

Our mission : To open the eyes of young people in Northern Ireland and India to their unique potential to change the world through working together

## Message from Christine

The highlight of the past few months has undoubtedly been the school principals' trip and we have devoted this newsletter to their reflections on this experience.

In February, this group of Northern Irish senior educationalists generously gave up their half-term to come to India with Saphara. Led by myself and Dominic Breen, it was a real joy to have such talented and committed educators share their professional expertise with the Indian schools supported by Saphara.

The workshops they ran were greatly appreciated by the Indian teachers, equipping them for their task of inspiring pupils to believe in their own potential despite their difficult circumstances. Yet I know that our principals felt that they received just as much encouragement in meeting such amazingly passionate educators who make a huge difference to their students' lives. These mutually empowering encounters are right at the heart of Saphara.

One highlight of the trip for me was to meet up with the final year students at Kaplani High School, while they were sitting their final exams (GCSE equivalents). I was delighted to hear recently that they had exceeded all expectations, with three girls – Prabha, Chandani and Reeta - achieving First Division! With so many obstacles facing girls staying in school this is a great achievement and highlights the impact of the Saphara girls' resilience programme now empowering 300 girls.

It is so exciting to have four Saphara school and student teams heading to India again this July. This experience is life changing for young people and teachers alike and we would greatly value your prayers as we head off.

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*PS Do come to our Commissioning Service if you can – details overleaf.*

*If you would prefer an electronic newsletter please email Flo at [Flo.Adair@saphara.org](mailto:Flo.Adair@saphara.org)*



## An amazing day in the Himalayas

Today we set out on a three hour trip on windy roads, with steep tiered mountain sides and vultures, cows and monkeys scattered along the road. Holding our breath (and the contents of our stomachs down) as we traversed the roads with the snowy Himalayas just visible in the distance.

After three hours, we went on a short mountain walk to visit a women's community group. They had a goat raising project which is funded by Saphara and organised by MGVS. There were nine women, who had currently twelve goats through which they sustained their families. As a result, all their children were in school and they had developed a credit union to support each other when times were hard. It was inspiring to see how something so small and simple had such a profound and positive effect. Keep buying goats this Christmas, people!

We then visited Gair Government High School to see the Saphara funded Girls' Empowerment Programme. There were four young female facilitators who were teaching resilience and life skills to adolescent girls. The girls put on humorous yet pointed role-plays which looked at the rights of girls to education and handling peer pressure. It was exciting to hear the difference the programme had made to the facilitators, and to see how their newfound passion was being transferred to the girls - the changes were clear to us all.

Lastly we stopped at a local village, where Saru, a young girl with polio, had received help from Saphara which enabled her to see a doctor to get fitted with leg braces along with a walking frame. Previously bedridden, Saru was now able to come out of her house to meet us all. This was exciting as are plans for an operation in the near future which will enable her to further progress.

Peter Dornan



## Hope amidst distressing conditions

Our day began with a visit to the marginalised community which was an experience of hope despite the horrific surroundings. The sights and smells of the conditions in which these people live in the 21st century is profoundly shocking. Yet there is no clearer place to see how education can make the difference for the lives of children. As we walked the mud-clad streets, with the pigs in the gutters and the sewage and detritus seeping through our flip flops, we despaired inside. We passed the children who don't go to school. They stand forlorn with hair matted, scantily clad and empty eyes, unable to communicate.

We turned a corner and all of sudden the pied piper of SNEHA, teacher Nadesh was surrounded by smiling, happy children with their hair combed, their shoulders held high, greeting us with cheers, 'The Saphara people are here, come and see!' On Saturday, we had met with the head of TearFund in India and he shared with us the plight of many children who are trafficked or sold into forced labour. When they disappear, nobody even asks 'Where have all the children gone?' In contrast, in this marginalised community, all the SNEHA children appeared and talked enthusiastically about their love of school and their aspirations for the future. The work of SNEHA through its partnership with Saphara is ensuring these children don't increase the statistics of forgotten children.



With it being a Hindu Holy Day, all the children and their parents were in the community, many dressed in colourful traditional clothes.

While the rest of Dehradun were off on holiday, the teachers of SNEHA, Kaplani and Donk schools engaged in personal and professional development workshops. They considered how each of them is special with their skills

and qualities reflected in lotus flowers, peacock feathers, handprints and hearts contrasting with negative messages that make us wilt, hide away, keep us enchained or break our hearts. We provided a range of workshops on the importance of

'plan, do and review' as a teaching process, different ways to reward pupils, characteristics of effective learning, active learning strategies and leadership skills. The quality of interaction with the teachers was excellent and their questions were profound and insightful. We celebrated all the learning and reviewed the day with one of the teachers stating, 'God has been here today and I see God in all of you'. What a way to end a staff development day!

Cheryl Stafford



## Final Reflections

'Dreams are not those things that we see in our sleep; they are the things that never let us sleep' (APJ Kalam). This seems to me to encapsulate the indomitable spirit of India. It is embodied in all of the people in the schools, in Surender and Prince David whose NGO work is doing so much to support the poor and the marginalised, and in the lovely Saphara team who I shared reflections with at the end of each amazing day. I don't know yet how this experience will change me, but I know it will help me to keep dreaming.

*Ms Jacqui Argument, Principal, Priory Integrated*

It was a once in a lifetime experience and thanks to Christine's exceptional planning, we had a wonderful trip. The highlight was visiting the schools and seeing the joy on the faces of the pupils who were so eager to please. Saphara is a wonderful organisation and we saw the results of all the hard work over the past 10 days.

*Miss Sally McGahan, Principal, Dominican College*

My second visit to India with Saphara and all expectations were exceeded. I was privileged to see the schools and the progress that has been made in the past few years. I have been humbled and inspired by the truly inspirational people we have met. A wonderful experience!

*Mrs Bernie Devlin, Vice Principal, Assumption GS*

What an amazing experience and humbling opportunity to visit all the Saphara schools in India. Fantastic staff and pupils, despite very difficult circumstances. A brilliant journey and a great team.

*Mrs Barbara Green, Principal, Beechlawn School*

Exceptionally well organised and planned from beginning to end with a variety of school contexts. A wonderful country of contrasts, of brilliance and of deep poverty and social injustice. However, in spite of this, there is the hope for something better for these wonderful children – through inspirational 'ordinary' people doing extraordinary work.

*Mrs Julie Taggart, Principal, Nendrum College*

The teachers in SNEHA, Donk and Kaplani schools and our own N Irish principals worked wonderfully together - I look forward to seeing this aspect of Saphara's work developing. Thank you to the principals and to Cheryl for making such a great contribution to the work of our Indian schools.

*Mr Dominic Breen, Saphara Board member*

## Saphara Commissioning Service

**Sunday 21 June at 4pm**

We would love you to join us at Dominican College, Fortwilliam, as we ask for God's blessing on our 90 young people and teachers as they head off to India on Saphara teams in July.