

# ASPIRE

A quarterly publication of OBAT Helpers.

*Clearing the way for a brighter future*

## Expressions of Anwar Khan, President of OBAT Helpers.

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Dear friends,

Hope the new year finds you in the best of everything. I was in Bangladesh during the holidays and visited all of our projects there. I participated in various cultural and sports activities of OBAT schools and provided developmental training to all our volunteers, staff and teachers in different cities. This year, my training topic was "7 Habits of highly effective people" by Stephen Covey.

Observing the progress in the camps and especially meeting the families who have been self empowered through our microfinance program, filled me with great pride. Now, they have access to better food and can send their kids to school. Some of them are now in a position to move out of the camps. I am waiting for the day when they will be living a life of honor and dignity outside the camps.

When meeting with the parents of our schools' children, I saw pride in their faces. They informed me that due to the schooling, their 5-6 year old kids are now developing better hygiene habits and etiquettes and are

now in turn trying to teach their parents. I met a lot of young boys and girls who have been admitted to colleges and are pursuing Business, Textile Engineering and Nursing degrees.

On new year's eve, I was amongst many of these unfortunate people at the Khulna camp. I told them that 40 years of adversity had already passed and that in 2012, they should make a commitment with themselves for a different future for their children.

My dear supporters, they should not see their 50<sup>th</sup> year in the camps. We have 10 years to make this shift and we can do it. Hopefully, you and I together, can fulfill their dreams. Maybe one day, most of you can also visit the camps and feel the same pride. There are a lot of things that still need to be done and we have a long way to go. But we will surely get there, God willing.

God be with you.

*Anwar Khan.*

(President, OBAT Helpers Inc.)



Mr. Anwar Khan carrying out the inauguration of new community bathrooms in Syedpur- Dec 2011.

## RACE for REHMA

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On November 13<sup>th</sup> 2011, Salaam Corp, the youth group affiliated with the Muslim Alliance of Indiana organized a walk to benefit OBAT's local initiatives in Indianapolis as well as the projects in Bangladesh. The walk was held at the Canal Park in downtown Indianapolis. The walk commenced with some entertainment by Khadijah Zakaeifar who sang two songs accompanied with piano played by Michael Ladd. Next, participants warmed up by mimicking the dance moves of Nyasha, a native of Zimbabwe and drummer, James Depp, ended the

event by playing some African beats. The 5K walk followed the course of the scenic canal; a smattering of signs stating facts about OBAT's projects were placed all along the path of the walk.

We are very grateful to our supporters who attended in spite of the high winds. We hope to make this a yearly event to raise awareness and funds for the REHMA project as well as for the projects in Bangladesh. Thank you to all of those that came out, see more of the OBAT family next year!



## Eid-ul-Adha and Qurbani 2011.

With the grace of God, OBAT's qurbani program was successfully completed for the year 2011. We would like to thank all of you who choose OBAT for their qurbani donations. As said in the Quran, it is not the animal's meat or blood that reaches Allah but your piety that reaches Him. May you be blessed for your compassion and generosity. This year, the sacrificial meat was distributed in the camps of the following cities: Mirpur, Mohammedpur, Khulna, Rangpur, Saidpur, Halishaher, Ferozeshah and Sardar Bahadur Nagar. A total of 60 cows and 168 goats were sacrificed. Malnourishment is widespread amongst most of the camp residents as they survive on a paltry diet. This meat they receive at Eid-ul-Adha through OBAT, is probably most of what they will consume throughout the year. Not surprisingly, it is something that they



Volunteers distribute sacrificial meat door to door in the camps- November 2011.

really look forward to and it is a huge source of joy for them. Thank you dear friends, for spreading this joy.

*The festival of Eid-ul-Adha is followed by Hajj, a pilgrimage that able-bodied and financially sound Muslims are required to make to the holy city of Makkah once in their lifetime.*

*Muslims sacrifice animals on this occasion and distribute the meat to needy individuals to commemorate the sacrifice made by Prophet Abraham.*



An old woman receives qurbani meat.

## A curse or a blessing?

Shazia is the eldest of three sisters. She lives in a rented house in Halishaher. Out of the mere sixty-five dollars that her father brings home as income every month, thirty-three dollars are used to pay for the rent of the tin and bamboo shack they live in. Shazia was able to complete her studies till grade nine with the help of her uncle. However, she was unable to sit for the SSC or middle school exam due to inadequate funds. After applying to OBAT Helpers for aid, she was not only able to take her SSC exams but also the HSC exam

and graduated from high school in July 2011. As a result, she was able to apply for a position at OBAT's Halishaher primary school and is now working there as a teacher. For the first time, this year, she was able to buy new clothes for the Eid festival for herself and her sisters from her own income. She plans to continue to work and simultaneously pursue her undergraduate degree. In her own words, she feels proud of herself and can see relief on her father's face as both of them are now sharing the

financial burden.

Shazia feels that in the society in which she lives, girls are considered a curse but she has proven to be a blessing for her family. You can help more girls like Shazia become the source of hope and salvation for her parents and siblings.

Donate to OBAT's schools and help hundreds of "Shazias" fulfill their dreams.



Shazia teaching her students at the Halishaher School.

