



# VAROSHA 2017

**Hope and Empowerment through  
Education and Opportunity**

*"I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy." Rabindranath Tagore*

We are grateful for the dedication  
of our partners in Kolkata:

Debsankar Roy and the  
team at Pub Pashchim

Arup Chakrabartty and the team  
at Health Vision Research

Geeta Venkadakrishnan  
and the team at Hope

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## VAROSHA'S NEW TEAM MEMBER

**W**elcome to our team! This year we welcomed Mrs. Tapasi Bandyopadhyay officially to the Varosha team. Tapasi brings a wealth of experience having devoted decades to the empowerment of women and children in need, in the treatment and rehabilitation of drug abuse and in the education/prevention of STDs/HIV. From 1991 to 2006, she was the Assistant Secretary, at Vivekananda Education Society, Kolkata, a leading NGO. From 2008 to 2014 she worked as an evaluator for the National AIDS Control Program. She has presented at several national and international conferences.

Tapasi was instrumental in Varosha's early projects at Ajanta Basti in Kolkata working as the main project director onsite and overseeing the operations. We are very grateful she has agreed to come onboard once again to offer her guidance, ideas and support to our partners in Kolkata.



Coming Soon!! We are doing a feasibility study of restarting the beautician training program which was very successful in Ajanta Basti. With the growing demand for manicure, pedicure, facials, threading, waxing and hair coloring/styling among all socio-economic levels of society in Kolkata, this has the potential for trainees to work in parlors or start their own businesses.

**N**ew for 2017!

This year we had a unique opportunity to partner with the Hope Foundation, Kolkata on a training center in Chetla. The project provides vocational training in computer literacy and spoken English to youth/young adults roughly 15 to 25 years of age in the underprivileged areas around Chetla. However to prepare them for the workforce they also needed interviewing and other communication skills to increase their confidence. A total of 26 trainees enrolled for the computer course and the spoken English course. They attend classes 5 days per week.



We want to begin a class in Tally ERP-9, an accounting software package that is used widely in India for students once they complete the basic and advanced computer classes. With these marketable and job-ready skills the students will be more prepared to apply for jobs.

Initially there were obstacles because the educational materials were in English and the students were only comfortable with Hindi and Bengali. Many students lacked confidence in themselves. With a lot of support, home visits and counseling against absenteeism, there has been a significant improvement in attendance and

performance.

Varosha fully funded the operating expenses of the center which included the salaries of the computer and English teachers as well as job placement activities for the students. This project was made possible due to a generous grant from Geeti and Parthasarathi Ghosh.

Facts and figures don't always tell the complete picture so meet one of our students at the Chetla Center:

Rajina finished 6<sup>th</sup> grade but had to leave school because of financial difficulties. She had to work at home to help her family. She married at a very young age and divorced after the birth of her daughter. Now Rajina is a 28 year old single mother. She works as a cook in several homes to support herself and her 6 year old daughter.

Rajina had already taken courses in tailoring. She joined the Chetla Center in April 2017, to learn basic computer skills and improve her spoken English proficiency. Rajina hopes to eventually run her own tailoring shop. She is motivated to learn English so that she can help her daughter with her schoolwork. Her teachers say it is a joy to teach her.







## H

### healthcare Assistants and Physiotherapy Training

In June, 2017 we began our third batch of healthcare assistants training in HVR's Laketown facility. Fifteen students who had a minimum of 8th grade education enrolled for the classes.

The lessons were taught from 11am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday. This year we purchased a LCD monitor for the classroom so that the students can be shown videos in addition to the lectures from doctors and healthcare professionals.

A total of 29 students completed the first two sessions of the program and are now working in nursing homes or private residences. There was a 90% completion rate for students who signed up. These sessions were made possible due to a generous grant from Amitava and Adrija Das.

After the classes the students are assigned to nursing homes to complete their practical training. With an aging population in Kolkata requiring medical assistance, we see potential for this program to provide good jobs for the trainees.

*United Nations World Ageing Populations Study (2015) found that five countries (China, India, the United States, Japan and the Russian Federation) accounted for half of the world's population aged 60 years or over in 2015. In India, the number of older persons is projected to grow by 64 per cent between 2015 and 2030*

*Fully trained nurses in Kolkata are expensive to maintain long term and Ayyas are not trained in medical care or hygiene. The trained nurse assistants after completing the program are in a good position to fill this gap in medical care.*



## P roject Updates



A major part of Varosha's goals is to regularly interact with our partners, evaluate programs and provide analysis and advice when it is needed. Projects also reach the end of their life cycle and we have to decide when people have been trained and need to move forward independently. In this regard we wound down our Ashar Alo, program which provided training in tailoring, embroidery and block printing. Between 2013 and 2016, we trained 112 ladies in partnership with HVR. It is rewarding to

follow up and see how they are doing. Here are a few examples: Rupali P. and Madhumita B. started a tailoring shop and earn about Rs. 5000/- and Rs.3000/-per month respectively. Aparna S. works at a garment factory and also makes night dresses at home. Bimala B. and Jyotsna S. work from home. They get orders for falls-pico of sarees, blouses, and churidars. Their monthly income is about Rs. 3500/- but during Puja time it is close to Rs.9000/-. Anima S. and Sonali R. work at a tailoring shop. They earned above Rs.5000/- and Rs.3500/- respectively.



