



Calcutta Connect Annual Review 2022



It is our pleasure to present you with the Calcutta Connect Annual Review of 2022. This review aims to provide an overview to our many incredible supporters and collaborators highlighting: the work we do; how we utilise all funds raised; and the excellent progress being made in the projects we support in West Bengal, India.

While the year began with many of the Covid-19 restrictions remaining in place in India, and beyond, the tide soon began to turn against the pandemic. In February, our local partner, the Panikali Rural Development Society ("PRDS"), resumed classes at full capacity for all students in the three centres we support with them. This was a particularly poignant milestone for these centres, with a number of younger students having not been able to attend school since March 2020. Across the three education centres, there are now over 1,025 students of all ages enrolled with 56 staff members employed by PRDS. In addition to this, we were also delighted to be able to continue our

support of older students, who are in the latter stages of their secondary education or completing college courses. In 2022 we provided 165 scholarships to such students - aligned with our core objective of removing barriers to completing education.

The construction projects we had embarked on with PRDS since 2019 concluded in 2022. The final two projects comprised the construction of extra classrooms in Alor Disha Centre and a new Skills, Empowerment and Medical Centre in Panikhali Village. The success of these projects has been made possible by the hard work and dedication of the PRDS team, particularly during lengthy periods of pandemic related restrictions and complications and we are so proud to have such excellent infrastructure in place. The buildings will be of great benefit to students and the wider local community for many years to come, and with classes resuming (for both children and adults) this year, we are already seeing the enormous benefit these premises are providing to the locality.

On a similarly positive note, the region benefited from a much needed reprieve from the destructive Cyclones experienced in the previous two years. Given the trajectory of climate change globally, it is fully expected that further environmental disasters will unfortunately occur and we continue to work within the local communities in which we operate to provide any and all support, guidance and assistance in preparation for the same.

We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported Calcutta Connect this year, without which none of the above progress would have been possible. It is this support which enables us to help so many children and young people from marginalised communities in India to reach their full potential, in circumstances where the odds are otherwise stacked against them.

Thank You,

Brian Kelly
Chief Executive Calcutta Connect

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. 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, young adults and families, regardless of their background, can reach their full potential through education.

Our Mission

To work in partnership with local organisations to create sustainable change through Education, Vocational Training and Community Development, empowering children and young adults to secure a better future for themselves and their families.

100% Model

One of our greatest selling points to our supporters is that we operate a 100% model, meaning that 100% of all donations we receive go directly towards the projects we support in Calcutta. As we have grown as a charity we are proud to continue this 100% model as a fundamental feature of how we operate. 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 that working with local organisations is the best way to understand, challenge and address the issues faced in underprivileged communities.

Respect

Respect is at the core of how we engage with each other, our stakeholders and the work we do.

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 see education as a tool of empowerment in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Professionalism

In our work we strive to operate in a professional, honest and ethical manner and adhere to best practices.

Child Centred

We believe that the best interests of the children and young adults we support should be at the centre of all the work we do.

Diversity

We celebrate diversity and seek to challenge the many inequalities experienced as a result of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, Sexualities and Religion.

Gender Equality

We acknowledge and actively challenge the additional difficulties faced by girls in completing their education.

Committee in 2022

As had been the trend for the previous years, most of our work and meetings took place online. We conducted all our board meetings online in 2022, and regular communication between Ireland and India took place.

Our CEO Brian Kelly travelled to India on two occasions throughout the year, spending five months in Kolkata in total. During his trips to India, Brian works with our local partner PRDS to oversee all aspects of the programmes we support. In April, our board member Alan Irwin also travelled to India to join Brian for two weeks, seeing first-hand all the progress which has been made since his last visit in 2019 and working closely with PRDS on strategic planning for the coming years ahead.

