income and high medical bills, Arjun was set to join the millions of children who do not finish their education and start working to support their families, rather than studying to improve their lives.

Fortunately, Arjun was going to a school that is Asian Aid supported, and the principal applied for him to be sponsored. My grandma answered his call for help and sponsored him. But what, I wondered, had this done for Arjun?

When I finally got to his school I was met by – not a boy – a fine young man. Arjun was quite shy and nervous. I had brought him an official Australian Cricket Cap, which he was very excited to receive.

Eventually, Arjun began to relax and we chatted about his studies, his family, and plans for the future. Arjun's father



Sponsorship helped Arjun's family get through the tough times, and they are nearly ready to stand on their own feet again.

wants him to do a commerce degree but he really wants to be a software engineer, as he loves computers.

When I asked him about where he will study (we can sponsor him through Asian Aid for tertiary studies at particular colleges), he proudly informed me that in the last six months his father's health had returned. He said it was because his family was able to spend money on health treatment for his father rather than on Arjun's education. Now that he is better, Arjun's father has found a new job and the family is saving for his college degree.

Arjun didn't have to say 'thank you' in many words. His smile and the way he held himself as he spoke about what it meant to his future and his family said it all.

News in Brief:

Promotions Calendar

Kerryn Patrick and Helen Eager have been busy visiting churches and schools to talk about what Asian Aid is doing. Keep an eye out for them at the following venues in the next few months:

Chinchilla Adventist Church, QLD – Saturday, 4 June

Kingaroy Adventist Church, QLD – Saturday, 11 June

Townsville Big Camp, QLD – from 25 June to 2 July

Atherton Adventist Church, QLD – Saturday, 9 July

North Mackay Adventist Church, QLD – Saturday, 16 July

Oakleigh Polish Church, VIC – Saturday, 23 July

Brisbane Big Camp, QLD – 16 to 24 September

If your church or school would like to partner with Asian Aid through an event, fundraising initiative or another project, please contact Kimberley Ellison on (02) 6586 4250 and extension 1340 or kimberley.ellison@asianaid.org.au to discuss possibilities.

AGM and Membership

A reminder that the Asian Aid AGM will be held at 10.45am on 21 August at the Community Services Centre, Cooranbong. If you wish to be a voting member at the AGM, please return the membership form included in the March newsletter or contact us. Membership fees are used for administration purposes.

End of Financial Year

Australian sponsors and donors will receive their end of financial year donation statement in the first or second week of July, so please ensure we have your correct contact details. You'll receive your statement more quickly if we have your email address. Please register your email address with us.

Blind School Results

Asian Aid is proud of the graduating students at Bobbili Blind School who have received a 100% pass rate, with half the students falling into 'first division' (61 – 80%), and half achieving second division results (51 – 60%).

Saying goodbye was hard. He was sitting his final exams in a month and with his plans to study with the support of his own family it will be the end of our sponsorship connection. Knowing that he has been set on the right path left me with the satisfaction that his future is secure.

The only question now is who will my family sponsor next?

1000 Kilometres For 1000 Kids

My name is Craig Harmon.

This year, I've challenged myself to run 1000 kilometres in a calendar year while seeking sponsorship and raising money in support of special-needs children at Bobbili Blind School in India, an Asian Aid school.

Why did I dream up such a challenge for myself?

It all began in 2004 on my very first trip to India. Back then I was flying B747s for Qantas. I flew the Sydney to Mumbai route.

From the first moment we descended below about 3000 feet until the time we climbed back out again to Sydney, I was in a state of shock. It found it impossible to comprehend just how there could be so many people, so much abject poverty and so little hope in the eyes of the kids I saw.

Even after several trips, I was always surprised at my reaction to the situation. I wanted to do something for the kids I met; something meaningful. But anything I could do would be a five-second-fix, and would possibly do more harm than good. I worried about the kids' futures.

