



Highlights of this Newsletter

(Dec 2015 – Jan 2016)

- *Channel of Peace*
- *A Mahila Suvidha Bank*
- *Family Support groups in Mental Health*
- *The Laughter Factory – Chris' Mime Workshops*
- *Starting New projects– On education; peace Building*

Channels of Peace

One year ago, a few days before Christmas 2014, violence broke out after militants gunned down innocent people. With the one year anniversary approaching, there was fear and tension in the air and with rumours flying thick and fast, things were getting out of hand. Instead of just sitting and watching the situation deteriorate, some of us NGOs in Lower Assam got together and decided to do our bit in defusing the situation.

We took out a joint rally in Kokrajhar town and then in each of our own areas which had experienced violence, we held candle light rallies for peace. In our Deosri area which saw 10,000 displaced last year, the candle-light rally on 23rd December evening helped lift the thick curtain of mistrust and fear and was a huge confidence booster for the communities. We are glad we could be channels of peace.



Other Work & Happenings

1. We have started 5 *Family Support Groups* for helping care-givers of mental patients deal with their stress and issues of caring for the mentally ill. There is a lot of enthusiasm and interest in the group right now.
2. Started Project Shiksha to support education quality in forest areas with support from Sh. Kamal Agarwal. The Child Development Centres will help children learn through various activities.
3. We are on the verge of starting a small pilot project with Unicef support to try and develop a model of community *Disaster Risk Management* in a Conflict situation.

Mahila Suvidha Bank

Women in villages work so hard to make life better for their families. But what about making life a bit better for them? With over 600 cycles being successfully revolved by the women's federations, we decided to extend the model to cover basic conveniences needed for modern living. We had found that less than 6.5% of women in our SHGs owned either a pressure cooker or a gas stove – two conveniences all of us take for granted.

Women do not use pressure cookers for fear of it bursting or getting damaged in a wood stove. Gas stove with connection costs Rs.6500 and out of the reach of most women. With the support we got from *Sh. Chetan Shah*, we got a chance to tackle the problem and give loans to women for these conveniences. The women's federations have already helped 129 women get cooking gas in their homes and 270 women have got pressure cookers. Of course, we had to run trainings on the use of pressure cookers and gas stoves before generating what is today long "waitinglists" in the hands of the federations.

We are happy to be saving trees cut for firewood apart from helping women save time, energy and cost.



Lolita of Palashguri Village has this to say of her gas stove "Earlier i cooked food in fire (wood) and we had to go far in the forest in search of firewood. It would take most of our time and energy and we still had to buy firewood from the local sellers which cost a lot, especially in winters. When I heard of mahila suvidha bank, I was keen (to buy) a stove but I was frighten of using a gas stove. But now, it has been 5 months I am using it and I am happy to say that this has saved my time, energy and money."



The Laughter Factory – Chris' Mime Workshops

We development workers get so serious about tackling the myriad problems of the world that many a times we forget to laugh! With stroke of luck, we got *Chris Yerlig* of *Magicians Without Borders*. U.S.A spend time with us again. That's twice in one year! We missed Tom the Magician but it was a pleasure having Chris with us for almost three weeks in December ...Doing what he essentially called "laughter therapy" with the ant team. In three batches, each batch had 10 members and every one of our team members – from project leaders, the team members to accounts and also admin section etc etc. – all took turns to undergo a 4 day long workshop with Chris.

Chris worked his magic in making the shyest and the quietest in every batch to blossom enough to act and mime and perform in a public market at the end of the 4th day ! Forgetting their tensions, familial problems, work issues, letting go their inhibitions, squealing, acting, playing the batches got an important lesson in pushing beyond their comfort zones and working on their communication skills. The camaraderie developed over laughter has given more energy to go on in this serious business of changing the world!

(Donations to the ant are exempt from Income Tax as per rules under Sec 80G of the Income Tax Act)
We also welcome any feedback on the newsletter. Please do get in touch. Our contact is

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