



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

85 ♦ September 2025

NEWS

United We Stand



Of the 2.4 million Christians in Pakistan, around 60%* are illiterate.

Despised for their faith, they are often viewed merely as a source of very cheap or bonded menial labour. For over 20 years the mission of Starfish Asia has been to see the destinies of these Christians in Pakistan changed - through education. And that change is happening. Children, previously destined to chop bamboo, be domestic servants, clean sewers or make bricks are now on the same higher education courses as their Muslim peers.

*reasonable estimate

The Leaders Making Change Happen

In the peaceful hills of Khanspur, Ayubia, leaders of independent schools from across the Starfish Pakistan family gathered for a powerful week of training, reflection and transformation (above). In a culture where suspicion and disunity pervades even the Christian community, these leaders unite for prayer, fellowship and skills equipping before facing the struggles of another term.

What are their daily lives like? How does such an event help? What changes are they seeing in their communities? For Christians in Pakistan, increased hope and achievement often comes with increased hardship and persecution. Read on to see how your support is helping us to **stand** alongside these leaders, **strengthen** their faith and see them start to **overcome** deep-rooted prejudice.



Not Alone

In conversation with a number of project leaders, following the training retreat, a number of themes developed when asked about their daily lives and the challenges they face in their schools. These stories remind us that Christian education in Pakistan is not just about textbooks and classrooms—it's about resilience, faith, and the unwavering belief that every child deserves the chance to learn.

'Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.'
Eph.6 v13-15

Standing up against adversity.

You may remember Ruth, the amazing project leader we featured in 2022 who travels through the bamboo plantation on her motorbike to oversee two schools, **St.Peters** and **St.Pauls**. 15 years ago, parents saw no point in education; just as they laboured to harvest bamboo, so would their children. But Ruth knew then that things could be different.

Starfish provided teacher training, salary support and textbooks and Ruth's persistence over the years is bearing fruit. A new generation of literate Christians are now going on to higher education, and former pupils are working in the police, as engineers, lab technicians and a physiotherapist.



Former pupil Kalash Zahur returned to the school to speak about his job as a policeman.

But now a new set of challenges have emerged. The peaceful coexistence that had prevailed for years in the community has been disturbed, and jealousy grows. Who is going to cut the bamboo if Christians are going off to university? Why should "they" be able to study with "our" children? These questions give rise to anger and now direct threats to the worshipping community. Ruth tells how last year it was impossible to celebrate their usual Christmas at the local village Church. In fact they no longer feel safe to use the building at all, and Christians must gather in homes.

This isn't an isolated case. We hear similar stories from almost all project leaders of discrimination. Freedom and opportunity here is limited, and very much favours the majority. We may not be able to change that, but we certainly **MUST** stand with our brothers and sisters to face a hardening climate.



Strengthening leaders in faith and skills.

How do Christian communities become stronger and more resilient in the face of persecution, discrimination and pressure to convert? A sound theological foundation increases confidence and faith. Did you know there are currently over 300 teachers receiving weekly discipleship through the Open Theological Seminary, supported by Starfish Asia? The training deepens understanding of scripture, fosters a closer relationship with God, and develops spiritual gifts, helping to strengthen the teachers' faith and, in turn, impact the children.

Samuel, a teacher from Kingdom of Heaven, told us what OTS has done for him: *"I came to know the priceless love of God and understood faith better. Compassion for others and humility and modesty were also born in my heart. As a teacher, my life and teaching also improved. I teach and instruct children in the light of the Holy Scriptures."*

We thank God that Mike Wakely had the vision to create a Bible-based curriculum delivered each week to 8,000 children in Starfish supported schools. He still updates this today (see pg4). We thank God that Mike also researched and wrote "The Amazing Story of Pakistan's Christians" being used to provide historic underpinning for older children. These publications play a vital role in raising a new generation of Christians who persist against the odds.

The project leaders all agree that their connection with Starfish provides a huge benefit beyond financial support. Access to good teacher training, the network with other schools and leaders, the OTS provision and bible curriculum give these small, independent schools a sense of security and help drive them forward and overcome even the hardest challenges.



Jasmine overseeing a group activity.

"I always say.... that Starfish is just like a hive of the bees... we are the bees, the leaders, and the project heads... We come together, we bring our abilities and capacities, and we join that hive [to] produce a honey which can change the lives of the children of our community."

Pervaiz Masih
- Kingdom of Heaven School.



Building Confidence, Inspiring Change

In addition to the Project Leaders' retreat, Starfish Pakistan planned and organised five regional teachers' training courses in July 2025, bringing together 161 dedicated teachers from Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Multan. They received a number of subject-focused sessions from expert facilitators: Mr. Shakeel Earnest (Science and Maths), Mr. Karamat Adeel (Urdu), and Ms. Caroline (Basic English).

