

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

It's been a very exciting time at Saphara over the past six months. Our Girls Flourishing programme has been transforming the lives of over three thousand girls living in poverty, and you can read all about the new developments overleaf.

In April, a team of ten teaching students and their lecturers from St Mary's and Stranmillis Colleges came to India as part of their Diversity and Mutual Understanding programme to experience the wonderful educational environment at SNEHA School. Flo Adair joined us on that trip to carry out a review of the NGO partners we fund. She was delighted to report on how effectively these partners have used this money – a total of £350,000 since Saphara began in 2008 - all thanks to your generous support!

Our NI school teams are heading to India from 30 June. We are delighted to have students and teachers from Ampleforth College to join us for the first time. We would greatly appreciate your prayers for all the young people and teachers and we would love you to join us at the:

**Commissioning Service  
Sunday 19 June at 4pm  
Chapel of Unity  
Methodist College  
Belfast**

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## Inspirational Encounters and Passionate Young Teachers

It was a real privilege for me to travel to India recently with the team from Stranmillis College and St Mary's College as they carried out a week of their teaching practice in our Indian schools.

I was so proud of our ten young people as they engaged with the Indian children with such compassion. It wasn't only how they carried out experiments, played games, sang songs, taught English and created art with such enthusiasm - but how they genuinely cared for the children as they visited with them in their homes in the marginalised communities, ate lunch together and even got their hair styled by them. Evening reflections always needed to be accompanied by a few tissues!

Dr Matthew Martin from St Mary's College and I were both humbled and delighted to be asked to open the new staff toilets at SNEHA that the team had been raising money for. As we were handed the scissors on a petal strewn plate to cut the ribbon, we came to the conclusion that this wasn't something that had been on our bucket list but it most certainly should have been.

I'll forever be inspired by Dr Reeta Rao, Prem Gideon and Surender Singh as they lead the NGOs we work with to change the lives of children from the poorest families in India. Their generosity of spirit seems to know no bounds. It was great to see how the covered stadium at SNEHA built with Saphara funding is such a fantastic space for the school children – shading them from both sun and rain. The two new light filled classrooms we built there are also a real bonus – especially for the teacher who has been coping with 100 children in the Nursery class!

It was great to see the improvements at Kaplani High school too – last time the walk down the steep path from the school to the canteen where the children eat their midday meals filled me with fear and trepidation, but the new steps we built meant I could practically skip down with the children (and I'm no mountain goat!).

Another fabulous memory was meeting with the Kaplani girls who have just completed the Saphara Girls Flourishing programme. On my last visit two years ago, some were too shy to speak – while this time they couldn't wait to have their turn to share their hopes for the future! They told us how now they dream of becoming nurses, teachers, computer engineers, bankers and doctors. Now I have returned to Northern Ireland determined that we at Saphara will do all we can to enable these young girls to fulfil their dreams – and we hope that you will join us.



Flo Adair,  
Saphara  
Financial  
Controller

## Journey Reflections

'My Saphara trip has been filled with laughter, tears and inspiring stories, but it is the smiles of the beautiful children I have met that I will never forget! Their love for learning and life has touched me and I will treasure all of the special memories forever.' Aoife

'I've heard it said that 'People who appear to have nothing to smile for, often smile the most' and after my last 10 days in India, I can say that this is fact. A humbling, emotional and inspiring experience that will stay with me forever.' Maeve

'Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain. I think these children have all helped us learn how to dance.' Sarah

'A personal journey half way around the world; a part of my heart will always remain in India. An experience beyond my wildest dreams.' Aideen

'Sometimes we look out into the world and see so many problems and so much pain and wonder how we can make a difference, but seeing the smiling faces of the children we met through the work of Saphara showed me that making a difference IS possible.' Jill

'I never imagined just how much my outlook on life could change within 10 days. Reflecting on this incredible experience I can whole-heartedly say that in this world we make a life from what we give.' Maria

'Saphara brings hope to the people of India and the beautiful children we worked with. I feel truly blessed to have been a small part of this; with hope anything is possible.' Ashlea

'They say travelling is the best education and who could argue after such an adventure.' Ryan

'Thank you for this opportunity to teach these precious children – but more to learn from their courage and joy.' Jennifer

'I will never forget the inspirational people I have met or the joy and love on the faces of the Indian children. Saphara has given me the most touching, humbling, life-changing and purposeful journey I have ever had.' Hannah



## Girls Flourishing!



In November, Saphara director Linda Thompson and I visited our partners MGVS and SNEHA to get feedback from the girls involved in the Girls Flourishing programme. The overwhelming enthusiasm of everyone involved and the measurable impact on the girls' lives, have encouraged us to expand the programme to new partners in other parts of India. In January we gathered in Delhi to hear the research findings for the CorStone programme that underpins our work, and we were delighted to have NGO leaders from Odisha and Tamil Nadu in south India and from Delhi, join Cheryl Stafford, myself and our current partners for the event. We were honoured to have Irish Deputy Ambassador Gerry Kelly join us as well as representatives from the Catholic Archbishop of Delhi.

Adolescent health education programmes are seen as vital in India to combat the marginalisation of girls living in poverty. But the work of CorStone has shown that this alone does not produce sustainable results. The key missing ingredient is the girls' capacity to value themselves and so to see themselves as 'worthy' of better education, nutrition etc. In this approach an essential aspect is to enable the girls to become emotionally resilient and so gain the self-respect needed to flourish. Having piloted this approach for the past 2 years, we have had some amazing successes – including girls succeeding academically in unprecedented numbers, and girls taking action and initiative in their communities. One example is how a group of out-of-school girls in the marginalised community near SNEHA, decided to address the high incidence of dengue fever in their community. They petitioned, on many occasions, the local government officials whose job it was to spray the mosquito-ridden area - and finally they agreed to do so. Two months later, there is much less dengue fever and local people are amazed that girls - who are often seen as worthless and not even capable of going to school – have achieved so much. Now they are being asked to sort out all the local problems!



This summer I will be joining our partners in Delhi for a training course to enable us to reach many more disadvantaged girls with this programme, reaching out to many in government schools. I can't wait!

Christine Burnett