

Calcutta Connect
Annual Review 2017



It has been another great year for us in Calcutta Connect and we have been delighted to see the progress made in the work we do in supporting education in some of the most marginalised communities in Calcutta and surrounding districts. This booklet aims to give an overview of the work we do in Calcutta Connect and some of the highlights of the year for us in 2017.

We have been delighted this year to considerably expand the support we provide and this was done by entering in to a new and exciting partnership with a local organisation called Panikhali Rural Development Society (PRDS). We first met PRDS in late 2016 and were immediately drawn to them by their commitment to support education in a marginalised rural communities' outside of

Calcutta. We began by assisting them in refurbishing their school building in the new year and then entering in to a programme with them for 2017 to support education in the village of Panikhali. It's been a great journey with PRDS so far and we look forward to many new and exciting developments in 2018.

With the exciting new developments, we were keen to remain involved in the areas where we have been providing support for a number of years now. We are lucky to enjoy an excellent relationship with another Irish charity called Friends of Calcutta and for the fourth year we were able to provide support to Friends of Calcutta in their programme with local organisation Development Action Society.

Student sponsorship has been an area we have involved in since our foundation in 2010 and this year it gave us great joy to see the progress being made by the older students we support with many progressing through state examinations in India and on to further studies in college. This year we supported ninety students in the latter years of their secondary education and nine college students.

It's with thanks to the incredible support we receive from our supporters that we have been able to have such a great impact in 2017 and support education and make a difference to the lives of so many children, young people and their families.

Thank You,

Calcutta Connect

A man in a green shirt is seen from the side, looking at a display board. In the background, a group of children are visible, some looking towards the camera. The setting appears to be an educational or community center.

Calcutta Connect—Who Are We and What We Do

About Us and Who We Are

Calcutta Connect is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2010 by past pupils of the Coláiste Éanna India Immersion Project in 2010. Our committee is made up of individuals from a broad spectrum of backgrounds who can draw upon their experience to enhance the work we do. We work towards alleviating poverty by supporting education of children and young people from some of the poorest communities in Calcutta and surrounding districts.

Our Vision

All children and young adults no matter what their background in Calcutta and the surrounding districts of West Bengal have the opportunity to reach their full potential through education or vocational training and make better lives for themselves and their families.

Our Mission

To work in partnership with local organisations to support the provision of education, vocational training and necessary support systems to children and young adults to make a better future for themselves and their families.

100% Model

One of our greatest selling points to our supporters has been that 100% of all donations we receive go directly towards the projects we support in Calcutta. As we have grown we have been proud to operate a 100% model which means that 100% of public donations we receive go directly towards the projects we support. Administrative expenses incurred (including the salary of our CEO) are met by separate funding, generously provided by a private patron. In short this means that every cent we receive in donations goes straight towards our projects in Calcutta.



Our Core Values and Principles

Partnership

We strongly believe in working with local organisations is the best way to address the problems faced in underprivileged communities.

Respect

Wherever we work we ensure that the cultural sensitivities are respected by ourselves and our partners and we shall not discriminate in educating any child based on their race, caste or religion.

Transparency

We believe in being completely open about the way in which we operate and clear about where all funds raised are used and being accountable to all beneficiaries, members, partners and the public.

Empowerment

We believe in being completely open about the way in which we operate and clear about where all funds raised are used and being accountable to all beneficiaries, members, partners and the public.

Child Centred

We believe that the best interests of the children and young adults we serve should be at the centre of all the work we do. Each child who we support will be given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Empowerment of Women and Girls

We recognise the greater difficulties faced by girls in completing and attaining an education. Through our work we will endeavour to assist girls in every way possible to complete their education

The Importance of Education

The numbers of children in school in India have risen in recent years, but despite the improvement of the numbers enrolled in school there are a number of worrying statistics regarding education in India. The UNESCO 2015 Report on Global Education states that India is home to the largest number of out school adolescents in the world with 16 million out of school.