We spent considerable time in previous years ensuring that we have comprehensive and robust policies and procedures in place covering all aspects of the work we do as an organisation operating within the charities sector. As a committee, we view this as an on-going process, and this year we continued to monitor our compliance with best governance practices, the CRA Governance Code, safeguarding policies and our internal risk management practices. Whilst a collective responsibility, our committee members have taken ownership over various aspects of these matters, with monitoring and regular reporting set as a key feature of ensuring our continued compliance with all our obligations.

In December, we once again held our Annual General Meeting virtually, with a number of our supporters in attendance. It was an excellent opportunity to provide our programme and financial updates for 2022 and to present our plans for 2023 in an open and transparent medium.

What We Supported In 2022

During 2022, as with previous years, we continued our support of across the following key initiatives:

1. As discussed in more detail below, we continued to strengthen and deepen our partnership with Panikhali Rural Development Society ("PRDS"). We work together in managing, promoting and developing three education centres called Panikhali, Alor Disha and Boria, which are located 60km south of Kolkata in marginalised rural communities. This year the number of students enrolled reached 1025 with 56 staff members employed across these centres. In addition, we continued to support a wide variety of community outreach initiatives within the areas surrounding the schools which are going from strength to strength.
2. Our student support programme has been a critical part of our work since 2010. Each year we provide students in the latter stages of their secondary education and those who have progressed to college, with financial support. This support removes many barriers to completing their education and pursuing further studies in colleges and training institutions. In 2022 we provided 165 scholarships to students to support them in their education.
3. The school infrastructure development programme with PRDS reached its final stages in 2022, with the last projects completed, which comprised the construction of: (i) the constructing extra classrooms at our Alor Disha centre; and (ii) a new skills, empowerment and medical centre to be used by the local community in Panikahli. It's been hectic for us and PRDS with so much construction on-going since late 2019, however, we are confident that we now have excellent infrastructure to enable us to fully serve the communities where we work. We are incredibly grateful to the patron who has so generously supported us in redeveloping the PRDS centres.

Panikhali Rural Development Society

This year we continued our partnership with a local Indian NGO, PRDS. Together we collaborated to manage the successful operation of three education centres located 60 km south of Kolkata. The centres are in marginalised rural communities with 1025 students enrolled and 56 staff employed.

In 2019 we began an ambitious school building and redevelopment programme with PRDS. In 2022 the final phases of these construction projects took place. Over the past three years, we have built new or redeveloped each of the centres we support with PRDS. This year, additional classrooms were added to the Alor Disha Centre and a new building was constructed in Panikhali Village, with the specific purpose of serving as a Skills, Empowerment and Medical Centre for the local community. We are proud to have this excellent infrastructure in place, which will be of enormous benefit for the area and aims to become self-sustaining within the near term.

With construction work completed and COVID-19 restrictions ending in early 2022, this gave the first opportunity since 2019 for the centres to be fully operational. Classes took place for all students from February in the pre-school and follow-up programmes. Classes begin each morning at 6.30 am and continue throughout the day in different batches until 8.30 pm. It's been great to see the centres full of life and students coming to their lessons daily. This year also allowed other programmes that were not possible in the previous three years. Seeing our students, staff and community enjoy the different activities during the year was a source of great pleasure for us.

We are lucky to work with a great team in PRDS whose sole focus is on providing a wide variety of programmes to benefit children, young people, mothers and families within the surrounding areas.



Panikhali Centre

The first community where we began working with PRDS was in Panikhali village. The building was basic and comprised of a single large room with a mud floor, a bamboo structure, fence walls and a straw roof. The building served us well initially, but as time went on and student numbers increased, we knew we needed to construct a new building. Construction of the new building began in late 2019 and continued quickly over the following months. The lower level was ready by early 2020, and the upper floor opened for classes in June 2020. The building has five classrooms, a library, a kitchen, a computer room, an office, student toilets and a community meeting room.



