

The sad face of Elishba Khan

Elishba is five years old. She comes from a Christian family. We listened to her sad story:

"Her mother brought her to be admitted in our school, but she could not pay the fee, so the school is supporting her. Her father is a drug addict, and her uncles also. Their situation at home is very difficult. Elishba has a brother and sister, and the New Life School will support them also."

You can read more on page 3 about the amazing work of the New Life School near Sahiwal.

"Pakistan's poor are even poorer now."

In this issue we focus on the struggle faced by many schools to open up again and bring their students back to the classroom. The poor are even poorer now. Here is a reflection from another trusted partner on the difficulties she is facing:

"Five parents came today. They said: 'We want to send our students back to school, but we do not have the fee.' I said to them: 'Don't worry. It is no problem.'"

"The situation is very bad. Many students come in their ordinary clothes. They do not have a uniform. They can't pay the fee, they can't buy the uniform, some don't even have shoes. They can't afford the books. Some cannot even afford a pencil. I say to them: 'Don't worry.'"

Welcome to Rob

On page 2 we introduce our new UK Executive Assistant. Rob is not a newcomer to Pakistan. He was brought up in Karachi. One of our UK Board members was his school headmaster. Please pray for him.



*The face of sadness.
The face of joy.*



"I can really see how God prepares us for the next step."



Rob Bavington with Johanna and family

“I’ve heard it said that there is something about Africa that just gets into your blood. I would say something similar about Pakistan. I think it gets under your skin! I was born and brought up there. I lived in Karachi until I was 16 years old and, try as I might, I haven’t been able to shake it out of my system.

An old school friend reminded me recently how concerned I was for the poor during the monsoon when their small shanty homes would be destroyed and their lives ruined.

Over the years I’ve worked with homeless people, done youth work with Youth For Christ, and spent 17 years in Sweden. I was involved with Church Planting while also working within the Swedish school system as a team leader for around 20 foreign language teachers. Looking back I can really see how God uses all the different experiences to prepare us for the next step.

I haven’t been able to get Pakistan out from under my skin!

Born and brought up in Pakistan, Rob Bavington joined the Starfish Asia team in January. We invited him to join us three years ago, when he was living in Sweden. He now lives in Bradford, and works part-time with a local charity serving the homeless.

That fantastic country with so many possibilities and so very many challenges! I’m excited to be involved with Starfish Asia and to start getting to know the 50+ projects which really improve life for some of the very poorest of the poor through giving children a better chance in life — from small rural schools in poor brick kiln communities to schools in my home city of Karachi. The need is immense, but so too are the rewards.

- ◆ The knowledge that teachers are receiving a more worthy salary as well as getting the opportunity of good quality further training to help them be better teachers.
- ◆ Supporting Christian students through the scholarship scheme so that they can rise above the level of their own parents’ education and get jobs with better chances.
- ◆ Making sure that the material needs of schools are met — fans for the hot summer, alternative power supplies to make sure they have electricity all day, building improvements, tables and chairs not to mention toilets and wash rooms.

Pakistan gets under your skin because nothing there is straightforward. Please do pray for me as I learn the ropes from Mike. Pray for wisdom to build the cross-cultural relationships that are inevitable in this work. Pray that God will help me to quickly get alongside Anser and the other Starfish Asia staff, as well as the ability to make good contact with the project leaders. Pray too for the ability to lift the vision for the work with passion and clarity. We don’t want to simply “keep things ticking over”, but to be able to do even more to raise standards of education in more schools, helping even more teachers and students. Pray that we can raise the required funding to enable this to happen. ”



During the long months of lockdown, Edkasa’s online lessons continued in Science and Maths for Grades 9 and 10. Six times a week they have provided interactive teaching via their live online platform for students in 12 Starfish Asia schools.

Edkasa have been testing students regularly to see how the lockdown has affected student learning levels. They reported in January: “We plan to revise the entire curriculum and will be conducting a full book test in the month of March, after which we will begin a revision cycle.”



Books for 2021 New books for 10,000 students

Schools need Books!

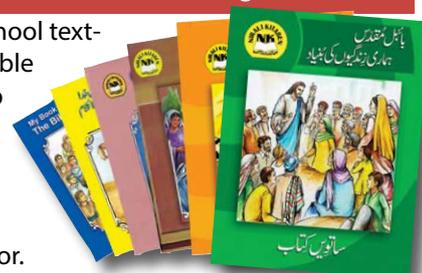
There is some uncertainty and confusion about the start of the new school year and the school syllabus.

The Pakistan Government has announced that the new school year will begin in August — and a new curriculum will be published. Some schools will begin in April and will therefore use the old curriculum books.



Whether required in March or July, we need funds to provide books to at least 10,000 children. The cost for a set of five books is about £4 / US \$5.60 / Sing \$8.

In addition to essential school textbooks, more than 8,000 Bible Curriculum books will also be provided for children in classes 1 to 5 — and, for the first time this year, the new Book for Class 7, already funded and paid for.



- ◆ “We have seen improvement in our grades after your teaching,” said Sosthenes from the Christian Public School in Kotrey.
- ◆ “I love your idea of starting Grade 8. It will be beneficial for us,” wrote Mr. Karamat from the Talents School, Lahore.
- ◆ “Wonderful idea. Go ahead,” said Naeem from Dean School.