For several years we had a program with HVR in Sonarpur where ladies would come to the center to make noodles/pasta together. The ladies in the community formed a cooperative and began running the operations by themselves. Earlier this year we formally transferred ownership of the equipment we had purchased into their name. They are now working, earning and sharing the proceeds of their work.

The goal of Varosha is to train, provide assistance and support initially but ultimately we hope the trainees will be able to support themselves.







## S support for Farmers in the Sunderbans (Aranyer Alo)

This successful program, partnering with HVR was renewed for the third time. We began by identifying 14 families who needed help with crop farming, small animal husbandry and fishery.

Due to demand, we were able to add additional families to have a total of 19 families supported

under this project. Seed, fertilizer and insecticides for vegetable plants were provided to six families, fish food for 15 families, goats were given to seven families, chickens and ducks for nine families and long-life plants/trees to eight families.

We are very pleased to report that all the families were able to increase their annual income by between Rs 20,000-30,000/-. The small animal husbandry, breeding of goats, chickens, ducks along with egg production has been particularly successful so we would like to expand these during the next cycle.

All the women in this program were assisted in opening bank accounts and saving their earnings.







**C**hildren's Academy, Dipto Alo, in Kulti and New Alipore, in partnership with Pub Pashchim

We were requested to add two more children to the after school care program in both locations and were more than happy to do so. Now 54 children attend the after school care program in both locations. Monday to Friday they are given a hot lunch when they arrive after school and then between 5pm and 9pm, they are assisted in completing homework and also taught English, math and computer basics.

The goal is to provide a stable and nurturing environment and instill self-confidence and interest to learn so they can be successful. We strongly believe that this program has made a significant positive difference in the lives of the children to instill confidence and keep them away from destructive influences.

At the New Alipore Dipto Alo center, we are fortunate to be able to provide instruction in dance, art, and theater/drama as well. The children and teens thrive under the caring teachers who love to teach them. We believe this exposure to the creative arts has a meaningful impact on the students.





## Tailoring Micro Loans

Longtime Varosha supporters are familiar with our tailoring projects in partnership with Pub Pashchim. The tailoring schools at New Alipore and Goragacha have now been converted into business centers. One of the teachers assists the ladies working at the centers get orders from local boutiques. The profits are shared with the ladies.

The ladies requested help from Varosha to buy sewing machines. We agreed if the ladies could raise Rs 1000/- themselves, we would give the remaining Rs 5000/- to encourage a sense of ownership and pride. The ladies are to pay Rs 1000/- back per month and if they do that for four months, we will waive the last month's payment. The pool of funds repaid will be used to help other ladies buy a machine.

This year three ladies in the New Alipore center have received the funds, purchased machines and are generating between Rs 60,000-70,000/- per year. Another three ladies at the Goragacha center have been accepted into the program and will receive their loans soon. We would like to set up a similar program for ladies of our tailoring program at the Kulti center.

**O**n Saturday September 9, Varosha hosted our first Donor Appreciation Dinner. Since no financial donation made to Varosha is ever used for administration or non-project expenses, the Varosha team hosted the event. We were overwhelmed by the level of joy and support we received and would like to acknowledge:

- \* Rahul Saigal, Cuisine of India, for giving the delicious and elaborate appetizers and dinner for our guests free of charge
- \* Champa Bhattacharyya, Royal Sweets, for supplying her mouthwatering sandesh at cost
- \* Aian Mazumder, Aian Mazumder Photography, for the beautiful photos
- \* Leema Chatterjee for performing a graceful tribute to Ganesha to start our evening and Durga to get us into the upcoming festive season
- \* 2017 BAGC President and First Lady, Shankar and Mallika Sarkar for attending and the BAGC present and past Executive Committees for their unwavering support
- \* Chairperson of Banga Bhavan, Sonali Biswas for all her help with the facilities and logistics

We are so grateful to our spouses and families who came, helped and celebrated with us. Your love and support is priceless. Thank you to our donors who came and those who couldn't come, but sent good wishes. None of this can happen without your generosity, support and encouragement.

Sincerely,  
Your Varosha Team

Santi Banerjee, Krishna Chakrabarty, Shompita Chatterjee, Neela Dasgupta, Bikram Dewanjee, Chandrima Roy, and Shuvani Sanyal