Alor Disha Centre

In the summer of 2017, we visited the community of Charadakatia, located 15km from Panikhali Centre. Local stakeholders requested we begin an education programme to support the young people in the community. With PRDS, we decided to start a programme in a building that another NGO had recently vacated. With only two classrooms in the building and increasing student numbers, we knew we would need to increase our capacity here. Beginning in 2019, we expanded Alor Disha Centre in different stages by adding extra classrooms. The centre comprises five classrooms, a tailoring training room, a computer training room, an office, a kitchen, a library and a community meeting room.



Boria Centre

We have been working with PRDS in Boria Village since the summer of 2017. When we started classes in Boria, we were very fortunate to have the use of two churches to conduct classes. With the increasing number of students, we put plans together with PRDS to construct our own centre to cater for the growing numbers. We assisted PRDS in purchasing a plot of land in the village and constructing a new school building. The building became operational in 2021 and has four classrooms, a tailoring training room, an office, a kitchen, student toilets and a community meeting room.



Skills Training, Empowerment and Medical Centre

As our programme grew with PRDS and student numbers increased, we identified different areas of need. Two areas identified have been providing skills to empower young people and local women and a medical check-up facility for the local community. In the village of Panikhali, we supported PRDS in constructing a new centre to train young people and women in acquiring skills to help them generate an income and support their families. The building also has a dedicated medical room where nurses and doctors will visit to provide check-ups and consultations to our students and the local community free of charge.



Pre-School

Pre-School classes take place five days a week in each centre. In these classes, children aged 4-6 learn the basics of Bengali, English and Maths to prepare them for entry to Government Schools in the locality. Each child is supplied with books and a uniform to encourage the habit of learning and regular school attendance from an early age.



Nutrition

Every day on completion of pre-school classes, children receive a nutritious lunch our school cooks freshly prepare in our kitchens. The meal provides students with much-needed nutrients they usually might not get in their diets at home. It also acts as an incentive for children to attend school regularly from an early age



Follow-Up

After completing our pre-school, students are mainstreamed into government-run schools in the areas. However, their involvement with our centres continues beyond this point. Instead, they enter our most extensive programme in the form of follow-up coaching for Classes I-XII. With many of our students being first-generation learners, providing them with additional support in our centres is essential in enabling them to keep up to speed in school and pass exams.



Mothers Groups

In each community, mother's groups have been formed by PRDS to discuss issues faced by women and their children and to create awareness on overcoming these issues. Meetings are held monthly and have proved highly beneficial, with many mothers in attendance.



Tailoring Training

The tailoring training programme is designed to provide local women with training in tailoring, clothes making and production. On completion of the course, the trainees will have acquired a skill that will enable them to start their own small business, take orders locally and generate an income for themselves and their families.



Computer Training

In each centre, a computer training programme takes place throughout the week for the students in the higher classes. Many of the students would otherwise have little or no access to computers. This training provides students with computer software and hardware knowledge that will benefit them in their future studies and careers.



Student Sponsorships

This year we continued our student sponsorship programme. The programme aims to support students in the latter part of their education to complete their studies and pass examinations. Students from marginalised backgrounds face difficulty paying for school admissions, textbooks and stationery. Our sponsorship programme aims to remove this financial barrier thereby enabling students to complete their education.

In 2022 our student sponsorship programme provided 165 students with scholarships, across secondary and third level education. We have supported students this way since 2010, and it's been great to see the continued positive impact particularly on reducing the number of students who dropout of school. A large number of students have also gone on to colleges and training institutions and gained employment. We are proud of all the students and to see the fruits of their hard work when they pass exams and then pursue higher studies.



2022 Programme Highlights



2022 Look Back - Classes Resume

February saw lessons resume for all classes for the first time in over two years with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in West Bengal. It was a great occasion to see the new centres in use for the first time. While older students had been able to attend classes during the previous two years, 2022 was the first time we could open lessons to all students.