In 2008 I ceased flying that route and I no longer saw the children's needs on a face-to-face basis, but I still felt it, sitting there tucked away in the back corner of my mind and my heart.

That is the motivation for the charity work, but it doesn't explain why I'm running 1000 kilometres. For that, I can lay the blame squarely on another pilot sitting next to me as we flew out of London just after New Year in 2010.

He proudly announced to me that he was aiming to run 1000 kilometres in the coming year. He then proceeded to recruit me to his mad scheme. Foolishly, I thought: 'Three kilometres a day; how hard can it be? Plus I'll get some excellent fitness from it!' and declared I would join in.

Several months down the track, I was running along Coolangatta beach. The morning was hot, I was struggling for motivation. I thought: 'Surely I can do something more with this running thing than just helping my own fitness?'

And so was born '1000 Kilometres for 1000 Kids'.

As soon as I got home I picked up the telephone and called Richard Greenwell, CEO of Asian Aid Australia. I explained to him my mad idea.

He was enthusiastic and supportive. In fact all of the staff have been great in helping me turn the idea into reality.

The blind school, one of Asian Aid's ongoing projects, is a place I would like to help in a special way. If a poor child finds it difficult to have a reasonable future in India, how much harder must it be for a disabled child? That's why it's so important to give the kids a chance through providing an education for them.

With the help of Asian Aid, I have set up a fund where people can sponsor me or donate directly to Bobbili Blind School through '1000ks for 1000 kids'.

I started running on 6 October, 2010 and I'm well on track so far. I've set up a blog where you can follow my progress throughout the year as I steadily head towards the 1000km mark. To check out the blog go to 1000ksfor1000kids.blogspot.com, or link to it from my Facebook page.

Next time you visit Kingscliff Adventist Church, look me up, come for a run with me and I'll post you into the blog! Your picture can be before or after the run – your choice!

Oh and for the record, in 2010 I ran 995km. I have made a promise to make the 1000kms for the kids – I just need your help to keep pushing me on.



Craig Harmon has run more than 630 kilometres so far to raise money for Asian Aid's school for the blind in India.

A Worthy Investment

A version of this story appeared recently in the SDA Church's Record magazine.

The generosity of one Gold Coast man and his family is now changing the lives of many more poor, disadvantaged, or at-risk children in Nepal.

It was 1986, and twenty-two year-old Peter Sandy had only just finished university and started full-time work when he decided he already wanted to share what he had. A nuclear medicine technologist, he donated any money he earned on Sabbath shifts to Asian Aid, and signed up to sponsor a child from Nepal.

His decision came partly from a sense of responsibility for "the least of these", partly from his interest in Nepal, and partly from his family's history with Asian Aid. As he was growing up, Peter's family had sponsored several children from Vietnam, and, as a child himself, he had worked on weekends to help earn the sponsorship money.

When he received the profile of eight-year-old orphan Rajendra Gautam, he had no idea how many lives that little boy would grow up to change.

Now in his thirties and with a doctorate in theology, a masters in sociology, and a degree in business administration, Rajendra is the director of his own aid organisation, 3 Angels Nepal (3AN). 3AN runs three children's homes, an anti-trafficking program, a Safe Haven for girls at risk, a brand new school, and a radio program to share health and spiritual messages – and they're just getting started.

Asian Aid is partnering with 3AN for many of their projects.

In February this year, twenty-five years after his first sponsorship payment, Peter took his wife and family to Nepal to meet Rajendra for the first time.

"The first few hours after we met were just emotionally overwhelming," Peter said. He and Rajendra have been in close contact through letters and emails for fifteen years, and Rajendra has been calling him 'dad' and his wife Fiona 'mum' for some time. To finally meet was a "dream come true" for both of them.



"As we met, I couldn't help but think of what it will be like to see Jesus face-to-face after having known him though the Bible," said Peter.

The bond between Peter and Rajendra is understandably strong. "I think his own passion

Rajendra Gautam in 1986.



Above: Pr Rajendra baptises his sister through sponsorship.

