

## NEW AT SUCHANA

### Our Upstairs

We are delighted that the new upstairs at Suchana's Education Resource Centre is now finished and furnished. This is a much anticipated extra-space – an Art Room; a Quiet Class Room; and an adaptable space for many activities. As one of many results of the extra space, we have been able to start an **Afternoon Pre-School** for about 30 children.



*The completed upstairs – thanks to the trustees of the late Irene Breugel*

### The Science Mela

A new event in our schedule was the Science Mela in January. Children learned for themselves, and then demonstrated to visitors, various scientific principles in simple, low-cost demonstrations. Suchana tuitions students lead the event, joined by children from government schools partnering this event. Visitors included teachers and students from these and other nearby schools.

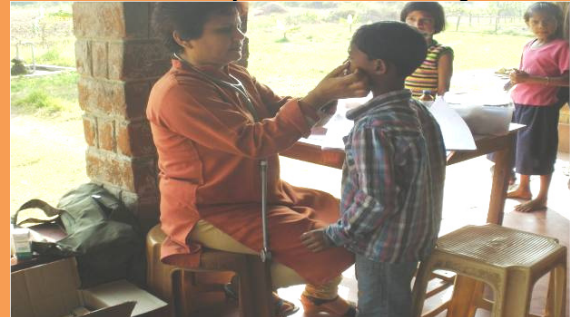


*Demonstrating that air has pressure from all directions*

### New Health Work

In December, Dr Sumita Basu from Kolkata volunteered her services for a health check up of ELG children. She found that two children needed urgent medical attention. Debasish had cataract in both eyes, very unusual for his age (14) and was slowly going blind. Mita's (16) haemoglobin was dangerously low. Previously, Suchana has not been able to address health issues that could not be treated locally. But this time, thanks to logistical support and co-ordination from Dr Basu, Maura Hurley of Mustard Seeds, and Joydeb Das, Suchana was able to get treatment and tests in Kolkata after finding services unavailable nearby.

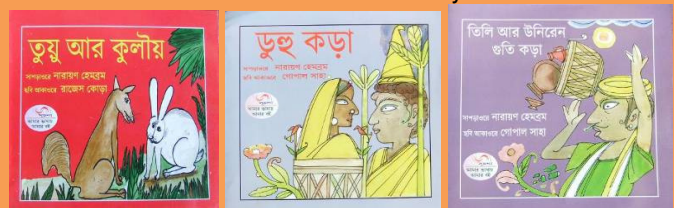
Debasish's cataracts were removed and now he can see well and has a big smile on his face! Mita underwent tests for thalassemia, which were found negative, and was given a blood transfusion locally to increase haemoglobin.



*Dr Sumita Basu on her health visit to Suchana*

### New Santali Books – Building a Children's Literature

In the series "Amar Bhasay Amar Boi" (My Books in My Language), Suchana produced 6 Santali story books for the age group 6-9 years. These are adaptations of Santal folk tales written down in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



*Three of the six new Santali books*

**New Kora alphabet songs** – and to add colour to use of the Kora Primer Suchana produced in 2010, a group of children made a CD of songs composed to the text. These are ABC songs in Kora!

## EVENTS UPDATE

All those new activities were of course in addition to the regular work of the Pre-School, Early Learning Group, Tuitions Classes, Computer Courses, the Health Worker, the Libraries and the Activity Groups. Winter annual events included, as has become customary, the child-managed **Children's Mela**; **Sports Day** including its mixed gender, mixed age team events; the **Annual Function** with 16 performances in Bangla, Santali, Kora and English; a tour of the local University's Art Fair, **Nandan Mela**, as the ELG's annual trip; and the **Picnic and Tour** which took in local temple Kankalitola and a feast on the banks of the Tekota river. We also welcomed one-off visits / workshops from the German group, **Clowns Without Borders**, and Australian performing/artists **Anne Riggs and Alex Pinder**. In January – March we also hosted interns from the Tata Group industries, conducting research on education for the **Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust**.

