

Duaripara Family Development Project Update July 2009



*Supporting and empowering girls at risk of commercial and sexual exploitation
An Oasis project in partnership with the Church of Bangladesh*

1. Introduction

In January 2009 we began a new 3-year phase of the Duaripara Family Development Project. Over the past 6 months we have had continued opportunities to work with many vulnerable girls and their families in the Duaripara slum community.

Detailed survey work has shown that the girls' families are living in appalling conditions and extreme poverty. The average family income is around £25 per month. About half is spent on rent for a one-room slum house made of bamboo, tin and sometimes bricks. Each room often houses 8 people, sharing a toilet with 9 other families.



Many of the girls in Duaripara continue to be at risk of commercial exploitation. Girls as young as 10-years-old work in garment factories or domestic labour due to family economic pressures. Often harshly treated for low pay and long hours they are extremely vulnerable to abuse. Since January we have witnessed 4 girls leaving to go to work. Whilst this is sad, the good news is that we have worked with many others to prevent this. It highlights the continuing need for our work. Without the project many girls would go to work and not have the opportunity to learn or continue their education. Hearing them laughing and learning with each other brings joy to us all.

2. Project Update

Through the first half of 2009 the project has been expanding and developing capacity to enable us to implement our strategy for the next 3 years. Following the appointment of two additional teachers in January, we conducted a recruitment process to appoint 3 new key staff members to work in the areas of health promotion, community liaison and economic development. These staff started in March and are working well together as a multi-disciplinary team alongside the teachers, increasing our impact in working with the girls and their families. In April the new staff conducted survey work to build relationships with the families and help design appropriate interventions.

We have made significant progress in redesigning our health promotion work with input from a British Doctor, building on recommendations from last year's external evaluation. We are no longer employing a doctor, but focussing far more on health awareness promotion and facilitating access to existing services. We have identified local health services that could benefit the girls and their families. Unfortunately it is often difficult for them to gain access to these, but we are in a position to advocate on their behalf as well as providing additional services where gaps exist.

After a lot of searching we have finally found a new building to rent for the project centre and have just moved there at the beginning of July. We were bursting at the seams in the old one, and are thrilled that the new building gives us more space to welcome the girls' families into the centre and scope for holding meetings with families and running groups and awareness sessions.

3. Highlights from January-June 2009

The 34 girls who gained admission to a local school in January have settled in well. We are continuing to liaise with the school and the girls come to our project centre in the afternoon for additional tuition and holistic activities. Our teachers have received training on assessment and goal planning and this has clearly improved the quality of our education programme. An additional 69 girls are taking part in our catch-up scheme for those who have missed a lot of education. Attendance rates in the catch-up programme have risen over the past 6 months. Each month we see the girls learning and opening up to staff about issues on their minds. Anyone who visits the project is greeted with a very enthusiastic welcome! Due to space constraints we decided not to begin a pre-school programme this year and will review at the end of the year.



The holistic development aspect of our project is helping improve the girls' self-esteem, confidence and life-skills through a weekly programme of creative activities. From January to March we had a team of 6 gap-year students from the UK who spent 2-days per week at the project focussing on such activities. They made a huge impact not only on the girls but on the staff too. They ran a "stranger danger" campaign to help girls stay safe, conducted various sessions from first aid to human trafficking as well as teaching English, dance and crafts. Their commitment and love for the girls was clearly evident. This team and other volunteers have helped our local teachers learn how to run a holistic programme. The teachers have now put in place a 3-month activity plan. It is wonderful to go into the centre and see the girls busily making crafts or performing dramas about issues they face. We can clearly see their self-confidence growing and that they are becoming equipped with skills and understanding that will benefit them throughout their lives. Over the next 6 months we plan to implement the "Step-by-Step" Oasis resource that allows assessment and planning for holistic development.



Our new health promotion officer is an excellent asset, bringing a wealth of experience to the project. We have a more accurate picture of health needs in the community and have identified core issues. The girls' health is being monitored with food supplements and support being provided for those suffering from malnutrition. We have run several awareness programmes for key aspects of health and family life, visiting families to deliver fundamental health messages. We have run adolescent health

sessions in which 33 girls and 48 mothers have participated. Our health promotion officer was able to have frank and open discussions about important adolescent health issues.

We are in the process of helping eligible families register for free or low-cost medical treatment at a local clinic. Although many of the families qualify, they had not previously been able to gain access to these services. After advocating on their behalf, more than 50 families are now being granted access. We are continuing to support those with more complex health needs, signposting them to government programmes where possible and following-up those who have not been able to sustain their required medical treatment. We have also started a group for girls who are working in garment factories. 35 girls are participating, coming to the project centre on their day off. This group is still in its early stages but will likely include some educational, awareness and recreational activities according to the needs and interests of these girls.

Our economic adviser has been researching job opportunities for the girls and their families and identifying possible training options for them. Several girls or family members have gained places on training courses including computers, beautician, tailoring and driving.

The families we work with experience considerable difficulties not only financially but also in their relationships with each other. Children are often caught in the midst of this. Our community liaison worker spends her days visiting families and talking through their problems with them. As a result we have already seen some changes in their attitudes as she gently shows them love, compassion and understanding. A few of the adolescent girls have had really difficult lives, often not receiving the love and parenting they needed. We have identified some who are particularly at risk and are working more closely with them and their families. Ten mothers are now participating in our savings group. They have expressed interest in basic literacy and as our relationships with these women grow we are discussing other issues with them such as health and family life.

4. Stories of people helped by the project*



Congratulations to Mili who passed her secondary school certificate with Grade A, and is the first girl involved with our project to achieve an educational qualification. She is now enrolling in college to take her higher school certificate, and is providing an inspiring example to other girls in the slum.

Our community liaison staff report changes in families who they are working with in issues of safety, abuse and domestic violence. Nazma's mother describes how she is feeling much more at peace than she has for a long time. Last year she had an operation, financial difficulties and significant problems in her relationship with her husband. We helped towards medical costs and our staff visited her regularly, offering emotional support. Nazma is doing well at school and her younger sister has also now joined our education programme. She feels

hopeful for the future.

Mariam lives with her mother in a small house they share with relatives. Mariam's mother has no income so spends most of her time out begging. We discovered that Mariam was being encouraged by older girls in the community to visit makeshift brothels with them and we became extremely concerned for her health and well-being. Following our staff's intervention, Mariam's mother is taking more care of her. Mariam is still very vulnerable, but we have built a strong relationship with her and her mother and are continuing to support them. Mariam now has the opportunity for beautician's training and dance classes which she is very excited about.

**Note: Names have been changed as per child protection guidelines.*

Thank you for your support of our Duaripara Project which enables us to continue working with these girls and their families, and see changes in their lives.

