

July 2010



Dear TB Alert supporter,

My name is Siobhan, and as TB Alert's Programme Manager I have been privileged to see some innovative and inspiring grassroots TB projects in Africa and Asia. But no project has touched my heart as much as one I visited in India last year and I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you about it.

A bit of background – Tuberculosis in children

I should explain first that children are highly susceptible to TB, because their immune systems are still developing. Undiagnosed, children can lose vital years of education through illness, and suffer devastating long term effects to their health such as blindness, deafness or paralysis (complications of TB meningitis). All too often TB *does* go undiagnosed – children are presumed to be “sickly” or simply malnourished. As a result, I was shocked to discover that in India alone, 100,000 children die every year from TB – a curable disease.

Children taking the lead to fight TB and HIV in the Krishna slums

The Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh in India has particularly high rates of TB (and HIV, which makes children even more vulnerable to TB). With funding from TB Alert, our partner Vasavya Mahila Mandali (VMM) has been working in slum areas of the district to improve services for children with HIV and TB. Their work really impressed me, in that it not only focuses on the needs of children, but it also involves children in the design, planning and implementation of the project. Swami and his sister Vennela are both HIV positive and have both had and been cured of TB. Swami is the leader of a School Health Support Group and uses the training and knowledge he has received from VMM to share his story and find ways to tackle stigma and discrimination about the two diseases. He's a remarkable young man and I'm sure you will be as moved as I was when you read his story, on the back page.

Saving lives through education (and making it fun!)

While I was at VMM I joined in a kids club meeting, where the children taught me how to play a special TB/HIV version of Snakes and Ladders. It's a simple yet fun way of getting across vital health messages. Once children understand why certain behaviours are good (taking them up ladders) or bad (sliding down a snake), they are given a copy of the game to take to their home or school - and this way they can teach others and reinforce the messages. VMM gave us their permission to recreate a version of their game (in English) on the reverse of this letter - perhaps you know some children who might enjoy it?

Please help TB Alert plan and develop other projects to help children like Swami and Vennela

Over the next year we hope to expand the work of VMM as well as use what we have learnt from their work in our other projects in India, as well as southern Africa. Can you help? There is a donation form included with this letter – any support you can give would be very gratefully received.

Yours sincerely,

Siobhan Mahoney
Programme Manager

PS. Regular gifts help us plan effectively and give us the confidence to know that if we set up a new project, funds will be available to continue it. I'd like to ask if you could make a regular gift today – or if you already have one, would you consider a small increase? Thank you so much.

Web Site: www.tbalert.org

Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton, BN1 3XG **Tel:** +44 (0)1273 234029 **Fax:** +44 (0)1273 371247 **E-mail:** office@tbalert.org

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