In particular, seeing the preschool children in the PRDS centres was a welcome change. Many of them had never attended our centres with school closures, and February gave them their first chance to come in person. Hearing the noise and chatter from the younger children back in the centres was brilliant. They adapted to attending school and participated in their daily lesson with great energy and enthusiasm.

The past two years had been particularly challenging for the teachers in the centres, who had diligently continued to distribute, collect and correct student worksheets which had been completed from home, and visited students' families at home to provide feedback, all with a view to minimising the impact on these children' education in the longer term.

We want to take the opportunity to thank the PRDS teachers for all their hard work during this period and dedication to helping the students keep up to speed with their studies.



Trip to Kolkata

In March, the Class 9 students from the PRDS centres made their annual trip to Kolkata for a city tour. The visit has become a highlight for the Class 9 students, with many rarely getting to experience an outing to Kolkata. Seventy-five students, accompanied by PRDS staff, set off early on March 5th and made the 60km journey to the city. They spent the day visiting the Zoological Gardens and one of Kolkata's most iconic landmarks, the Victoria Memorial. The day was enjoyed by all students and staff from the villages as they got to experience spending time in the city. The day-long trip finished with games and many selfies as the sunset behind Victoria Memorial.



Exam Results

This year saw many students from PRDS sit their board examinations for Classes 10 and 12. Exams occurred in March and April, and over the summer months, students received their results. The students had worked very hard in the months preceding their exams, and their hard work was evident when the results were announced, with every student passing. Several students received top marks in their schools, much to the delight of PRDS staff and the student's families.

It's a testament to the hard work the staff in the PRDS centres put in throughout the year to see so many students passing their board exams and it is a source of great pride for us at Calcutta Connect to see our student sponsorship programme's continued impact. We would like to wish all the students all the best in their future studies and career paths.



Student Councils

With the growing numbers of older students in the PRDS, we wanted to increase the involvement of such students in the centres. In October, a meeting of students in classes 10 and above took place in each centre to discuss their roles and responsibilities. After consultation between staff, management and the student body, a student committee was formed in each centre.

The student councils meet to discuss and highlight student issues and bring them to PRDS management. They will have the opportunity to present their suggestions to the staff and management of PRDS. The student committees will provide a sense of empowerment, ownership and greater involvement in PRDS's activities. It also allows us and PRDS to ensure we are aligned with the actual needs of students at any given time. The councils have the added benefit of affording student members an opportunity to learn communication, planning and organisational skills, which will be of huge benefit to them in the long-term.



Movie Nights

One of the great benefits of having excellent facilities and equipment in the centres we support with PRDS is being able to add new activities. While our programmes focus on education, we also recognise the need for leisure time and enjoyment for our students. With this in mind, once every two months a movie night is held at each centre. PRDS staff chose a film with a particular social message that would resonate with the students, and the chosen film is shown on a projector screen in front of the centres, with local community members joining to enjoy the movie.



Imran's Graduation

In the summer of 2021, it was a big occasion for us when Imran travelled from India to Ireland before beginning his Master's Degree in Germany. Over the past year, it has been great to hear of his progress, and some of our board members had the opportunity to visit him. Imran progressed well through his coursework during the year.

His Masters Project took place over the summer months when he made his first short film called "Breaking Free". The making of the film was a brilliant experience for Imran and one that will stand to him long into the future. His college in Berlin held a graduation film screening in October to celebrate the end of their time at the college. It was an excellent occasion for Imran, with his film shown on the big screen for the first time. His film has since been selected for screening at several film festivals over the coming months. Imran plans to remain in Germany for the foreseeable future and pursue a career in the film industry.



Blood Donation Camp

PRDS organised a blood donation camp in conjunction with a local hospital for the second year. The PRDS centres' redevelopment has allowed such programmes to take place beyond their normal function. We have seen the centres double up as shelters during cyclones and hosting community meetings. It was great to once again collaborate with a local hospital to hold a blood donation camp.