Those from poor communities are most prone to drop out of school due to family's economic situation, early marriage, poor standards of education and a lack of value of education being common causes of students dropping out of school. Providing quality pre-primary education as well as on going monitoring and support of students once they are enrolled in government schools is recognised as a method of providing children with their best opportunity to complete their education and make brighter futures for themselves and their families by breaking the cycle of poverty.

Education in India

36%

The number of children who have dropped out of school by the age of 14



Children with a parent who has completed their secondary education are twice as likely to complete their own education

45%

The number of students who never complete their secondary education in India



Children who can read words and sentences by the age of 8 are 70% more likely to complete their education

43%

The number of children who don't receive a pre-primary education



Children from larger families are much less likely to complete their education

Our Committee

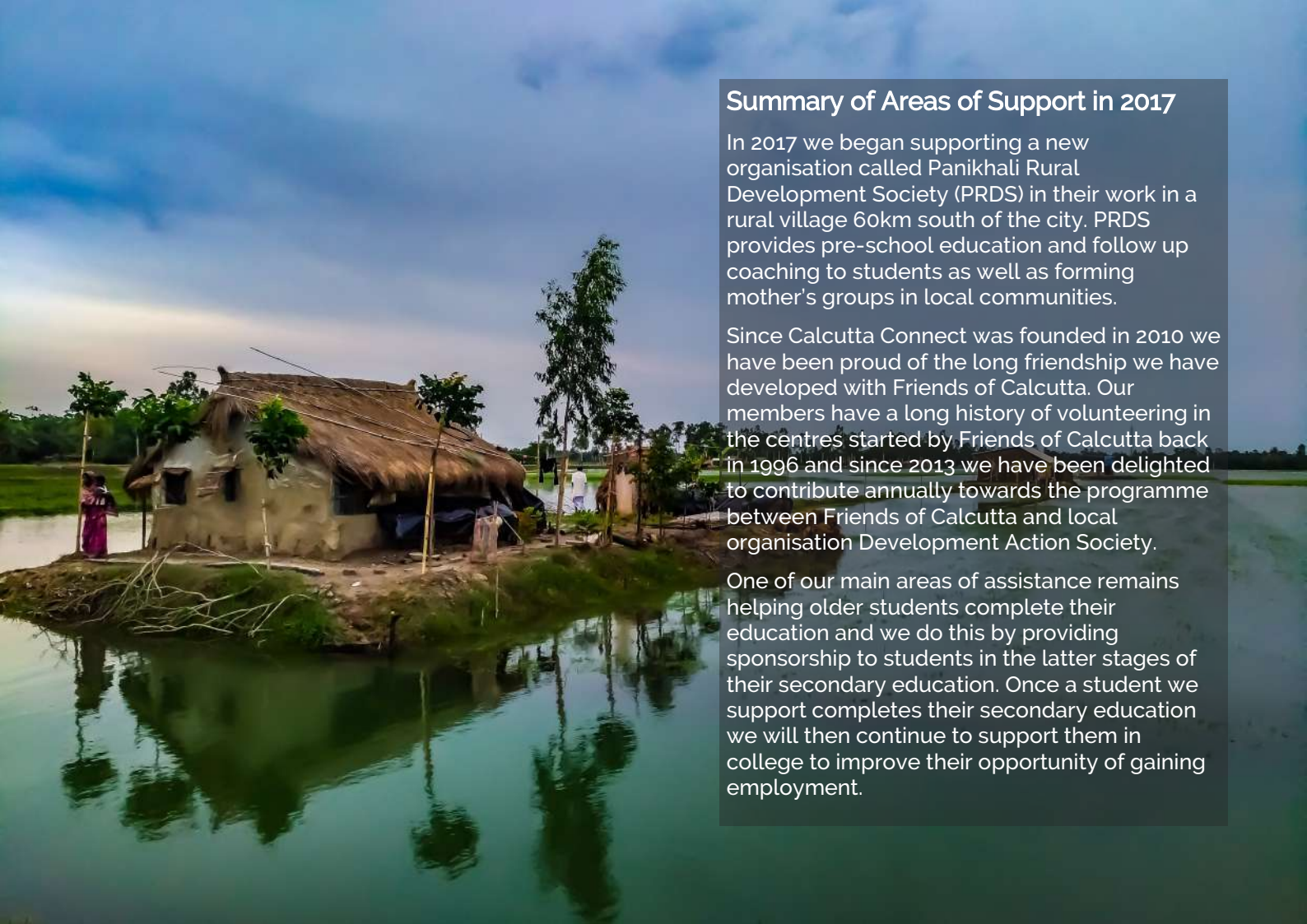
We are a young and energetic charity with ambitions to grow in order to support the provision of quality education in underprivileged communities. Our committee consists of eight individuals who have all visited Calcutta on numerous occasions and are passionate about bringing about real change to the lives of the young people we support. The committee contains individuals who can draw on their experience from here in Ireland and India to contribute towards Calcutta Connect having the greatest impact possible in the projects we support. We meet regularly to discuss our current and future work.

