

## SPECIAL EDITION

### Asha Breaks New Ground—Students Enter Semi-Private Universities for the First Time!

*“A historic milestone in Asha’s journey to transform slum education.”*



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## 02 Director's Message

Dear Friends,

Each year, as the high school results of our Asha students are announced, our hearts fill with overwhelming pride and deep gratitude. This year, hundreds of children from our slum communities—who live amidst poverty, overcrowded homes, and unimaginable adversity—appeared for their school-leaving exams. And yet, over 98% of them passed. These numbers are not just statistics. They are stories—stories of courage, sleepless nights, and dreams held tightly against all odds.

Behind every result is a child who studied by candlelight, a mother who skipped meals so their child could buy books, a sibling who took care of the younger ones so their sister could revise in peace. These are the invisible heroes of our communities. But passing these exams is only the beginning.

Our students now stand at the gates of another challenge—the Common University Entrance Exam. It is a test not just of knowledge, but of resilience. They compete against students from elite schools, equipped with tutors, technology, and every advantage. Many of our students walk into exam halls feeling like outsiders. But still, they walk in—with heads held high and hearts full of hope.

As part of our ongoing commitment to support higher education, the Asha family stood beside them—every step of the way. We offered coaching classes, helped them navigate complicated forms, comforted them through their fears, and even travelled with them to distant exam centres. Our Asha Ambassadors and volunteers turned this daunting journey into one filled with warmth, friendship, and belief. Recognising the pressure of seeking admission into Delhi University alone, we helped our students explore other prestigious institutions—Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Jamia Millia Islamia—so their chances wouldn't be limited, and their dreams wouldn't be boxed in. We encouraged them to look beyond the obvious, and toward possibilities that matched their passions.

But perhaps one of the most powerful transformations we witnessed was among the parents.

Many of them had never stepped inside a school. They had never dreamed of university—not for themselves, and certainly not for their children. Yet, with Asha's support, they began to walk this unfamiliar path with pride and purpose. We asked them to accompany their children to exam centres, even if it meant losing a day's wage. And they did. They faced the heat, the confusion, the long distances—just to stand beside their child. That single act of presence said: "I believe in you."

For many students, that moment of having their parent by their side gave them strength they didn't know they had. And for the parents—it changed everything. They began to believe that education could truly be the bridge out of poverty. Now, as these young people prepare to enter college, the financial strain is growing. Fees, transport, books, meals—it all adds up. And for families living on the margins, even one small expense can feel impossible. This is where you come in.

Your support—no matter the size—can be the difference between a child continuing their education or being forced to give up. It can mean a future teacher, nurse, lawyer, or engineer gets to step into their destiny. Let us walk together with these remarkable students. Let us believe in their dreams, fuel their determination, and stand by them as they rise above every obstacle.

With deep gratitude,



Dr. Kiran Martin



## 03 From Slum to University: The Unseen Struggles of Students from the Slums

For a child growing up in Delhi's slums, the dream of going to university often feels like a distant star—beautiful, but forever out of reach. Crushed under the weight of poverty, discrimination, and systemic neglect, many dreams fade before they even begin. But with Asha by their side, some dare to dream anyway.

When the government introduced the Common University Entrance Exam—a national-level exam meant to equalise opportunity—it instead widened the gap for the poorest. Suddenly, students from cramped one-room homes, studying under dim lights and battling constant hunger, had to compete with those from elite schools and private coaching centres.

The struggle begins long before exam day. The Common University Entrance Exam syllabus wasn't even released until weeks before the test. How do you prepare for an exam when you don't know what's on it? The online application process was a maze—confusing, technical, and full of pitfalls. Students had to carefully select subjects, upload endless documents, and navigate slow websites and power cuts. Most families didn't have the required caste, income, or residence certificates. Their parents—daily-wage earners—didn't understand why any of it was important. So Asha stepped in. The Asha team made repeated visits to government offices, stood in lines for hours, and fought red tape to ensure no child would miss their chance because of a missing paper.

Then came the day of the exam. Centres were often two hours away, with reporting times as early as 7 a.m. Students woke at 4 a.m. and had to travel alone through unfamiliar, often unsafe routes, because their parents couldn't afford to miss work—not when it meant losing the day's only income. But Asha refused to let them go alone. We made sure every student was accompanied—by a dedicated team member or one of our trained Ambassadors. Many of these Ambassadors were university students themselves. They waited outside exam centres for hours in the blazing sun, offering water, comfort, and courage. Some even sat on roadside pavements with their own books open, studying for their upcoming exams as they waited.

This is not just a test of academics. It's a test of resilience, strength, and belief.

Through every step of this painful, exhausting journey, Asha walks beside them—not only with digital tools, coaching, and financial help, but with deep, unwavering love. Still, the path is long, and we cannot walk it alone.

You can help a student cross the finish line. Your support will cover university fees, coaching classes, transport, books, digital devices—everything needed to turn barriers into breakthroughs. Every donation brings a first-generation learner one step closer to a university degree and a life of dignity and hope.