Staff and management of PRDS, along with local community members, came to the centre to donate blood during a daylong drive in October. When blood stocks are low in local hospitals, it can often be the responsibility of a family to locate a donor for a transfusion. The hospital will use all the donated blood to provide needy people with blood during their time of need. Sixty-seven people donated blood, and each received a small gift as a token of appreciation from PRDS.



Eye Camp

In April, PRDS arranged an eye check-up camp for the local community in Panikhali Village. PRDS worked with another NGO called Living Hope and a large Indian Optical Retailer, GKB Optical, to arrange the camp. Two hundred fifty local people attended the camp, where a team of skilled opticians checked them. Each person received advice on necessary treatments and medication to care for their eyes.

One hundred twenty-one community members were prescribed glasses and provided with them free of charge. It was great to see this collaboration much to the benefit of the local community. Similar programmes are planned for the future when visiting teams of specialists will provide medical check ups free of charge in the communities where we work with PRDS.



Safeguarding Committees

Safeguarding all young people is paramount to Calcutta Connect. We ensure that our local partner PRDS adopts the same high standards. There were several meetings among PRDS staff to ensure they know the best practices for safeguarding students. In each centre, a safeguarding committee has been appointed.

During parent meetings, guardians of the students discussed safeguarding measures. They received information from the staff members with whom they can discuss concerns. In each centre, a list of Child Safeguarding Do's and Don'ts is on the wall highlighting our core standards. A suggestion box is in each centre where anyone can give feedback or comment on any concerns.



School Building Programme

Over the past three years, we have entered into an ambitious school building and renovation with our local partner PRDS. Since the end of 2019, we have supported PRDS in constructing three new education centres named Panikhali, Alor Disha and Boria. With the hard work of PRDS management, we have completed this work despite lockdowns and restrictions. Panikhali Centre was ready by mid-2020, and Boria by late 2021.

In different phases, new classrooms were constructed at Alor Disha centre beginning in early 2020. The last phase began in late 2021 and was ready by late spring 2022. The final project was building a skills, empowerment and medical centre in Panikhali Village. Construction started in late 2021, and the building was ready by summer 2022. This centre is 100 metres from the main centre in Panikhali.

By the summer of 2022, it was great to be coming to the end of our construction programme. It has been a busy period for us and PRDS management. To carry out such a significant expansion of the centres we support during this challenging period has been a great achievement. We have supported PRDS in constructing four buildings that will provide education for many years and have already been used in other ways by the local communities, where needed, for example as shelters during cyclones and for hosting community meetings

Alor Disha

We began working with PRDS in supporting the running of Alor Disha centre in 2018. The centre consisted of two classrooms, and as student numbers increased, we knew we would need to expand capacity. Beginning in 2019, we started supporting PRDS in constructing extra classrooms. The work to develop the centre took place in different phases over the next three years.

In the first phase, we added a new room to the upper level of the initial building. This room is now a meeting room and a classroom to help with the growing student numbers. Next, we assisted PRDS in acquiring a vacant plot of land to the rear of the centre. Construction of a new building on this land began in 2020. A new building consisting of two levels was constructed over the next two years. The building contains three classrooms, a kitchen, an office and a computer room.

The student numbers in Alor Disha have increased since we began our programme here with PRDS in 2018. The construction work to add new classrooms to expand the centre's capacity means the PRDS can accommodate the 352 students who attend the centre daily. We are proud to have such a great facility at Alor Disha to create a much greater learning atmosphere for students and staff.



Skills, Empowerment and Medical Centre

It has been a long-held ambition of ours and PRDS to expand the work we do together. We wanted to have an even greater impact in our education projects' communities. The current buildings focus on supporting children and young people of school-going age. We recognised even with our education project's great benefits, we could have more programmes to benefit the local community further.

