



CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN AND AGING
One Elmwood Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66103
800-875-6564 • 913-384-6500 • www.cfcausa.org

A letter from CFCA's Bhagalpur project coordinator

The CFCA Bhagalpur project is situated in Bihar and Jharkhand states. These two states are the most underdeveloped states of India. The number of people living below the poverty line is quite high. The rate of literacy is about 50 percent. People migrate to big cities and other states for work because there is a lack of employment in this area. Because of the outdated educational system, the number of unemployable youth is also quite high, which leads to law and order problems. Modern facilities, like good roads, health care, electricity, telephone services, etc., have yet to reach most of the people.

The Bhagalpur project covers four civil districts of Bihar state (Bhagalpur, Banka, Jamui and Mungher) and four civil districts of Jharkhand state (Sahibganj, Godda, Deoghar and Giridih). These districts have a high percentage of tribal (indigenous) population. Since the people live close to forests and hills, they lead a very primitive type of life and their livelihood comes mostly from seasonal farming and income from minor forest products, such as honey, leaf plates, firewood and grass. Such income is not sufficient for their daily bread, and they leave homes for cities and other places looking for work to make a living.

This seasonal migration makes it hard to retain their children in the schools. Because of their location in the forests and hills and the lack of trafficable roads and medical facilities, the mortality rate is very high in these areas, especially for young children. The most common diseases in these areas are tuberculosis and malaria. Children suffer from lack of sufficient, nutritious food, resulting in malnutrition.

As I mentioned earlier, the literacy rate among the people is very low. In the Bhagalpur project, 95 percent of the children come from the tribal population. These children are first-generation learners. Most of their family members are illiterate and do not understand the need for education. It is hard to retain such children in the schools since they enjoy a free life, mostly grazing animals, catching fish, hunting, etc. School bells, timetable books and pens are strange for them and they feel tied down in school. The textbooks are not suited to their situations.

Though we have many challenges to face in retaining the children in the program, we have many reasons to be happy and satisfied. We have the most deserving children in the program who need special help to make a better future. These



children would have never dreamed of going to school if not for sponsorship. They feel elevated and dignified wearing school uniforms and carrying school bags. Once, a group of children marched in the village to display their new uniforms and school bags. These children get timely and nutritious food, medical care, spiritual formation and the opportunity to play and recreate. They are given training in all the aspects of their life so that they can face the future confidently and courageously. Even if a child goes to school only for a few years, it is a great achievement since their eyes are opened and they realize the value of education.



The sponsored children's families have also immensely benefited from the sponsorship program. Part of the sponsorship fund is set apart to help the families with their urgent needs. When the children or family members are sick, part of this fund is used for medical treatment. These funds are also used for agricultural needs of the family or to repair the houses of the families since most of the houses are made of mud walls and thatched roofs with straw.

Another important part of the project is that every child has an individual bank account in her/his name. This account is operated jointly by the child or guardian and the subproject coordinator. As a result, the bank doors are opened to the most downtrodden people of society, enhancing their self-respect and dignity.

We have also formed self-help mothers groups composed of the sponsored children's mothers. It is known as SCMG (Sponsored Children's Mothers Groups). The mothers contribute 50 Indian rupees monthly (about \$1.25), and an equal amount is given from the project as a matching grant. The mothers are the sole operators of these funds. They carry out group activities such as rice plantation and harvesting, and common income-generating activities like growing mushrooms. This makes them economically strong and frees them from the clutches of money lenders. Also, they solve their family's problems, pray together, learn to read and write, and are more involved in community activities. These groups have played a great role in the formation of local women leaders and the empowerment of women in society.

The Bhagalpur project is helping to bring people out of utter poverty and give them a right place in society by enhancing their self-respect and human dignity. The aims and goals of CFCA are slowly being achieved as a result of the generous help of the sponsors. We thank the sponsors and the CFCA team in Kansas City for their dedication and commitment to lifting up the most poor and needy children all over the world.

Father Mathew Vettukallel
Bhagalpur Project Coordinator