The slow return to 'normal'



New Life School Chak 65/5-L, Sahiwal

For five years Mehtab asked Starfish Asia to help him with his school in a village near Sahiwal. Finally in 2014 we began to provide some help to enable him to bring more Christian children to his school. The village is a mixed community, and the school serves both Christians and Muslims.

Mehtab and Azra have a Youtube Channel. "We share the Gospel through this channel. 13,000 people have seen my videos. I make the videos with my mobile." See 'Mehtab Gill' on Youtube.

New Life School serves 104 students, with only 8 teachers managing 10 classes. Sadly some of the Christians failed to return to school after the lockdown.

We asked Mehtab: **What happened when the school was closed due to the lockdown?**

"Starfish Pakistan did some online training, which was very helpful. Our first year exams were done in December. The teachers came on Mondays and Thursdays to give homework. Thankfully, in my village there is no case of COVID-19. In school we wear masks and Starfish Pakistan gave us a temperature gun. In the morning we check the students and teachers. They all sit 3 feet apart in class."

Do you have Bible teaching for the students?

"The Bible Curriculum books are being taught in our school twice a week. I take a Bible class on Saturdays and my wife takes a Sunday School class for the children. The Church meets in our school, and I will be ordained as a pastor in the coming month."



Eshal and Hurab

"About 20 children come to school in the school van each day. Two girls, Eshal Masih and Hurab, have been coming with the van for the past 2 or 3 years. They have two brothers also. Their home situation is not good. They have no washroom, and sometimes they do not even have anything to eat. New Life School is helping them."

"Pray for us"

"In Pakistan we do not have vaccines. After the lockdown, many children did not come back to school. Many have gone to work for their families, because Christians are facing many financial problems. We have contacted them and we pray they will come back."

"We need prayer for some needs in our school. Worksheets need to be photocopied and I have to go 4 kilometres on my motorbike to get photocopies." (Comment: This prayer has been answered.)



Light Education System Youhannabad, Lahore

Mrs. Zanobia Stephen opened a school for her Christian community next to the AoG Church. Starfish Asia began to provide help, especially for teachers' salaries, in 2014. Most funding now comes from churches in Singapore.

Zanobia Stephen is the wife of Pastor Stephen of the Assemblies of God Church in Youhannabad. Her daughter Sharon (above) works with her.

In 2020, with Starfish Asia help, the school began a total renovation of the building, with the addition of 4 classrooms on the second floor. We asked about the progress:

"The grey structure (cement and plaster), the ground floor room renovation, cementing, electrical work and plumbing is done. The new classrooms upstairs are full of light and very airy. Flooring is complete now and doors and windows are being fitted."

How did you manage during the lock-down?

"Online classes were difficult, because very few people have smartphones or computers. We called the senior classes to come in once a week, and we gave some homework to the juniors. Now most of the children came back, and more will come. Some classes use the school, some are outside and others in the church. The kids are excited to be back. Now we are starting exams."

Support during lockdown

"Most of our parents are daily-wage labourers who lost their jobs during the lockdown. The church supported about 20 families. One of our students, Waseem from Class 7, lost his father, and his mother took him out of school and sent him to work on the brick kiln. We went to meet the family and persuaded them to bring him back. We continue to help them as much as we can."



"Pray for us"

"Pray that we will quickly adjust to our new school building. The teachers need to catch up with students again. Not everyone in the class is now on the same page."

"Pray that in 2021 our teachers will receive focused, face-to-face training in their own subjects."



“ Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. ”

New Year's Day, 1 January: A great way to start the New Year. Anser and the Starfish Pakistan team emerged from the office and went into the street outside. A cook was hired to prepare a huge pot of rice and chicken biryani, and they offered a free meal to workers sitting by the roadside.



Staff members went out to look for people waiting for work, sometimes in vain, and looking hungry. They chose 300, and had the joy of giving them a free meal of steaming biryani. Senior students from three secondary schools were invited and joined in to help with the cooking, packing and distribution. "Nothing else could be a greater start to the new year 2021." Only one

expressed his disappointment: "We gave food to 300, but we could have given to another 300 if we had enough."

And that was just the beginning

Since then, every Friday, Starfish Pakistan staff have been joined by a team of about 20 young men, students from schools supported by Starfish, to provide a free meal to people from poor homes in the Christian colony of Youhannabad. "Yesterday we fed 350 people. These people included shop workers, rickshaw drivers, children on the street, and many others. It was a blessing to be able to share a meal with these people."



"I wanted to cry with joy"

So said Jahanzaib, a student who had joined to help the distribution.



"I always wanted to help poor people" he continued. "Today, when the food arrived, I ran to the main bus stop to look for people to invite to share the food with, praying that the Lord will help me to find someone in need. I saw a family of four people. They had been in Lahore for four days. One of them was blind. They told me they hadn't had food to eat. I thanked God, and directed them. I was so excited and happy that I had tears in my eyes and wanted to cry aloud for the opportunity the Lord has given me. Even though I also belong to a poor family I was able to help a needy and hungry family."

For our prayers

Three things stand out from this initiative:

1. It is a compassionate and practical service to the poor.
2. It is a powerful blessing, especially for young men like Jahanzaib.
3. As it continues, it will be ultimately be fully funded locally. Adam Christian School in Narang Mandi just donated two sacks of rice. We want to allow our Pakistani brothers and sisters to have the blessing of giving. If you wish to support, please pray.

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