The members of Calcutta Connects committee are as follows: Chairperson - Brian Kelly, Secretary - Ian Stuart-Trainor, Treasurer - Alan Irwin, Emily Lyon, Alan McMullan, Ciarán Ahern, Shay Ferris and Emmet Wilkinson.

Welcoming Emily to our committee

We were extremely lucky this year to welcome Emily Lyon to our committee. Emily graduated from UCD with an International Bachelor of Social Science in 2015 and completed a Masters in Women, Gender & Society in UCD in 2016. She has volunteered with UCD Volunteers Overseas in the Northeast India project as Student Leader in 2015 and as Team Leader in 2017. She visited Calcutta with Calcutta Connect in 2016 and 2017. Emily currently works in the voluntary sector, as the Programme Assistant for UCDVO. She will be a great addition to the committee bringing her vast experience in the international development and voluntary sector.





Summary of Areas of Support in 2017

In 2017 we began supporting a new organisation called Panikhali Rural Development Society (PRDS) in their work in a rural village 60km south of the city. PRDS provides pre-school education and follow up coaching to students as well as forming mother's groups in local communities.

Since Calcutta Connect was founded in 2010 we have been proud of the long friendship we have developed with Friends of Calcutta. Our members have a long history of volunteering in the centres started by Friends of Calcutta back in 1996 and since 2013 we have been delighted to contribute annually towards the programme between Friends of Calcutta and local organisation Development Action Society.

One of our main areas of assistance remains helping older students complete their education and we do this by providing sponsorship to students in the latter stages of their secondary education. Once a student we support completes their secondary education we will then continue to support them in college to improve their opportunity of gaining employment.



Panikhali Rural Development Society

Founded in 2006 Panikhali Rural Development Society (PRDS) work in a number of rural villages approximately 60km south of Kolkata. The organisation works to provide education to children from marginalised families in the community and works closely with mothers from the local area.

In 2016 we came in to contact with PRDS and were immediately drawn to the project as it was providing education to children from poor families and supporting mothers groups in local communities. At this time PRDS was struggling financially despite their best efforts.

In early 2017 we funded repairs to the school building and were then delighted to begin supporting their programme of providing pre-school, follow-up support and numerous outreach programmes in local communities.

By the summer we had expanded our work with PRDS to provide follow-up coaching to students in a neighbouring village. PRDS aims to work closely with mothers in particular to help uplift them and their families through awareness programmes and the provision of education to their children.

By the end of 2017 there were 165 students enrolled in the different programmes in PRDS attending the centres on a daily basis with 115 mothers in the self help groups.

