



# the dreams of the downtrodden



## and the face of hope

Absolute poverty is a terribly ugly thing. Many of the children whom we support come from families torn apart by abuse at home, grinding poverty, drugs and debt. Life loses its meaning for those with no hope. Kerstin has been in Pakistan this month listening to the moving stories of some of these children — and talking to some of the teachers who are inspiring them.

She has written: "I am left with many memories of children who have eagerly told me they want to become doctors, nurses, pilots or pastors. They told me that if they didn't go to school they would be sweeping floors or working with their parents at the brick kiln. Maybe, just maybe, their dreams will one day come true — with our help and yours."

**"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The Bible, Galatians 6:2**

# Poverty is not a statistic

In September 2012 the *DAWN* newspaper wrote:

*A study on poverty has brought Pakistan face to face with a reality that it will find hard to accept: every third Pakistani is caught in the 'poor' bracket — some 58.7 million out of a total population of 180 million subsist below the poverty line. These are daunting figures.*

Poverty has many faces. Mother Teresa once wrote: "We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty." All of this is true among Pakistan's Christians today.

We cannot pretend that we will overcome this problem, but at least (on the Starfish principle of one at a time) we are part of the solution. Kerstin, who just came back from a two-week visit to Pakistan, writes on the next page: "I am more than ever convinced that poverty and ignorance go hand in hand."



She has brought back some sad stories of poverty, neglect, loneliness and fear in the lives of children. She has also spoken to — and watched — some of the heroic efforts of teachers and staff to help their students manage their sorrows.

We are as ever dependent on God's amazing provisions to bring some hope into the lives of the poor. Thank you for sharing His compassion for a wounded world.

— Mike Wakely



## Maria's story

**On her visit to St.Peter's, the school at the heart of a bamboo plantation, Kerstin met Maria.**

Maria thinks she may be 12 years old. Her mother died when she was very small. Her father and an older brother work as daily labourers on a farm. Maria has to get up at 4 am to cook breakfast for the family. A teacher then brings her and her younger brother to school in his rickshaw.

After school she cooks and cleans again. It is a man's world and men do not cook or clean the house. After doing her homework she is usually not ready to go to bed until 11. It is no wonder she is not doing too well in class. But her dream is to be a police woman. She likes the uniform!

And what is the reward at home for this brave girl? When I ask if she has any special fears she replies that her brother often beats her and she is afraid that nobody loves her. She could not have a more caring and loving Principal than Ruth. *Pray that she can do something to help Maria.*



## "I want to bring these children out of darkness"

**Arthur (above, with a group of children from a brick kiln) works together with his cousins to provide a future for poor Christians through the Miracle Schools. He took our Newsletter cover photo. This is his passion:**

"The children of brick workers have a specially hard life. Brick kiln workers are a broken and disheartened people. The world has forgotten them. They can't read or write. They urge us to open schools for their children. My passion is to save these children and give them a hope in Jesus. The Lord has given me power to work for these children."

## "The only way forward..."

**Dr. Paul Bhatti is the Minister of National Harmony — and the only Christian — in the Government of Pakistan. He serves also as Chairman of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance.**

**His brother, Shahbaz Bhatti, was Minister for Minorities until his assassination in 2011.**

Dr. Paul has expressed his appreciation for the work of Starfish Asia and our support for the education of Christians:

“I was very encouraged to learn of the work Starfish Asia are doing in Pakistan, especially the thirty-two schools your charity is supporting in the low income and slum areas.

Clearly the need for education has to be a priority in Pakistan, especially among the poor and marginalized, which I am personally committed to myself.

It was very heartening to see the work of Starfish, as I see this is the only way forward in bringing minorities back into the mainstream.”



# Reflections on poverty and hope

Kerstin visited Pakistan in February together with Sheila Thomas, a long-time friend and Starfish Asia supporter. Here are just a few insights into the reasons why we are so committed to do more in Pakistan.