After consultation with PRDS management, we decided to construct a second building in Panikhali Village. The building would become our Skills, Empowerment and Medical Centre. It is 150 metres from our primary Panikhali Centre. The main aim of the building is to provide skills training to local youths and women. They can use these skills to gain employment or start businesses. Construction began in late 2021 and was completed by the middle of 2022.

The first programme to begin in the new building is the tailoring programme that moved here from the main centre in Panikhali. We are working with PRDS to plan several training programmes starting in 2023. There is also a dedicated medical room in the building that teams of medical specialists will use to carry out checkups in the local community.



Get Involved With Calcutta Connect

If you are passionate about helping support the education of young people from marginalised communities in India we want to hear from you. There are many ways to get involved in the work we do from making a one-off or regular donation, to attending one of our fundraisers (or organising your own), to becoming a corporate sponsor or visiting Calcutta with us. We are always open to new ideas and working with new people so please do get in touch if you have any suggestions as to how you might be able to help.



1. Donate

We are always grateful for any single donation and we also have a large number of ongoing supporters. 100% of all donations we receive go directly to the projects we support. Visit our donations page on our website to see the various ways we accept donations and make a difference

2. Organise a

A fundraising event is a great way to raise funds and help spread the word about the work we do in Calcutta Connect. No matter how big or small your planned event is we want to hear from you and will support you in the planning of your event.



3. Corporate

If you are looking to partner your company with a charity where you can be assured that all of the funds you donate go directly to education projects in India then look no further. We have been lucky to engage with a number of corporates in recent years and are always looking to expand our circle of supporters. Through partnering with Calcutta Connect you will help provide education to some of the poorest communities in Calcutta, while at the same time meeting your own Corporate Social Responsibility objectives. We can attend your offices and present on our work and we have previously arranged visits to our programmes in Calcutta for some corporate supporters. We are happy to work with you to design a programme that would fit best with your company so please get in touch.

4. School Visits

Our committee members are always available to undertake school visits or speak to other community groups to inform students and all our supporters of the work we do, the projects we support and more generally about development issues faced in India. We can tailor a session depending on the age groups of any students involved and the topics that teachers or group leaders may wish to explore. Please contact us any time to arrange a talk.

For more information on how you can get involved, please visit www.calcuttaconnect.ie or contact us at info@calcuttaconnect.ie



Planning for 2023

With the disruption of recent years behind us, we look forward to a more settled year ahead in 2023. Our committee will be holding its annual day-long strategy session early in the New Year, with a view to getting back to planning for both the short, medium and long term direction of the organisation and the projects we support in India.

Whilst new initiatives will undoubtedly stem from that session, we can say with certainty that we will continue to: (i) provide and expand our Older Student Sponsorship programme to ensure its continued success; and (ii) work closely with PRDS to:

1. Plan the training courses for the new Skill, Empowerment and Medical Centre that will be rolled out in 2023;
2. Continue to bolster our community outreach and assistance programmes for the benefit of the wider communities in which our centres are located; and
3. Enhance the existing education programmes and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation for the benefit of all students and staff in the centres.

For the first time since 2020, we are looking forward to welcoming a school group to visit the projects we support. St Colmcilles Community School, Knocklyon, Dublin will make their first immersion trip to India in February 2023 for a week-long visit. The school had planned a trip in April 2020 but unfortunately missed out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The group is already busy fundraising for their trip, and we look forward to assisting them during their time in India in February.

In 2023 we will also continue our efforts to raise funds which enables us to provide the much needed support required to ensure the progress and success of the projects we support in India. Fundraising will be a key agenda item of the strategy session mentioned above, but with 2022 seeing the return of our long-established quiz night (raising €4,500 across two nights), it's safe to say this event will feature again in 2023. Without the incredible generosity of our many supporters, none of the progress mentioned in this Annual Review would have been possible. As a committee, and on behalf of both PRDS and the projects, students, families and communities we support, we cannot thank each and every person who has supported us enough!





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



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