



Special care for special people



"I will surely hear their cry" Exodus 22:22

God surely reserves a special place of affection in His heart for the weak and the vulnerable. Several of our Starfish Asia partners share His concern for those who, through no fault of their own, are deprived, wounded or face an impossible struggle in their lives.

At best little special care is available for the disabled in Pakistan. For the Christian minority, who face the extra hazards of poverty and prejudice, few people care. Those with learning

difficulties, sight impairment or other physical disability are often treated as an embarrassment and kept hidden out of sight.

Starfish Asia is supporting several homes and schools for neglected and disabled children. Facilities are sadly inadequate and staff often lack professional training. But the love that is being given to the vulnerable is providing security and hope to children who would otherwise sit at home unwanted and unprotected.



Komal is 8 years old and is unable to walk due to polio. She lives with her father, mother and four siblings in Lahore. Her father works for a tiny wage in a cattle farm and is trying in vain to pay off a large debt. Starfish Asia provided a wheelchair for Komal. We would like to do more. Her dream is to go to school.

NEW PROJECT ★

The Gospel Care Centre, Bilal Town, Lahore

Several months ago Shamshad, from the Gospel School in Bilal Town, phoned to say that Shahbaz, a severely disabled boy in his school, was being bullied at home.

"When I visited him he was weeping. An older cousin sometimes beat him badly. His father is a drug addict. Shahbaz had 11 brothers and sisters but four died. His mother requested me to take care of him."

"Find out what we can do and let me know," I replied. Shamshad responded shortly with a list (with photos) of 10 disabled children, all desperate for help.

We did not know how to respond. We could not afford to launch another project or start a new hostel for disabled children. What did Shamshad do? He went ahead anyway and opened a very simple rented home for five children, disabled from polio. The children are brought each day to the Gospel School and study together with the other children.

To cut a long story short, we have just begun to support this simple home. Shahbaz is there, a grin from ear to ear, and four others, all attending the school and delighted to be cared for and loved.



Rayasat Salamat
together with Shamshad and Rubina

Rayasat Salamat is one of the five children now living at the Gospel Care Centre. He is 12 years old and has not been able to walk since birth. His family is very poor and sometimes not even able to provide enough food for their son, let alone proper medical care. Rayasat is eager to study in school but is very weak.

"On my visit to the Gospel Care Centre in February," wrote Mike, "I found that Rayasat was in hospital to have pins inserted into his legs to help him become more mobile. I met his mother, a simple Christian lady, overwhelmed that someone cared so much for her son. I too was deeply moved."

CAP Mercy Mission, Youhannabad, Lahore



The Good Samaritan story retold (that's his donkey - above)

The children at the CAP Mercy Mission for the Disabled put on a performance of the Good Samaritan — no polished drama but a lot of fun for everyone. The school is attached to the CAP Boys School in Youhannabad (Lahore) and provides day care to 22 children with special needs.



Mrs Anees, who oversees the school, is a trained staff nurse and teacher and aims to develop the creative skills

of the children. Some learn dress-making. Others do clay modelling or make cards for guests. They also do normal school studies.

NEW PROJECT ★

My Home, Sada-e-Aman, Sargodha



Kanwal Tariq, wife of Tariq Iqbal and Principal of the Sada-e-Aman School in Sargodha, had a deep concern for troubled girls.

"So many poor and destitute girls are helpless and hurting around us, alone and without hope. We want to serve them with our love. We want to give them some happiness in their lives, some smiles on their faces and a faith that there is a God who cares for them. We want to assure them that they are not alone to bear the pain in their lives. They are special to God."

Kanwal's passionate dream was realised in the opening of 'My Home' in February. Five girls moved into a rented house to live with Tariq, Kanwal and their son Danyal. It is a huge extra work load for Kanwal.

Soneha (age 8), whose mother died and father is a drug addict, was delighted to have new clothes to wear. She said: "I have always worn used clothes; this is the first time I have had new clothes to wear. I am very happy and I just want to say thank you."

Kaynath is pictured here in the kitchen with Kanwal. Kaynath's real mother is blind and her father is a drug addict. Her auntie wanted to send Kaynath to work to support the family.

The five girls in 'My Home' are also studying at Sada-e-Aman School each day. For Kanwal it is a dream come true.



Ananias Home

The Ananias Home for Blind Girls was one of the first projects supported by Starfish Asia. Mrs Khalida Nelson now cares for 25 girls with sight impairment. Two 'graduates' from the Home are now studying at the prestigious Kinnaird College for Women.

The offer of a partial grant from another donor means that some Starfish Asia funds are being used by the Pakistan Christian Blind Society. We are pleased that our funds can stretch to provide help for more disabled young people.

CGA Special Children

When Pastor Iqbal started the CGA Home in Lahore, he had one small room and a group of disabled children. What was impressive was the care and love shown by Iqbal and his family for some very poor and otherwise rejected children.

Naveed is now in his twenties. Unable to walk due to polio, but trained as a tailor, he runs a small tailoring shop. Mehwish is just three feet high but has the mind and heart of an intelligent teenager. These young people are truly 'special'.

Another dark cloud over Pakistan's Christians

On Friday 4th March I received a phone call from Tariq Iqbal, who runs the school in Sargodha that is supported through Starfish Asia. The school—like all Christian schools across Pakistan—was closed for three days. Tariq was calling from Khushpur, a village in the heart of Punjab, and the birthplace of the Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, who was assassinated two days earlier, Wednesday 2nd March.