## Zafar and Amna

We are not yet supporting the Helping Hands school in the Johore Town suburb of Lahore. Johore Town is an upper middle class housing scheme, but at its heart is a colony of desperately poor Christians. Zafar Daniel and his wife Amna begged the Catholic priest to allow them to use his church as a school for Christian children. The school is lively but totally under-resourced. These insights come from Kerstin's visit to the school.

"On entering the church building we are met by the buzz of children reciting their lessons in every corner. Six groups are sitting on the floor. Amna herself teaches three of them. 150 children are on the register, all from very poor families. Amna smiles as she moves from group to group. She is a woman full of laughter. She laughs when she tells how she and her husband sold their wedding bed to support the school. She laughs when she tells how the school was inaugurated with one Bible, two donated white boards and two chairs for the guests of honour — her in-laws."



## Ashraf and Rani

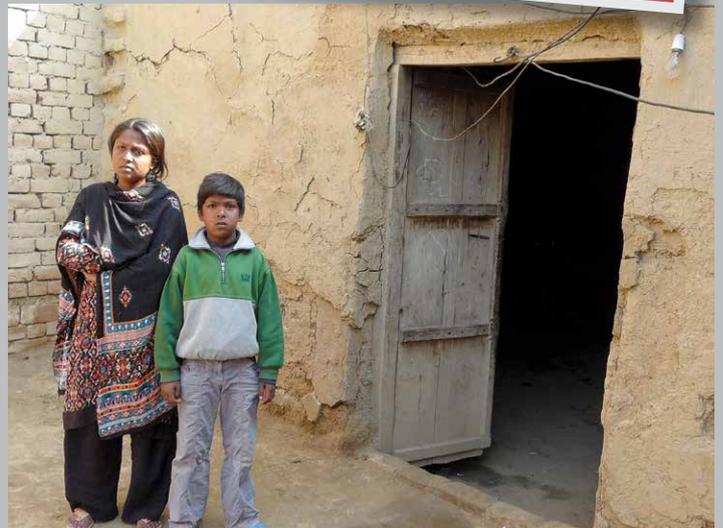
Amna's students come from families that are heart-wrenchingly poor. Ashraf, a manual labourer, broke his arm two months ago. Incompetent doctors did not set it right and he can't work. His wife Rani and four children have nothing to eat. The eldest daughter Bushra had a job, but because she is engaged to be married her future in-laws won't allow her to work. It is considered shameful — culture at its worst. Starfish Asia has a Compassion Fund and Zafar went off to buy groceries. The expression of pure joy and relief on Rani's face when she received big bags of food was the best moment of the day.

## Samina and Sameer

Their father is a daily labourer. When there is no work there is no money. This morning he went to work without breakfast because there was no food in the house. He came back at ten with some food he had bought for money he had earned this morning. This is poverty — hand to mouth.

The mother died with heart failure some time ago. Sameer is 10. He has not been to school for two months because he is weak from hepatitis. Samina, who is about 25, has had hepatitis for five years! Both are as sallow and yellow as the cracked mud house they live in and exude utter dejection.

An older sister, sitting on a rope bed in the courtyard, looked at us with the same resigned expression. She had two sleeping children with her. She had just fled from her husband, a drug addict, who was beating her. We left a gift for food, with the assurance that Zafar will continue to visit. Starfish Asia is providing funds for medical diagnosis and care.



## My overwhelming impressions

I am humbled by the generosity of those who have so little and yet give all they have ...

I am infuriated by the oppression and greed of people in power ...

I am impressed by the tenacity of children eager to study, even as they have to cook, clean and look after their siblings because mother has died ...

I have huge admiration for teachers who work for a pittance because they want children to realise dreams they haven't even dreamed because they have never learned to dream ...

I am more than ever convinced that poverty and ignorance go hand in hand ...

## ... but not without hope!

Thank God for Zafar and Amna. They are the kind of people of compassion and extraordinary faith that it is our privilege to support. They went ahead and opened a school with no promise of help and no shortage of obstacles. They are a light in the dark. We hope we can start providing some further help very soon.