Please give today. Help us ensure that no dream is left behind. Because when a slum child steps onto a university campus, it is not just a personal victory—it is a quiet revolution.



## 04 Spotlight 1

### Mantasha: The Girl Who Refused to Give Up

In the narrow lanes of Seelampur slum in North Delhi, where dreams often die before they're born, I live with my two elder sisters in a one-room shanty. I'm Mantasha, eighteen, the youngest of us three—and the only one still studying.

My story began long before I did, in a village in Uttar Pradesh. My father died when my mother was still young, leaving her with small children and no support. Tormented by in-laws and drowning in poverty, she fled to Delhi, hoping for a better life.

But Delhi was unkind. We found shelter in my uncle's house in Seelampur. Then he died too. His widow threw us out. I remember that day—standing on the street with no roof, no food, and nowhere to go. Just when we were losing all hope, neighbours intervened and fought for us. With their help, we secured a tiny room in the same house we were once cast out of.

That's where I grew up. My mother began peeling electrical wires to earn a meagre income. It barely covered food and rent. My eldest sister left school to help, and when my mother's health declined, things became unbearable.

Then came the hardest day—my mother passed away. I was just a teenager. The three of us were left alone, vulnerable in every way. My eldest sister took over the wire-peeling work. Every night, we heard boys outside making vulgar noises, trying to scare us. But we clung to each other, our sisterhood stronger than fear.

Despite everything, I held on to one dream: to become a teacher. But as my 12th board exams and college admissions approached, I began to think maybe I should give up, start working, and help my sisters instead.

That's when Asha stepped in like a miracle.

I had been part of Asha since Class 11, but after my mother's death, they became more than a support system—they became family. The team counselled me, reassured me, and said, "You don't need to worry about fees or college. We're with you."

Those words lit something inside me. I studied hard—day and night. Asha's Ambassadors guided me through difficult subjects. And when my entrance exam came, they didn't let me go alone. At 4 a.m., they woke up, travelled two hours with me in public transport, and stood outside the exam hall for three hours, praying. I passed my school-leaving exams with excellent marks. Now, I'm preparing for Delhi University—a dream I never thought possible.

We still live in that same one-room house, but now it holds hope. I want to become a teacher, return to Asha, and give back what I received.

With tears in my eyes and fire in my voice, I say: "I will make Asha proud. I will make my sisters proud. I will make myself proud."



## 05 Spotlight 2

### Sugra the Asha Ambassador: Walking Through Heat and Hurdles

The sun hadn't yet risen when I began preparing for one of the most important days in the lives of two young girls—Swaima and Dolly—from the Chander Puri slum community. It was their Common University Entrance Exam day, and though they were the ones appearing for the test, it felt like my exam too. As an Asha Ambassador, I had walked with them every step of the way—through doubts, deadlines, practice tests, and long hours of study.

Swaima had been with Asha since she was four, growing up in our care, shaped by its values. Dolly joined in 11th grade. Her story broke my heart—her father was an alcoholic, and her mother ironed clothes just to ensure her children could study. Despite their struggles, both girls had the fire to rise above. I had spent countless hours with them—preparing for boards, discussing sample papers, helping them register for the Common University Entrance Exam, and most importantly, trying to build their belief in themselves.

At 4:30 AM on the morning of the exam, I received a call from Dolly. Her voice was shaking. Her father, who was supposed to accompany her, was drunk and unable to move. She was scared and confused. I knew we had no time to waste. I told both girls to meet me directly at Shastri Park Metro station. Even when I asked Swaima if her parents could come, they refused—saying, “If you're going with her, there's no need.”

At 6:30 AM, we met at the station—two nervous students and me, carrying all our hopes. The exam centre was far, in Rithala Begumpur. We rushed through the metro ride and then took a rickshaw through unfamiliar roads. We reached at 7:15 AM—just in time. I double-checked their documents, gave them a few last words of encouragement, and watched them walk in.

Then came the hardest part—the wait. With no place to sit, no shelter, and the temperature touching 43 degrees, I found a small spot in front of a shop, right next to a garbage dump. The stench was unbearable. But I stayed. I stayed because I had seen their hard work, and I knew how much this exam meant to them.

Three hours passed. My clothes were soaked, my body was exhausted, but I kept thinking of them inside that hall, giving it their all. When they finally came out, I saw it in their eyes—relief, pride, and quiet joy. And in that moment, every ounce of discomfort disappeared.

That day reminded me that success isn't just reaching the finish line. Sometimes, it's being the one who walks beside others through every obstacle—without expecting anything in return.

That's the Asha way. That's how we **Pay It Forward**.



## 06 Feature Article: Asha's New Focus on Semi-Private Universities

Asha has long been committed to transforming the lives of children and young adults from underserved communities by providing access to quality education. However, as competition for admission into prestigious public universities such as Delhi University intensifies—with students nationwide vying for a limited number of seats—many talented and deserving students face the unfortunate reality of being left behind.