Tariq came to pay his respects at the funeral of a courageous defender of the rights of Pakistan's minorities, killed for his outspoken criticism of the Blasphemy Laws. "People like him, they are very rare," said the Prime Minister, speaking at the memorial service in Islamabad. "All the minorities have lost a great leader."

Khushpur is the home village of another prominent Christian leader, Bishop John Joseph, also buried there, who gave his life in 1998 in protest over the injustice of the Blasphemy laws.

The death of Shahbaz Bhatti strikes another blow at the heart of an already insecure community. Pray for Pakistan's Christians to trust that God is watching over His people in even the darkest times.

— Mike Wakely

Courage and faith displayed



"I wanted everyone to know that we are Christians and to see the cross over our school," said Shamshad, Director of the Gospel School in Bilal Town, Lahore. He has erected a large illuminated cross on the roof of his school building in Bilal Town. It can be seen from afar.



Renala Khurd lies along the main highway 10 kilometres from Akhtarabad, home to about 70,000 people. Mitchell's fruit farms have made the town famous. There is a small Christian community of mostly uneducated and under-paid agricultural and brick kiln workers. Most families are living below the poverty line. Few Christian parents can afford to give their children an education.

In 2010 Noor Ministries took a step of faith. They purchased two plots of land on installment in a housing society where many Christian families live.

The vision? To construct and open a High School for Christian children in Renala Khurd, running together with the Elementary School in Akhtarabad to provide a quality education, together with Christian teaching and discipleship classes, for the deprived Christian children of the District.

Sajida's vision

Sajida Iqbal is the Founder of Noor Ministries that provide education for poor rural communities near Okara. In 2006 she bought a plot, built a school and started to bring Christian children from five villages to her Life Transforming Centre. The school is partially supported by Starfish Asia.

Now she has another vision...

Starfish Asia & Noor Ministries

We have produced a special newsletter just to cover the work of Sajida, her staff and team in Okara District.

Please request a copy if you would like to know more about the work of Noor Ministries in Pakistan.

For address details, see the back page.



No little girl should be forced to pick through rubbish like this. Our passion is to rescue girls from such indignity.

Reflections

Trevor visited Pakistan for a month in February, returning home to Northern Ireland shortly after the tragic death of Shahbaz Bhatti. Here are some extracts from his prayer diary.

5 February: Had a good flight with a free upgrade thanks to my air miles...

It has been non-stop meetings with people — often very humbling to learn of their commitment in difficult circumstances and some are outstanding. The needs and requests for help are overwhelming... We need a full time rep here badly... Have a pull-over on — quite cloudy. Health is good.

8 February: Yesterday we had rain, thunder and lightning on our way to the Kingdom of Heaven school in Meher Town. Mike ordered a rickshaw instead of a taxi. The rain poured in from the gap at the top of the canvas door as we huddled together to keep warm and bounced up and down like rubber balls over every pothole. Mike reassured me: "We are relatively safe from the lightning; at least we have rubber tyres underneath us."



Trevor with the staff at the CAP Mercy Mission

15 February: I had a great day on Monday with Sajida and the team in Akhtarabad. She told me the backgrounds of some of the children. One family of sisters and brothers who attend the school had heads full of lice. They had no running water in the home. The mother had left them and the father was not working. One of the sisters (aged 6) was at home looking after the baby and the eldest (aged 11) had to cook every day for the family and was attending the school as well.

3 March: The really disturbing and shocking news is that Minister Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated yesterday morning in a hail of bullets in his car in Islamabad. Here is one response from a project leader we forward support to:

"As Christians we have no voice or political party... we do not have anyone to represent us and we are like the sheep without a shepherd. As a church, especially in the small cities, we are feeling so under pressure."

On my last full day here I visited Morning Star School in Zia Colony, Karachi. As we travelled to the school together on a bone rattling rickshaw, George our project leader whispered, "We Christians are not safe here in Pakistan. We are only secure in Christ."

The gift of books

April is the start of a new school year and all schools in Pakistan are preparing for a new intake of students. This requires additional classrooms, desks, chairs and new teachers. This is all a huge challenge.

We want to express our special thanks to everyone who responded to our appeal, especially those who made an extra contribution, so that we could provide subsidies for text books to more than 5,000 children.

We remain committed to ensuring that all the children in schools that we support have the books they need. The same applies to school furniture, classroom space, qualified teachers and equipment.



Salamat Ghauri and his son—proud that his school is now not only a registered High School, but also has the required science lab with basic equipment for science classes up to Matric level.

EDUCATION EMERGENCY PAKISTAN

This is an outstanding online publication, produced by representatives from the

Pakistan government, with leaders from civil society. It outlines graphically the crisis in education in Pakistan today.

All accessible on their excellent website: <http://educationemergency.com.pk/>

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STARFISH ASIA

giving hope to the children of Pakistan

I was walking on the beach one morning and I saw a young man picking up starfish from the sand and flinging them back into the sea. I asked why he did it. "If I don't, they will die in the midday sun," he said. "But there are thousands of starfish," I replied. "What difference does it make to save a few?" He looked down at the starfish in his hand and flung it to safety in the waves. "It makes a big difference to this one!" he said.

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