NEW  
PROJECTS  
★

## New projects

We sometimes wish we could stand still for a while, but we face many needs that are both urgent and necessary. Two new projects have joined our Starfish Asia family since the start of the year. We urgently need more income to meet these growing commitments.

### The HERF Children's Home

HERF (Human Education Resource Foundation) provides a Home and education for 14 Christian girls from dysfunctional or very poor homes. Starfish Asia has undertaken to provide partial support in order to rescue the Home from closure.

The HERF Home is run by friends of Starfish Asia whom we have known for several years. Miss Sumera Ashraf is in charge of the Home, helped by volunteers. Girls from needy families are welcomed on the recommendation of local pastors.

Anita and Sangeeta come from a very poor and illiterate family in a village. Their father was a drug addict before he died, leaving them orphaned. They wanted to study but it was a 10 kilometre walk to reach the Government school in another village. Joining the HERF family has given these girls new hope for their lives.



### The Gospel School, Hadayatabad

A small Primary School with one broken classroom was opened two years ago by the Gospel School in Bilal Town. It serves 60 Christian children from the homes of some desperately poor sweepers. Now generous donors in Singapore have provided for the school to be upgraded and improved. A new building will be rented, another teacher hired and books and uniforms provided.



Sheila Thomas with Hadayatabad children

## Nauman and the curse of drugs

Kashi is the wife of Anser, the Starfish Pakistan Director. She has an important role alongside her husband, especially with her experience in teaching. One reason for Kerstin's visit was to help her in her role. Here is another insight.

Kashi has a wonderful way with children. When we visited the Gospel Care Home in Bilal Town I found her hugging a little boy who was crying his eyes out. After he had eaten a chocolate and dried his eyes, he told us his story.

Nauman is 11, the second of three brothers and one sister. His father is a drug addict. One day his mother took the other children and ran away from the home. Nauman was left behind. He is frightened because His father has threatened to sell him. His mother never comes to visit.

Two years ago his aunt sent him to the Care Home, where he is happy. He likes to study at the Gospel School. He wants to become a Pastor — like Shamshad! *Pray for Shamshad and Rubina as they act as mother and father to these needy children.*



We hope this letter has illustrated that poverty is not just a statistic. Our funds are very stretched right now. An extra gift would enable us to do much more to help the poor, and would be much appreciated.

## Tell us you care!

Starfish Asia is a member of the  
Fundraising Standards Board



- Yes, tell me more about schools and communities that need my help. Send me more information.
- I enclose a gift of £ / \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for Starfish Asia

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postal code / Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

In UK, return the coupon to: Freepost RRAY-KKCU-SGZC  
Starfish Asia, 32 Beck Lane, Beckenham, Kent BR3 4RE (UK)

In USA, return to: Starfish Asia, P.O. Box 603, Westerville, OH. 43081 (USA)

In Singapore, contact: Starfish Asia (Singapore) Ltd.  
3 Ghim Moh Road #07-280, Singapore 270003

DATA PROTECTION ACT, 1998. Starfish Asia will only use your personal data in connection with its charitable purposes. It will not make your details available to other organisations.

 **STARFISH  
ASIA**  
giving hope to the children of Pakistan

### Please Note

While we guarantee that donations to specific projects will go in full to the nominated project, any tax recovered under the Gift Aid scheme will be used at the Trustees' discretion.

[www.starfishasia.com](http://www.starfishasia.com)

Starfish Asia (UK)  
32 Beck Lane, Beckenham, Kent BR3 4RE (UK)  
Email: [mike@starfishasia.com](mailto:mike@starfishasia.com)  
Registered UK Charity No. 1099672

Starfish Asia (USA)  
P.O. Box 603, Westerville, OH. 43081, USA  
tax exempt under section 501(c)(3)

Starfish Asia (Singapore) Ltd.  
3 Ghim Moh Road #07-280, Singapore 270003  
Email: [geraldine@starfishasia.com](mailto:geraldine@starfishasia.com)