These passionate tutors went above and beyond, ensuring each concept was understood, not just via presentations, but also with real-time classroom scenarios and practical engagement. Feedback was positive and encouraging.

This training is part of our commitment to building stronger, more confident educators who can inspire change in their classrooms and communities.



Proud to be Pakistani

On 14th August, it is traditional for pupils and teachers to come together and celebrate Pakistan's Independence Day. Despite being marginalised, there is still a strong desire within the Christian community to be a blessing to their country, to be 'salt and light' in a world where they are so often overlooked.



"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." 1 John 4v4

CONGRATULATIONS!

The year 10 national exam results (for the Punjab) were released in August. We rejoice that there is a slight improvement in scores from last year, although noted a fall in numbers who sat the exams (76 compared to 103 last year). The overall pass rate (pass in ALL subjects) was 64%, while 50% passed with Grade C or above. Given the poor background of these students, and the large drop-out rate after year 5, it is something to rejoice in!

High Achievers

Special recognition was awarded to Urooj Komal Javed (top right) from St. Paul's for scoring an impressive 1051 marks (A+ grade), and to Anum Fatima (middle right) and Rubab Niaz (bottom right) from Solomon Convent for securing 1043 and 963 marks (A+ grades).

Your hard work and excellence have made your schools proud!



Anjeela, the student we mentioned in the last newsletter, is the first female in her family to sit the matriculation exams. We're thrilled to report that she passed, scoring a B grade!



Overcoming deep-rooted hopelessness

On the outskirts of Lahore, Anam runs the **Voice of Children School**. She tells of the struggles they had due to being an independent school, but how being linked with Starfish Pakistan has helped them in various ways, not least by experiencing the fellowship at training events and being reminded of key educational tools. She has worked hard to build up the parents' understanding of the importance of education and now notices a sea-change in their commitment and dedication which is passed on to their children. The older pupils even attended school for a couple of hours throughout the summer so that they would have enough time to complete the curriculum and revise for the matriculation exams!

It's hard, but parents are determined. Most of the mothers work as maids in rich households. One said to Anam *"I realised that my children have the same bodies, organs and brains as the children in the house where I work. The only difference is the rich have an education."* Today, the children of domestic servants are passing exams. With Starfish scholarships they are going on to mainstream further and higher education. The destiny of Christian minority children in this village is no longer fixed. Anam is excited to see what they do next!

"...our children have the same bodies and organs as the rich children. They have brains too. The only difference is education."



Anam (far left) with staff and pupils at the Voice of Children School

A Heartfelt Thank You - The Legacy Continues



Back in February, we announced that Mike Wakely was stepping down as a Trustee of Starfish Asia. In July, Board members Sheila Thomas and Marjorie Murphy were delighted to finally present him and Kerstin with a photobook, containing a wide cross-section of photos and tributes coming from supporters across the world.

Under Mike's leadership, and Kerstin's service, Starfish Asia has grown from a single school to a network of over 40 educational institutions and homes for the disabled and neglected. His unwavering commitment to "rescuing starfish"—inspired by the story of a boy saving starfish one at a time—remains the heartbeat of the organisation.

What set Mike apart as a Trustee was not just his strategic vision, but his deep personal investment. He and Kerstin knew the names, the stories, the struggles. They walked alongside communities, not above them. Their faith, humility, and relentless optimism inspired everyone around them. And this legacy continues—not only in the schools and children they helped, but in the hearts of those they inspired to carry the mission forward. Thank you, Mike and Kerstin, for showing us what it means to serve with purpose. Your impact will echo for generations.

A message from Mike and Kerstin

We thank God for the 40 years we have been able to give for the welfare of Pakistan's Christians, and we appreciate Devin's kind comments. As we move on from Starfish Asia, we are not in any way retiring from our commitment to Pakistan's Christians.

We continue to work on the revision, publication and promotion of the Bible Curriculum books in Pakistan. Working with Nirali Kitaben in Lahore, I am now preparing the student textbook 3 of the Curriculum, and value your prayers and support. Book 2 is in the press and should be available next month in English and Urdu. Any support can be given through Starfish Asia (be sure to mention Bible Curriculum Book 3).



Implementing lasting change takes time. YOU can continue to be part of that change through leaving a gift for us in your will. If you would like more information please contact liz@starfishasia.com



SAVE THE DATE!
2nd-9th December



Following the success of last years' campaign, we have once again applied to take part in **The Big Give Christmas Challenge** this December. If accepted, we will be using the opportunity to **DOUBLE** all donations towards the Scholarship fund. Keep an eye out for more information in the coming weeks!

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