

### India: Apanjan Residential Care Home for Girls with Disabilities

Of the many children living in difficult circumstances in the streets and slums of Calcutta one group finds it particularly hard to survive: children with mental and physical disabilities. Abandoned by their families who are unable to cope with their special needs, these children are often found wandering the streets or the city's vast railway stations. Vulnerable, severely traumatised and unable to look after themselves their only hope is adoption by charitable institutions, but in the Calcutta area there are very few that accept children with mental disabilities and the existing ones are bursting at the seams. The Apanjan Project is an answer to the desperate plight of these children. Apanjan gives them a home, education and a social environment where they can develop and thrive. At Apanjan the children are finally able to claim a happy childhood and look forward to a bright and secure future.

Net4kids' project partner for this project are The Banyan Trust, OFFER and Wilde Ganzen.



### Project description

The Apanjan Project ("Apanjan" = "Our Family" in Bengali) is located in the West-Bengal village of Govindapur, 25 kilometres south of Calcutta. It is already home to fourteen boys and one girl with mental and physical disabilities and offers them the

specialised care, loving attention and secure environment that they need. An additional fifty children from the surrounding area attend the Apanjan Day Centre, where six days a week the curriculum includes music therapy, art therapy, physiotherapy, sports, vocational training and a wide variety of play learning activities. The children are under close medical supervision. As there is also a strong need for such a place for girls street children, the Apanjan Project has now completed the construction of new girl's home and is now seeking funds for the continuation of the home which will ultimately give 20 girls a caring and loving environment.

### Postcard from..

#### Arati, Age 7+years. Staying as of 03 August 2005

Arati was deserted by her mother Laxmi (name given) who left Arati with her uncle and two aunts. Arati is speech and hearing impaired. The shelter home in North India where Arati was placed unfortunately had to close its operations and the Legal Government Agency NALSA (*see explanation page 4*) requested OFFER to accept two of these evicted girl children with multiple disabilities into the new Apanjan extension for girls. In order to maintain good contacts with the government and the fact that Apanjan is a registered home meant that OFFER had no choice but to happily oblige to provide a safe and stimulating new environment to these unfortunate girls. Arati has mild learning difficulties and is hearing and speech impaired. The extent of her disability is being studied in consultation with the NIMH and NIIH and an appropriate care plan is under preparation. Luckily her motor coordination is normal. She is active and loves to learn and help out. Besides a cheerful disposition she also has a caring character, always rushing to the aid of needy children. At Apanjan Arati will greatly benefit from the Day Center's inclusive educational programme.

**Ritu, Age 6+years. Staying as of 03 August 2005**

Ritu was also made homeless when the doors of the same shelter home (see case study 1 "Arati") closed for good. Ritu has been referred to OFFER and Apanjan by NALSA, just like Arati.

Ritu's files are incomplete and contain little information about her background before she entered the home, apart from the obvious case of abandonment by her parents and family. The files disclose that her behaviour in the home could at times be quite difficult, not in the least due to her hyper-activity and inability to communicate properly.

Ritu has learning difficulties and is hyper-active. She is also mildly hearing and speech impaired. However she has speech capacity and will be able to improve through Apanjan's speech therapy and sign language programmes. She has already started to attend Apanjan's special education programme, where an appropriate care plan is the defining guideline. Ritu craves affection and loves to be around the caregivers or any other adults. She is affectionate, cheerful and attention seeking in mostly always a positive manner.

**Objectives**

Apanjan would like to do more for girls with mental disabilities. Therefore we seek to continue our help for girls and boys with multiple disabilities.

- The girls' home will provide long-term residential care for a group of twenty girls with multiple disabilities who have been orphaned or abandoned. The girls will be gradually admitted.
- The girls will be able to join Apanjan's comprehensive care programme, which comprises education and medical care.

**Activities**

- Individual care plans will determine the girls' activities.
- Education at the Apanjan Day Centre.
- Vocational Training at the Day Centre.
- Leisure activities that will include dance, singing and making music.
- Improving living skills to a level that will enable the girls to participate in daily household tasks.
- Improving their social skills through recreational outings and events with other projects.



**Results so far**

The construction of the girls home is completed after 4 months - end of November 2005. Due to Durga Puja holidays and unexpected heavy monsoon rains the opening of the new home had to be postponed for a month.

A small ceremony/celebration was held during the five-day Durga Puja in the new building where all Apanjan children and representatives from the village had gathered to initiate the new grounds. As per custom during puja blessings were given to the new home.



### **How to help**

Currently we are looking for funds for the running cost for 7 girls.

### **About the Organization**

#### **The Netherlands – The Banyan Trust**

The Banyan Trust was founded in 1998 by a group of individuals who had volunteer experience in Calcutta and were moved by the plight of one of the most marginalised groups amongst India's poor: street children with mental disabilities. Dutch and English volunteers of The Banyan Trust travelled to Calcutta to explore the possibilities of establishing a residential care programme, where the first priority would be linking up with a local group. OFFER was identified as a highly respected grass roots organisation who were interested in creating long term care for the disabled, but until then had been deterred by the costs and complexity of the issue. After long and careful negotiations an agreement was reached where OFFER would manage the new project and The Banyan Trust would finance the running costs. Decisions would be taken jointly and the two parties would stay in regular contact. Thus The Banyan Trust would not be "just" a funding body, but a more active partner, at all times aware of the developments, progress and inevitable setbacks of the project. In September 1999 the Apanjan home first opened its doors and by December 1999 seven children with a wide range of disabilities had moved in permanently. At present the project has 15 residents and that number is growing steadily.

#### **India - OFFER**

OFFER, the Indian partner organisation of The Banyan Trust, works with street children in the slum areas and railway platforms in different parts of Calcutta. Initially a group of well-meaning group of students who wanted to offer a helping hand to the city's poorest of the poor, OFFER developed throughout the 1990's into a respected, efficient and effective organisation that

successfully focuses on the needs of children who live in difficult circumstances. OFFER runs projects in Calcutta's red light districts where children are sent to school through scholarship programmes, provides shelter, food and medical care to children who live in railway stations and has established three residential homes, including Apanjan. The working relationship between The Banyan Trust and OFFER has over the years developed into one of friendship, trust and mutual respect.

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#### **Net4kids Aid Foundation**

##### **100% FOR CHILDREN**

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