## OBAT'S Think Tank and Education for Working Children program

Anwar Khan's recent visit to Bangladesh led to the implementation of a slew of new projects.

The **Think Tank** is a group of the youth population of the Dhaka camp. Their task is to introduce and implement 1-5 community service projects every month. The projects are easy to undertake and do not require funding. Some examples are providing training to other camp dwellers and cleaning the camp site.

**Education for Working Children** is another program implemented in Dhaka camp for working children, aged 10-12 years. Survey results found over 90% of them to be illiterate. These kids were forced to work to supplement the meager earnings of their parents and hence could not go to school. From 7-9 am, daily, they attend classes which are preceded by breakfast. Some of the kids in the group are adept welders, barbers and tailors who are eager to read the newspaper or learn basic literary skills to enable them to carry out their daily tasks at work. The program is gaining instant popularity, 25 kids are enrolled currently with another 30 on a waiting list.



Members of the think tank, having their first meeting

On December 11th, 2011, OBAT held its annual board meeting at the Indiana Interchurch Center. Several key decisions were taken by board members, some of whom joined the meeting through Skype.

## *Towards brick homes...*



Ms Sony.

***OBAT Helpers runs a  
microfinance  
program in the city of  
Syedpur, which to  
this date has lifted  
close to 9000 people  
out of poverty***

Sony is a young woman in her mid-thirties. She lives with her two kids, husband, mother-in-law and sister in the city of Saidpur, in Bangladesh. They live in an 18 ft long and 16 ft wide thatched house- *All six of them*. Around them as far as their eyes can see, are rows upon rows of similar, squalid, makeshift huts cramped with people. Most of them make a living by engaging in rigorous, back-breaking labor. At the end of a strenuous day of work, they earn just about half a dollar. With this meager amount, they kill their hunger and wake up the next day, ready for more drudgery.

Sony and her neighbors are a part of the 300,000 displaced people who have been living in these slums for forty years now. Known as, "Biharis or stranded Pakistanis," they were a group who were temporarily accommodated in camps in Bangladesh to be eventually repatriated to Pakistan when the two countries split in 1971 after a war. However, political complications sealed the fate of these people and doomed them to a life of abject poverty inside the camps. Sony is among the hundreds of camp dwellers who all use water

from a single tube well for drinking and household purposes. The derelict population collectively uses community bathrooms, most of which are literal cesspools. Putrid piles of garbage lie close to where Sony's children play. Some kids, who are fortunate enough to enjoy their childhoods, play dangerously close to open sewers and drains. Other kids are not so lucky; they have to help their parents do household chores. Or worse, join them in their daily grind and use their small hands to do manual labor. Going to school is out of question for both these groups of innocent children. Sony's kids are one of them.

The shop in which Sony's husband, Hira, used to sell betel nuts, brought home 43 cents daily. Desperate to make ends meet, Sony took a loan from OBAT. OBAT Helpers runs a microfinance program in the city of Syedpur, which to this date, has lifted close to 9,000 people out of poverty. OBAT plans to implement a micro financing project on the South-East side of Indianapolis to combat local poverty. The Indianapolis project, soon to be finalized, will build upon the

organization's success in similar programs in Bangladesh. The first \$80 loaned to Sony by OBAT, were invested by her in a business, making and selling confectionary. As required by OBAT's microfinance program, she had to adhere to strict guidelines regarding savings and attending training and other educational programs on health and sanitation. Sony's business, like those of many other women who have taken micro loans, took off. With more savings and prompt loan repayments, she was able to borrow greater amounts.

Today, Sony is about to go from living in a dingy shack to a home made out of bricks. Her savings and income from OBAT's microfinance program have enabled her to buy land in the city; now she is saving more to start constructing her house. Her kids will finally be able to go to school now. Sony's newfound financial independence has gained her esteem from within and from the community around her. Stories like Sony's abound in the squalor of the camps in Bangladesh. The good news is that many others besides Sony are headed towards brick homes as well.

*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."*  
**Winston S. Churchill.**



A small child receives treatment at Syedpur health clinic

## *Syedpur Health Clinic- a year of healing*

OBAT's health clinic at Syedpur is about to complete its first year of operations. The project began in January 2011 and was implemented for OBAT by ISDCM, a local nonprofit. Roughly, two thousand people will have received treatment for common ailments by the end of 2011, from this clinic. Women constitute more than fifty percent of this number. Asthma and gastric diseases are the most frequent diagnoses among both children and adult patients. Since there is a general lack of

awareness related to health and hygiene issues, regular health education sessions are conducted at the clinic. The attendance in these sessions has seen a gradual increase with a spike during the rainy season due to rampant water borne diseases.

The clinic is located in Hatikhana camp which is one of the many camps in Syedpur. To make the health amenities accessible to other camps, a mobile health service has been initiated since August 2011. A trained medical assistant visits other camps in Syedpur

every Sunday on a bicycle and takes a supply of medicines to treat ailing patients.

No consulting fee is charged from the patients; they only pay 50% of the cost of medicines which is used as a revolving fund for the clinic's operations.

The project continues to be on target and is a great addition to OBAT's humanitarian mission in the camps.