

HOPE *amidst* HARDSHIP

A Daily Struggle

Why is Abneer (right) carrying dung upstairs to the roof while his father is labouring outside in the extreme heat? What is life really like in a Christian minority village in Pakistan? A village where you can see the Brick Kiln chimney where bonded labourers work, and where life is harsh and short. What's it like for the children? What hope is there for the future?

Turn to page 2 to read about how Abneer and his two brothers find a haven in the Starfish-supported **FGA School** just two minutes' walk from their home.

Jesus said: *'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25 v40)

In this edition we'd like to give you snapshots into what it looks like to be "one of the least" in Pakistan, and how each prayer, and each gift, is making a difference. Thank you for giving **Hope amidst Hardship**.



Also Inside...

★ Excitement as **OM teacher** with 20 years of leadership in Pakistan joins the Starfish Asia team. Get fresh insight into the challenges and joys of delivering hope through education.

★ Read how **Agape Home** is bringing hope to the most disadvantaged, in the hardest of family circumstances.

★ Share in a **family's delight** as their daughter reaches matriculation - setting the foundation for further education.

A daily struggle (continued)...



As Abneer arrives upstairs on the roof he places down the cow dung – fuel for cooking - and watches his brother flying a kite. He's in his family home in a village near Sialkot. When it rains and it's hard to cook, water runs down the open stairs into the house. There is damp on the walls and the stench of sewage in the gutter outside is just a feature of village life.



But today is dry and the heat extreme as his father Madsar labours in the Brick Kiln to support his wife, Anita, and four children. Sadly this brutal work is not enough so he takes on other labouring jobs to help pay off generational debt. Sometimes the children will help. He works six days per week and is hardly ever home. He is happy his three boys are at school, and that the family can go to church each Sunday. He hopes when his children are educated, they will have a better future.



Although the government minimum wage for an unskilled brick kiln labourer is £100 per month, Madsar earns just £65. **£2 per day** does not feed, clothe and house a family of six – especially with inflation over the past 3 years at 30%. Sometimes there is no food, and then school principal Lubna helps the family whenever she can.



As Yeshua, Ahem and Abneer make their way to school, they step over the gutter where the sewage runs. The **FGA School** is a haven of care, a place to learn, and a chance of a better future. Like many Christians in Pakistan, the family name is 'Masih' meaning 'Christ'. This family in Christ are profoundly oppressed. Yet, with your support they receive the gift of hope. **Thank you.**

"I was a stranger and you invited me in..."

Khurram and Kiram are two people supported by the **Agape Home**. Though not related, they both live with learning difficulties and face significant challenges. Farzana, who runs the centre, tells us about them:

Khurram, who is 37, has a mental age of around 8. Since the passing of his father, he and his mother have been living with relatives in a difficult and unstable environment. His mother, unable to work due to ill health, struggles with financial hardship.



Khurram with his mother.

Kiram also comes from a troubled home. There have been incidents of violence and disruption in her household, sometimes serious enough to involve the police. These circumstances have taken a toll on her wellbeing, affecting her appetite.



Kiram enjoying the gift of food.

Khurram and Kiram are just two of the 21 people who find care, support, and stimulation at the **Agape Home**—a place where they are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Farzana knows of a few places that take good care of people with disabilities, but generally provision is very poor in Pakistan. Even within Christian families, the understanding and support for people with disabilities is not good, and they can easily end up being rejected.

Breaking the Cycle

This is Saima with her 7 children. I had the pleasure to meet her on my last trip and to find out a bit about her life and struggles. We met in her simple compound where her family lives with her in-laws, and their two cows. Everything is basic, but clean.



Saima (second left), Anjleena (back) and the family

Saima left school after class 6 as her parents couldn't afford to send her any longer. She works about the house while her husband (*below right*) is out pushing a cart selling vegetables.

Although she thanks God for giving her so many children, she says it makes it very hard to educate them all. That's one of the reasons she's so grateful to **Eden School**, the only school in the area they could afford. She is impressed by the teachers' dedication, not just for secular education but also the encouragement they give the children to grow in their Christian faith.



Her eldest daughter, **Anjleena**, recently sat her first matriculation exam. This makes her the first female in the family to reach that level of education, and she hopes to continue studying to become a nurse. As a mother of 5 daughters, Saima is anxious that all the girls get a good education, and sees the huge benefit for both the family and Christian community.

When concerning issues are brought to their attention, Farzana and her husband Imran (*below*) try to become change-makers. First, with the immediate families but also with attitudes in churches and the wider society.

"In Agape Home we are caring for them, trying to make them happy, healthy and hopeful."



Training Teachers, Transforming Education

We're delighted to be welcoming OM (Operation Mobilisation) teacher Caroline to the Starfish Pakistan team this summer. Responsible for professional development, she will be working alongside Jasmine and Karamat, and brings with her over 20 years of experience of the Pakistani education system.

Caroline qualified as a primary school teacher in Aberdeen and worked for a year before feeling God's calling to go to Pakistan. In 2005 she arrived in Peshawar and spent the next eight and a half years teaching at an international study centre, during which time she learned the culture and language of her new home. In 2013 she became the principal of a school serving the Christian community in a remote part of North-West Pakistan. Fewer than 20 children attended when she arrived, but today there are over 100.

In the 12 years you spent as principal, what were some of the issues facing the Christian community and how do you think education is helpful?

Just 20 years ago, there were only 1 or 2 people educated in the Christian community I supported. They didn't see the value of going to school, resulting in a generation of sweepers, and labourers. Over time there has not only been growth in numbers, but also in mindset; families now believe that education is an available path for their young children.