Right: Peter and Rajendra in Nepal.



for helping orphans helped us to connect," Peter said.

Peter, Fiona, and their two children Josh, 17, and Nicole, 14, were welcomed into Rajendra's own family. "I went away from Australia with a wife, a son and a daughter, and I came back with three daughters-in-law, a granddaughter, two sons-in-law and a grandfather; you know?"

To deepen the family ties, Rajendra baptised Nicole in the local river with a group of girls from the Safe Haven. Nicole plans to keep her membership with the little church in Pokhara, Nepal.

Rajendra Gautam has worked through communism, death threats, and personal tragedies to keep changing lives, and he has a fiery passion for helping those in need.

Richard Greenwell, CEO of Asian Aid, said: "His story shows how important it is to invest in young lives. Every great person was a child once. Today's children really are tomorrow's leaders, and how they are treated now can change not only their future, but also the lives of others they come into contact with."

Peter says they are planning on returning to Nepal as soon as they can.

The Sandy family will continue to support Rajendra in his work with 3AN, and are currently sponsoring a young boy at one of 3AN's children's homes. "It'll be great to see what the future holds for him," says Peter. "He can offer hope and change other lives too."



SPONSORS DESPERATELY NEEDED

One of these children would love to be sponsored by you



Abijith, 6
Single parent family
\$25



Steven Jacob, 9
Ill parents unable to work
\$30



Mutuamayya, 9
Struggling family
\$30



Nirmita, 8
Struggling family
\$50



Sri Ram, 5
Irregular work
\$25



Mohammed, 12
Large family minimal income
\$30



Vamsi, 11
Minimal family income
\$30



Surya, 8
From slum area
\$30



Sathya, 15
single parent family
\$40



Prabuddika, 12
single parent family
\$40



Nareshkanth, 11
Struggling family
\$40



Suranthiran, 15
Sick parents unable to work
\$40



Haggai, 17
From forest area
\$50



Sudeep, 7
Minimal family income
\$25



Dominic, 5
Minimal family income
\$30



Keya, 11
Minimal family income
\$40



Dipty, 12
Large family
\$40



Suma, 10
Large family
\$40



Shorna, 12
Father has seasonal work
\$40



Rumi, 12
From a large village family
\$40



Ananna, 12
Minimal family income
\$40

MY DONATION TO

ASIAN AID ORGANISATION LTD ABN 98 002 286 419
PO BOX 333 WAUCHOPE NSW 2446 AUSTRALIA
PO BOX 97-357 MANUKAU CITY AUCKLAND 2241 NZ

YES! Please find enclosed my gift for the following special needs

- | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blind School | \$ | <input type="checkbox"/> Deaf School | \$ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3AN Children's Homes | \$ | <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Safe Haven | \$ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Health Program | \$ | <input type="checkbox"/> Administration | \$ |

I would like to sponsor a child at

- Day school rate \$25pm Day school PLUS \$30pm
 Boarding school rate \$40pm Boarding PLUS \$50pm

Mr/Mrs/Miss

Address

P/code..... Email

Phone No (.....).....

Payment Method Cheque Credit card (as below) \$Au
 \$NZ

Internet transfer (we will send you details)

Card No:

Mastercard Visa Expiry Date:.....

Amount

This payment is to be a regular monthly payment a single payment

Card Name

Signature

Donations over \$2 to approved projects are tax deductible in Australia Date

I would like information on how to include Asian Aid in my will



Shima, 13
From a large family
\$40



Sharan, 15
Minimal family income
\$40



Uchaimay, 12
Seasonal family income
\$40



Vanmawi, 12
Minimal family income
\$40



Swemyanu, 12
Wants to become a Teacher
\$40



Hlahlaching, 13
Wants to become a Doctor
\$40



Nandi, 11
Family are from forest area
\$40



Lovely, 10
Wants to become a Teacher
\$40

Go to asianaid.org.au for more children waiting to be sponsored.

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