Friends of Calcutta

We are lucky to enjoy an excellent friendship with another Irish organisation called Friends of Calcutta and have been providing support to the programme between them and local organisation Development Action Society since 2013 which supports the education of 800 children and young adults. The programme provides education through the provision of pre-school, follow-up support and vocational training. In addition to this nutrition and medical care is provided in each of their four centres. Three of the centres are located in the city while the fourth is located in the remote Sundarban area 100km south of Calcutta. As part of this programme in 2017 Calcutta Connect will be one of the four funding sponsors in the Friends of Calcutta project.





Student Sponsorship

When Calcutta Connect was founded in 2010 one of the first areas we began to provide support to was assisting older students complete their education by removing the financial barrier which so many students from poorer backgrounds face. Education is free under Indian law until the end of Class VIII (age 14) however the final four years of school are not and the costs can escalate quickly in these years putting pressure on poorer families and resulting in students dropping out.

In Calcutta Connect we provide sponsorship to students in the final years of their education to remove this financial barrier and to further enhance the prospects of these students by assisting them to complete their education. We have been supporting older students in this way for a number of years now and have already seen the benefits of this assistance with greater number of students reaching the latter stages of their secondary education.

This year we are proud to support to support 90 students in the final years of their secondary education. The students we support in 2017 come from both PRDS and the Friends of Calcutta projects.



College Students

With the success of our student support programme in recent years it has been great for us to see a number of the students we sponsor complete their education and progress on to further studies in third level education.

The desire by so many of the students to progress to third level studies to further their future career prospects has become much greater in recent times and with many of the students we sponsor at second level wishing to attend college we decided to continue our support of these students to help them complete their studies.

This year we are proud to sponsor nine different students in their college education and we work closely with them all throughout the year to guide them and monitor their individual progress.

Sushanta

Sushanta comes from the remote Sundarban area and despite this his family were determined for him to be admitted in college. With the support from Calcutta Connect he has is now studying Chemistry Honours and is in the second year of his course.

Meet Our College Students

First Year



Paltu is studying a Bachelor of Commerce Degree with an emphasis on Accounts having received first class marks in his higher secondary exam in commerce stream.



Priya is studying a law degree having successfully gained admission to college after passing the entrance examination. She will be completing her LLB in LJD Law College.



Samser is taking a Bachelor of Science degree in Bango Basi College. He completed his higher secondary in science stream and is now pursuing his BSc in college.



Shehjadi is studying an Arts degree having completed her higher secondary this year. She will be completing her BA over the coming three years.

Second Year



Akbar is in his second year of a BHM in Hospital Management at the Future Institute of Engineering.



Salim is in his second year of his Bachelor of Commerce Degree in New Alipore College in Kolkata.



Rupmini is in her second year of a Journalism Degree in Derozio Memorial College in the New Town area of Kolkata.



Imran is in his second year of his BSc in Media Science in The Future Institute of Engineering and Management.

A Look Back at 2017

Panikhali Rural Development Society

The year began with repair work to the PRDS school building that were badly needed before we could progress in our work with them. The work was quickly arranged and completed by late January by PRDS founder and secretary Subho with the results being a much better learning environment for the children and staff following the construction of a new thatched roof, frame and installation of lights and fans. With the improvements in place we then agreed to enter in to a partnership with PRDS for 2017 where we would fund the running of their village pre-school and evening follow up programme. In addition to this mother's self-help groups would be held regularly with numerous awareness camps and activities taking place throughout the year.

With the programme progressing with PRDS nicely a mothers meeting was held in early June in a neighbouring village called Boria where the mothers requested coaching for their older children who were in classes V – VIII. After



discussions between PRDS and Calcutta Connect and then with the local community the use of a local community building was given for classes. Two teachers were hired to give the classes each day to 45 students here.