"My dream is that we can change the mentality of just settling for what previous generations have done, but instead believing you can achieve something different, something better"

Generational poverty and a deep-rooted sense of hopelessness weigh heavily on many students, plus a pressure, especially in Muslim-majority schools, to conform or convert. I have witnessed students give up studying for a Bachelors degree to take low-skilled minority government jobs, no longer enabling their true skills to flourish. Many households don't have running water or electricity, and drug problems are prevalent. Just the fact that a child has made it to school at all is a miracle. At the very least they've seen Jesus' love, and we trust that will impact their life.



What are you looking forward to as you work alongside Starfish Pakistan?

One of the biggest surprises of being a principal was how much the teachers needed encouragement just as much as the students. It is a constant challenge and some are more open than others to learning new ways. Sometimes they don't consider themselves as professionals, rather viewing teaching as a 'stop-gap' before marriage or a better paid job. But I believe Pakistani teachers have the potential to be excellent. They don't need fancy resources—just the belief that they can make a difference.



"Quality education is directly linked to the quality of teaching"

What might be some of the most challenging things for you personally in this new role?

It's daunting going from a single school to working with such a large number of teachers and students, plus living in a new province. I know I will need to build trust with the staff, project leaders and teachers, but believe God has been preparing me for this new role. It will be a massive change and learning curve!

Building the Future, One Book at a Time

Thanks to support from individuals and a number of trusts, (most recently Barnabas Aid), **9,054** students have been gifted new school textbooks since April, with a further **2000** waiting to be delivered. This is a basic resource that most families cannot afford, yet a vital tool in helping to break the cycle of illiteracy that leaves these children destined for life as sweepers.

"Thank you to Starfish family for providing our students with free books. It's such a valuable gesture that not only supports their learning, but also fosters a love for reading. It really makes a difference."



Young Minds Compete: Students Shine at Inter-School Quiz

On 16th May, the FGA (Full Gospel Assemblies) School, organised and hosted a competition for children from eight different schools—four supported by Starfish. Students were quizzed on their Bible Knowledge, Mathematics, General Knowledge, and English.

In total, 39 students attended from the Talent School System, Light Education System, Amazing Grace School and Dean Public School. After several challenging rounds, the **Talent School System** (above) earned an impressive second place! Students were encouraged, and expressed a desire for similar competitions in the future. The experience boosted their confidence and gave them the opportunity to learn in a fun and interactive way. This event not only offered a healthy competitive platform, but reinforced the spirit of unity among organisations working towards a shared vision—empowering underprivileged children through education.





"What kept me going was wanting to do my best for the children with the least."

On 24th May, **Rob Bavington** (left) set off at 7:30am to take on the London to Brighton Ultra event. He reached the target of walking for **14hrs and 31mins**, having covered just over 70km, and has so far raised over **£1300!**

<https://donorbox.org/great-starfish-trail-2025>



The
Great Starfish Trail
24th May - 7th June 2025

"Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God." - Proverbs 14:31

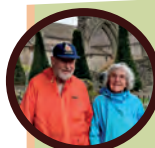
Inspired by the verse above, the theme for this year's challenge is **14:31**. The focus has been on encouraging new monthly donations to help cover the running costs for some schools.

It's not too late to donate!

Karen Gledhill - Walking **14.31miles** with her daughter Becky from Kew to Westminster along the Thames Path. Target: New monthly donations for the **The New Life School**, Bahawalpur.



Dan and Ruth Bavington - Walking a total of **14.31km** across the fortnight. Target: 5 new monthly donations to help support **Adam Christian School**.



Ruth Coleman - Walking for **14hrs 31mins** as part of the North Downs 50 route (12th July). Target: 5 new monthly donations for the **Zeenat School System**.



Could you commit to a monthly gift?

Just £5 per month could educate a child for one month.



(L to R) Rob, Starfish UK Vice-Chair Sheila Thomas, John Mason MSP, Devin Scobie

Following John's welcome, and Starfish UK Chairman Devin Scobie's brief overview of Starfish's history, Rob shared a more detailed presentation. This focused on the diversity of our current work including our successful scholarship programme. Attendees were mainly Scottish supporters whom we were keen to thank, but several MSPs dropped in or sent messages of support for our work. We look forward to hosting further events in the UK.

1 Correspondence (for donations) Starfish Asia, c/o Field Sullivan, 9 Hare and Billet Road, London, SE3 0RB

2 Head Office - Rob Bavington, Starfish Asia, St.Columba's Church, St.Margaret's Place, Bradford, BD7 3AW

www.facebook.com/starfishasia

Tell us you care!

- ☐ 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 to: Freepost RUGY-ERZK-UUZZ

Starfish Asia, c/o Field Sullivan, 9 Hare & Billet Rd, London, SE3 0RB (UK)

In USA, return to: **Starfish Asia**/Advancing Native Missions, P.O. Box 29, Afton, VA 22920, USA

In Singapore, contact: **Starfish Asia (Singapore) Ltd.** 8156B Stirling Road, Singapore 148947

In Canada, contact: **Starfish Asia (Canada)** info@starfishasia.ca

Starfish Asia will only use your personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018). Our Privacy Policy is available on our website: <https://starfishasia.com/privacy-and-cookies/>



www.starfishasia.com



UK donors only, 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.

Starfish Asia (UK)

Registered UK Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO No.1181649)

c/o Field Sullivan, 9 Hare & Billet Rd, London SE3 0RB

Email: info@starfishasia.com

Starfish Asia (USA)

3230 Seagraves Mill Rd, Hull, GA 30646, USA
(EIN#: 27-3896601)

Starfish Asia (Singapore) Ltd.

8156B Stirling Road, Singapore 148947
Email: info_singapore@starfishasia.com

Starfish Asia (Canada)

Info@starfishasia.ca