In an important expansion of Suchana's work, from April 2013 the **Mobile Library** began visiting 4 new villages. This brings the work of the library up to 7 days a week and it now takes books to nearly 600 children.

### THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT (RTE):

#### Provision to stop repeat years for exam failure

The RTE makes it obligatory for states to provide free and compulsory education of all children aged 6 to 14 as a Fundamental Right. One component of the Act states that no child in this age group – covering Class 1 to Class 8 - can be retained in the same class for a second year on the basis of failed annual exams or for any other reason.

This provision is very important for children who are first generation learners – i.e. most *adivasis* - because failing exams and therefore having to sit the same year again is an important reason why children who are struggling at school eventually drop out. Recent data from Birbhum, where Suchana is located, show that proportionately far more *adivasi* (schedule tribe) children drop out between class 5 and 10 than other groups: in classes 1-4 they are 9% of students, but in class 9-10 they are less than 5%. The proportion of more privileged groups, on the other hand, gets larger further up the school.

The provision aims to stop a practice that contributes to preventing completion of basic education. If this generation of children is supported to complete basic education, evidence suggests the chances of *their* children completing more years of education are good. Sadly, although the RTE has been in force for 3 years,

It has not been fully implemented in West Bengal.

Children are still being retained for exam failure. Many schools believe that retaining a child is good as he/she then has another chance to cope with that year's learning. Some teachers claim that children are now not taking their study seriously as they 'pass' annual exams in any case – being allowed to progress to the next year is understood as a signal that the previous year was 'passed'. This reasoning has gained some support in Parliament too, and the Act is being challenged.

In this debate, as in much discussion on education, the focus is on exams, and on the good students who pass them and the bad students who do not. Missing from it is recognition of the tremendous opportunity created by this provision of the RTE to go beyond exams and look at methods and content. If exams are not the focus, nor the only monitoring tool, teachers have an opportunity to be creative, go beyond the text book, work on children's understanding not just rote learning, and to develop ways to link up education with children's life experiences and cultural knowledge.

Suchana and other organisations working on education with marginalized groups must continue to advocate the No Repeat Years provision as an important step towards equality in education.

Sources: *Pratichi Trust India; Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) facilitated by PRATHAM; National University Of Educational Planning And Education (Neupa).*

## NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF SUCHANA IN THE UK

The Mere group's sustained and many activities included a Quiz and Pancake evening, and a Whole World Fair. In Kent, six stalls were held at Christmas fairs. A new group in Faversham began a 'Change for Change' initiative: **would you like to collect your small change for Suchana?** Labels for containers (eg screw top jars) are available from [angela@claresforstal.plus.com](mailto:angela@claresforstal.plus.com) who is the contact for Friends of Suchana.

One exciting development was Class 5 at Sheldwich School Skyping an English Class at Suchana. Suchana children had previously painted a banner with greetings in several languages which was presented at a Sheldwich Assembly.

Two exciting **sponsored events**: in May, 73 year old grandmother, Judy Seymour-Ure swam 1 km in aid of Suchana. In July, 16 year old Zubin Roy will cycle from Land's End to John O'Groats to raise money for an autorickshaw for the mobile library. Thanks to a donation from Andrew Baxter for the subscription, both events are up on Just Giving: [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com). **Sponsorship donations are welcomed on line or by text.** Please do support these brave initiatives! You can still sponsor the event after it has taken place!

**AND THANK YOU TO ...** Heather Chappell for a donation to assist a Suchana student through Art School and Cecilia Duggan for a lap top; many thanks for all donations including from the Irene Breugel Trust, Trustees of Mrs Ruth Walker; Robert Charles; Daphne Vivian-Neal; Michael and Petrina Slaytor, and Mary Gray. **In West Bengal**, thanks to Chandan Saha, Soumya Dey, Mina Choudhuri, Soumendra and Manjusree Basu. To Ruchira Das, Theo and Fifi Eisenberg and Brandy Henniger-Weisinger, thanks for contributions to the Mustard Seeds Emergency Medical Fund for Suchana, and to Joydeb Das for invaluable support for the transport logistics.

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