In response to these evolving challenges in the higher education landscape, Asha has strategically shifted its focus towards facilitating admissions into semi-private institutions like Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (IP University). IP University offers a diverse array of professional programs that are closely aligned with today's dynamic job market, equipping students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

IP University's academic portfolio includes programs such as BBA, BCA, B.Tech, Law, Paramedical Sciences, Journalism, and more. These courses are uniquely designed with strong industry linkages and include valuable internship opportunities at leading companies such as WIPRO, Infosys, Amazon, and Deloitte. This practical exposure significantly enhances students' employability and prepares them for sustainable careers.

While the fee structure at IP University is significantly higher than that of traditional public universities, it remains considerably more affordable than many private institutions, which often lack guaranteed placement support. For context, the fees for a four-year Biotechnology course are approximately ₹7,400; for the full BBA program & B. Com (Hons), ₹5,600; and for Paramedical courses, ₹5,200. Beyond academics, IP University offers extensive placement support, English proficiency training, and access to experienced faculty—elements that collectively make it an excellent platform for Asha students to thrive and succeed professionally.

Recognising the transformative potential of such education, Asha emphasises the importance of providing deserving students with these opportunities, despite the financial challenges. Many of the young talents we support come from families with limited economic resources, where even these comparatively moderate fees are difficult to bear.

This is where your support becomes invaluable. Donations help cover tuition, study materials, and other essential university expenses, ensuring that financial barriers do not hinder these bright young minds from pursuing their dreams.

We invite you to join us in this vital mission. Together, we can break the cycle of economic limitation and empower passionate, determined students to build successful futures. Your generosity can transform lives—turning aspiration into achievement.



## 07 Spotlight 3

### “I Thought Dreams Were Only for People Who Had Everything”

I never imagined they could belong to someone like me.

My name is Rinku. I am 18 years old and live in the Seelampur slum in Delhi. My home—one tiny room—is where my parents, three younger siblings, and I eat, sleep, study, and survive.

My father, once a broken man from years of brick kiln labour, now sells fruit on a cart to feed us. My mother lost the use of her right hand in an electric shock at age 12, but still cooks, cleans, and cares for all of us with quiet strength and one working hand.

I started working at a doctor’s clinic when I was 15, earning less than £2 a month. Watching the doctor serve people with care lit a spark in me—a dream to become a scientist. But dreaming in a slum is hard. I studied under a flickering streetlight during power cuts, often on a rooftop, because inside was too noisy. We couldn’t afford coaching or books—only hope.

Then, Asha found me.

The Asha team gave me academic mentoring, access to digital learning, and most of all, encouragement. They saw potential in me when no one else did. They told me my background didn’t define me—my dreams did.

I worked hard and passed the entrance exam for Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. On admission day, I left Seelampur with my father and Asha’s education officer, Shiv, at 6:30 a.m., heading for Dwarka—over 35 kilometres away. We were nervous, excited, and hopeful.

But when we reached, everything collapsed.

We were told to pay £1,700 immediately. My father and I had £860—our entire life’s savings—and no cheque book, no ATM card, just an old passbook. Shiv Sir and I rushed to the nearest bank to arrange a demand draft—but the server was down. Hours passed. Hope slipped away.

Back home, when my mother heard what had happened, she mortgaged her only jewellery.

“Take it all,” she said. “But let my son study.” When Dr Kiran heard of our struggle, she acted immediately. Asha paid the remaining amount on the spot. She saved my dream.

Today, I study Biotechnology. Asha lifted me when I had nothing. Dr Kiran believed in me.

**I will rise—not just for myself, but for every child still waiting to be seen.**



## 08 Transforming lives

### Support our cause

**£3200** – Covers one year of university expenses for a professional course for one student in a semi-private university

**£1600** – Covers one year of university expenses for one student in a public university

**£1200** – Covers one year of expenses for an allied health course for one student

**£1000** – Covers running and maintenance expenses for one IT lab for one year

**£800** – Covers upskilling computer courses for five students for one year

**£500** – Covers clothing, footwear, and transportation for one student for one year

**£200** – Covers the cost of books for a university student for one year

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## Friends of Asha (Great Britain)

If you would like to contribute to the lives of poor slum dwellers in Delhi, then you can become a Friend of Asha. Friends of Asha (Great Britain) aids our activities through donations, fundraising events, volunteering opportunities and raising awareness of the work we do.

#### For more information, contact:

**Dr Richard Hogben, National Coordinator,  
Friends of Asha GB**  
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#### Donations

If you would like to make a donation to Asha, and you are a UK taxpayer, you can Gift Aid your donation. Download a form from the website or request one from the Coordinator. Friends of Asha GB (Charity Registration No. 1085071) can collect an extra 25p for every pound you donate.

**1. To donate online directly from your Bank** Make a payment to  
The Lloyds Bank account of Friends of Asha (GB)  
Sort Code 30-96-31; A/c No. 01899891

#### 2. To donate online

Send your contribution to Asha by visiting our website at  
<https://asha-india.org/get-involved/donate/great-britain-donations/>

#### 3. To donate by cheque:

Make your cheque payable to  
“Friends of Asha (GB)” and mail to  
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