



**CALCUTTA
KIDS**

www.calcuttakids.org

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Dear Friends of Calcutta Kids,

Let us take you into the hopeful world of Calcutta Kids - a respite from political unrest in the United States and a currency crisis in India.



While the specific objectives of Calcutta Kids continue to relate to improvements in health and nutrition among pregnant women and young children, we are an important part of a larger mission dedicated to poverty alleviation. We found ourselves keenly aware of this during the past few months as we sought to untangle an almost unimaginable tragedy - the sale of a one week old little girl.

The story – like the saga of human trafficking more generally - presents in bold relief, the desperation associated with extreme poverty. Happily, in this instance, the story ends well, and underlines the vital importance of the safety net that Calcutta Kids has succeeded in developing - a safety net, of course, dependent on your continued financial investments and support.

Here's the story: Munni, one of our senior health workers, learned that one of our beneficiaries, a pregnant women whom we will refer to as Puja, had returned home from the hospital after delivering a healthy girl. Munni went to Puja's house to meet the mother and child and conduct a routine post-natal-care check-up. Puja was at home but the child was not. Munni was told that the child was at the home of Puja's mother-in-law but would be back soon. Munni came back the following day and again the child was absent. When Munni returned three days later, Puja broke down in her arms and confessed that the family had sold the child for the equivalent of \$700.

Puja, unable to contain her tears, communicated to Munni her unabated anguish, saying that she would give anything to have her child back. Over the course of that afternoon, she managed to explain to Munni her story: that when she had become pregnant - already with 3 young children (one of whom was being treated by Calcutta Kids for severe malnutrition), the family had first considered an abortion. On further reflection, they instead decided to follow through with the pregnancy, and then sell the infant to be able to pay the rent and feed the family. Distressed and regretful, and fearful that she would be arrested if she went to the police, Puja chose to remain silent.

Munni held the grieving young mother in her arms for a long time, then escorted her to the Calcutta Kids community center where Munni had arranged a conversation with senior management. After hearing Puja's story and consulting with colleagues at the local police station, Calcutta Kids filed a police report on her behalf. A child protection officer was immediately assigned to the case and proceeded to work hand in hand with Calcutta Kids staff.

After two long and painful weeks, the child was found in the home of a childless couple and identified by Puja. The couple claimed that a mistake had been made, but when Calcutta Kids asked for a DNA test, the couple admitted their complicity. Puja's daughter was returned to her; they are now home together and the child is

growing well. Puja's family is participating fully in all of Calcutta Kids' programs and receiving extra care and attention from Munni. In addition, Puja is also receiving support from friends and neighbors whom she has befriended through Calcutta Kids' community meetings.

Puja's story is a desperately sad one. It inspires all of us involved in Calcutta Kids to continue working with individuals like Puja so that 1) one day families will no longer be faced with such desperate need; and 2) until that time, they will not be alone when faced with the impossible decisions that poverty forces upon them.

But there is also an organizational sub-narrative behind Puja's story – the daily efforts of Calcutta Kids' extraordinary community health workers who make it their everyday business to understand the needs, and the struggles of families in our Fakir Bagan community. These workers are deeply committed to the community, and are constantly facilitating such sensitive matters like improving the plight of unmarried pregnant women and of adolescent girls who heretofore had received no counselling on life skills, nutrition, and reproductive health – and who are now beginning to face difficult challenges.

After we took a leave of absence from the ground operations in India, there was an interesting occurrence. One of the senior managers departed the organization, and, for several weeks, while the team was recruiting a replacement, this important position remained vacant. We were worried that the vacancy might have a negative impact on the program. But when we examined the coverage and impact indicators we discovered that some of them were actually improving. We learned, to our delight, that the organization had adapted organically to the management vacancy and distributed the additional responsibilities among themselves. Asked how this had happened, the team spoke about modelling, responsibility, and commitment. One health worker said, "The children shouldn't suffer just because a member of the team leaves."

Impressed and inspired by the opportunity which had been born out of crisis, we changed job designations and reassigned former health workers to leadership positions in staff recruitment, induction, training, and clinic management. We are in awe of what the Calcutta Kids team continues to achieve and are looking forward to the creativity and innovation which these leaders will bring to their new managerial roles.

Please join us in celebrating this growth from within. By supporting the efforts of our team to support families like Puja's, you are also helping to provide a strong foundation for healthy growth of the pregnant women and children of Fakir Bagan.

With warmest holiday wishes,



Noah Levinson & Evangeline Ambat
Co-Directors, Calcutta Kids



P.S. For more stories, plans, outcomes, and quantitative indicators see our annual report on the home page of www.calcuttakids.org.

Please make your checks payable to “**Calcutta Kids**” and send to the address on the reverse page. Or if you prefer, visit our new online payment gateway by visiting www.calcuttakids.org and clicking on the **Donate** button. Donations are tax-deductible.