**Stories for use in all age service**

**For the Common Good**

Blanca Dias

For the Common Good Working with local community groups and church groups on advocacy and action is Christian Aid’s partner UNES. The groups meet in a hall given to the community by an Italian priest who helped them understand that the church must work on behalf of the poor. Named after him, it continues to be a place where people can meet and serve others. His desire was to defend the poor and that is what they continue to do. Together with UNES they are exploring the meaning of advocacy and action. Marches, fairs, simulation games and visits to areas of most concern have all been arranged to highlight environmental problems such as dumping and erosion. Participants have been encouraged to write letters to the Government and file complaints to the Mayor. However, despite all this action, they often do not make progress. They share ideas on how to help the community, especially as it is situated in an area vulnerable to earthquakes and flooding, made worse by overcrowding and deforestation. Blanca Alicia Díazs describes herself as an environmentalist. When she saw how businesses were dumping rubbish illegally up the mountain directly above their homes, she decided she wanted to take action. She asked for help from UNES and arranged a cleanup walk to inform people of the dangers to them and to the environment. The group that was formed looked at the dump and then issued a complaint letter asking the Mayor to move it from the mountain as it was threatening their homes. “If it slips it will threaten our homes and would bury us.” she said. When asked about the Mayor’s response, Blanca replied, “He did not do anything. He said that the land it was on was privately owned.” The group held a press conference and got support from the community health teams with some success. They also arranged for an article ‘denouncing’ the dump to be in the local newspaper. This made a few of the companies who were dumping there find alternatives. They have recently renewed their efforts with help from UNES. “This is our struggle,” she said, “Sometimes it is dangerous to complain: we have been threatened with guns, but we will continue to tell the Mayor to get rid of this garbage and construction waste.” There is a very different attitude to community work. They understand that they are working for ‘the common good.’ If the government says they will not do something, they keep on campaigning and are prepared to roll up their sleeves and do it themselves if needed.

**Working Together**

Shapna Shone

Working together Shisamondnay Forum has 17 members (10 male and 7 female) each representing a family. Both Hindu and Muslim families in Dhankhali Village where the forum is situated, live in wooden, well cared for buildings. Cyclones, flooding, drought and salinity all affect this area so Shushilan, supported by Christian Aid Bangladesh, have been helping the forum with cultivation so they are better qualified and get better crop yields. Shushilan has made them aware of the best research and ways of managing disasters as well as nutritional advice, health and sanitation. This means lives have improved as they know their crops are good quality so when they go to market they ask for a fair price for the crops. They like it that Shushilan investigates and collects other information to help them. Shushilan has given them training for paddy field production. They gave saline tolerant seeds, provided advice e.g. It is better to store seeds in plastic not jute bags. It keeps them in a better condition and more protected. They can see the benefit of these seeds and are now collecting their own from the harvested crop which they are storing and sharing with others. They also feel they can discuss issues and resolve them together rather than going to Shushilan for advice or help. They meet every 15 days and discuss what training they feel they need. They want to be more organic in their farming methods and raise homesteads, as they have learnt of the benefits from Shushilan. The women appear to have a full voice in the forum and work together in the fields. This did not used to be the case. All are willing to learn and they want to share what they have learnt. Both Muslim and Hindus work together well here making the whole community aware of the problems related to climate change. Shapna Shome has an air of confidence about her. She shared how life had changed through the forum. “Earlier we could not come out of our house, now we can share and talk. The difference has been the forum. We work together and this is a real cultural change. Earlier we hid ourselves. Women feel better from the knowledge we have strength and can even go to Government offices to get our rights. No one would have done this earlier as we felt timid (shy.) Earlier we did not have the power or strength. We feel the committee is behind us to fight against any intimidation.” Shapna explained how now both male and female children are starting to be treated the same. “It is all for the children. We listen to advice about eating vegetables. Our children learn from us and are healthier. They do not play in the dirty waters and they wash their hands. With all this new knowledge, I know I should send my children to school.” This confident forum is a great example of how, through training and sharing, life for the whole family can become better.

Neighbourly Love

The YMCA’s Rehabilitation Programme was started in the early days of the first intifada (conflict). During the first year of that conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, over 50,000 Palestinian young men aged between 14 and 18 years old were injured. Nader Abu Amsha, Director of the YMCA Centre in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem in the West Bank, saw the needs of the local people and developed the programme into the success it is today. The programme attempts to integrate people, with both physical and mental disabilities, back into society where they can play a full part.

Shaba’s story, told by Nader, illustrates exactly how, through working with her, her family and community she has found independence and a purpose in life.

Shaba was shot in the neck by a soldier, whilst in a car with her husband, as they waited at a checkpoint. The Israeli Defence Force soldier took their papers to examine and then returned them to the car. The husband, thinking all was well, started to move away. However, the soldier had wanted to look in the car boot so when he saw them start to move away he aimed and shot at the car. Unfortunately Shaba sustained injuries to her neck which resulted in permanent paralysis. Her husband, a builder, worked with the YMCA to understand and implement the adaptations needed for their home. The YMCA paid for the materials he needed for the conversions but he did all the work.

Before her accident Shaba used to visit their neighbours every day but following the accident this was impossible and it made her very depressed. Steep steps leading up to their homes made it impossible for her to visit them and be part of the community chatter. Shaba was therefore thrilled when neighbours started to add ramps to their homes so she could visit them all. By giving a little help and much expertise, Shaba’s life has been turned around and she and her husband are very grateful for the help and guidance of the YMCA.

Images for these stories are in the PowerPoint in the pack

Commitment for Life 2019