Back in Panikhali the classes were running smoothly for both the pre-school and follow-up students however as can often be the case outside factors can come in to play in India. With the summer heat building from late March the electricity supply becomes erratic and cuts are common in village areas. The evening follow-up classes were affected in particular as they were regularly plunged in to darkness hampering the evenings lessons. We consulted with PRDS and an inverter machine was purchased which would ensure continuous supply of electricity from a backup battery supply. It has made a great difference and each evening students are able to study and complete their lessons..

By the end of 2017 our programme with PRDS had proved to be a great success to date and we held exciting discussions with the PRDS board about our future plans together and how we can further support the education of children and young people in these marginalised communities .



Friends of Calcutta

We were approached by Friends of Calcutta Chairperson Fr Vincent O'Hara in April to support them in their work of running four education centres where 800 children and young people are educated. Once again we were delighted to renew our long association with Friends of Calcutta. It is also great for us to be able to sponsor the education of so many of the older students in their centres and also those who have now progressed to college.



Student & College Sponsorships

There are two busy periods for sponsorship in Calcutta and they come in January and June each year when the admissions take place for Class IX & X and then Class XI, XII and College Students respectively. This year was no different and it was great for us to be in the position to sponsor 90 school students along with 9 college students. We met all the students throughout the year to organise the distribution of their admission fee's and education costs and continually monitor their progress during the year.



Coláiste Éanna India Immersion Project

The roots of Calcutta Connect lie in the Coláiste Éanna India Immersion Project and to this day we enjoy great ties with the school, which has become one of our most important long term supporters.

Established in 2001 and still continuing bi-annually the India Immersion Project sends pupils from Coláiste Éanna to Calcutta to volunteer in the city with a number of organisations and to immerse themselves in Indian culture.

Since 2001 78 students and 14 members of staff have taken part in the ten trips to Calcutta. In February 2018 we look forward to welcoming the next group of students and staff to the city and witness the progress we have made since their last trip in 2016.

As part of their visit, the pupils will spend time visiting the projects we support and getting to know students, staff and the areas in the projects we support. It gives us great pleasure to welcome the group from the school every second year and to share with them the continued progress in our work.



Looking Ahead to 2018

In late 2017 we began to make plans with PRDS to expand our work with them and begin supporting new areas where even greater numbers from marginalised rural communities can be supported in their education. In 2018 together we will grow the projects which we began this year in the villages of Panikhali and Boria as well as beginning in a new community called Choradakatiya. This is an exciting new development for us in Calcutta Connect and we look forward to making an even greater impact in 2018 with PRDS.


In addition to this we look forward to continuing our long association with Friends of Calcutta and continuing to support them in their work in to 2018 and beyond.

Our longest running area of support of older students which we began back in 2010 will

continue to grow this year as the numbers of students reaching higher levels of secondary school and college increase each year.

In February 2018 we look forward to welcoming the group from the Coláiste Éanna India Immersion Project to Calcutta where we will show them the projects we support during their trip. We have strong links with the school and it's a great honour for our committee to keep our connection with them after so many years.

It's shaping up to be our most exciting year to date for Calcutta Connect in 2018 and we wouldn't be able to achieve so much each year without the support we receive from everyone who donates to us and supports our work on a regular basis. We would like to say a big thank you to all our supporters for all they have helped us achieve in 2017.

A group of young children in blue school uniforms are sitting on a red floor, focused on reading their books. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor environment. The children are arranged in a loose group, with some in the foreground and others in the background.

Become a Supporter of Calcutta Connect

We are always looking to expand our network of supporters and donors and would like to welcome any inquires no matter what their size.

From large donors to once off donations you can be assured that all funds raised will be put to the best use possible in supporting education in some of the poorest communities in Calcutta and surrounding districts.

You can make a single donation or become a monthly supporter by visiting www.calcuttaconnect.ie/donate

Or contact us at info@calcuttaconnect.ie for further information.



Calcutta Connect is an Irish Registered Charity CHY 19742

To make a donation to our work visit www.calcuttaconnect.ie/donate



www.calcuttaconnect.ie