



**CALCUTTA  
KIDS**

[www.calcuttakids.org](http://www.calcuttakids.org)

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November 28th 2015

Dear Friends of Calcutta Kids,

On November 17th of this year, Calcutta Kids Trust - our Indian implementing body - celebrated its tenth anniversary. As part of our ongoing commitment to help meet the needs of our community, and particularly its mothers and young children, we used this anniversary to seek impressions and reflections from numerous families in the community who have graduated from the Calcutta Kids intervention. An overwhelming majority of reflections



included the words *dekhbhaal* or *jotnokora* which in English mean *caring* or *looking after*.

Many of the parents of now healthy school-going children remembered the deep personal commitment of the health workers who visited them monthly throughout their pregnancies and for the 36 months after their child was born. Their memories have reminded us that while our data-driven program drives our measurable successes, community members remember and cherish most *how* we do our work - the kindnesses, the understanding, the genuine recognition of the challenges these families face in their lives. All of this makes us think of the words of Mother Teresa - still a guiding light for many of us: "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving."

We'd like to share with you in this letter two interesting developments. The first is our public pledge that we not only will continue 'caring' for and 'looking after' families whose children have survived the challenges of early childhood, but that we also will provide loving attention to those families who have lost their children in miscarriages, stillbirths, and in infancy. We have always provided healthcare services to this latter group. In 2016, however, we will start support groups and initiate personal counseling to these families which have experienced losses - losses of beloved children, losses of hopes and dreams. Our health workers will soon begin training on grieving counseling and will learn skills that will help these families minimize sentiments of guilt. We are re-embracing Mother Teresa's words and putting a little *more* love into our giving to those who mourn.

The second development relates to another new Calcutta Kids initiative - our adolescent girls program - a response to the many mothers who have told us how they wish they'd had access to vital reproductive health and life skills information when they were younger and *before* they became pregnant. They've told us that with such information - and attention from an organization like Calcutta Kids - they could have avoided many of the dreadful physical and emotional problems they experienced during their adolescent years.

In the research and design phase of the adolescent girls program, Calcutta Kids' Co-Director Evangeline Ambat and some of our community health workers held a series of individual interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent girls in the community. This needs assessment delved into the multiple issues of reproductive health, including the often avoided issue of menstruation. After four focus group discussions and more than 15 individual interviews, the team had sufficient data to design the program.



But then something remarkable happened. Over the next week, young girls who had *not* been part of the research began showing up at the Calcutta Kids doorstep asking to speak with the *didis* - the 'older sisters' - who had carried out those interviews and focus groups the week before. As it turned out, the research itself had become an intervention: the adolescent girls who had participated in the research had told their friends and sisters and cousins about this

great opportunity; about how they were able to share and talk about private things openly. These friends and sisters and cousins were now hungry to share and learn and participate in the same kind of conversations.

By the end of the week, a large number of young girls - some with their parents - had come to our office asking to be part of the program. This reinforced our determination to not only work with the adolescent girls, but also those individuals who have influence in their lives.

Deeply committed to prevention, Calcutta Kids is thrilled to be able to provide the adolescent girls of our community with the critically important health education, life skills, and legal information necessary to protect and enhance their lives. This in turn will help us in breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

**Please join us in our continued effort to educate and empower, but also care for, and look after the pregnant women and children of Fakir Bagan by donating generously.**

With warmest holiday wishes,

Noah Levinson & Evangeline Ambat  
Co-Directors, Calcutta Kids

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