

# THE LONDON ROTARIAN

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**Bhola's Children:  
Building new futures  
in Bangladesh**

**Delacave:  
Protect freedom  
and science to  
promote prosperity**

**Shulman in Sudan**

# Hope for orphans and disabled children

## Dozens of lives transformed by new charity



**B**hola is an island in Southern Bangladesh where there are children with every kind of disability due to excess of arsenic in the water, poor diet and genetic disorders. Bhola's Children is a charity which supports a home for some 40 orphaned and disabled children and 15 staff; in addition to the residents, around 20 more children come to school every day.

Bhola's Children's aim is to support up to 100 children at one time, to teach them and train them to be able to integrate in local schools and society. In particular, we want to enable the deaf and dumb to communicate with their families and villages.

All the children are taught agricultural skills in our farmland, carpentry in our workshop and tailoring.

We organize a lot of cleft lip operations which at the moment are carried out in Dhaka, Bhola

island having the highest percentage in the world! Ultimately we hope to perform operations locally, once a clinic has been built.

Bhola's Children was started in 2005 by Bruna Colombo-Otten, Wednesday Club Member and wife of London Rotarian Walter Otten, and the extraordinary Howlader Akkel Ali (known as Ali), himself orphaned at the age of eight, who has worked with disabled children for nearly 40 years. Ali had a dream to create a home and a school where all the different disabilities would live and learn together, where most of the teachers and carers were also orphaned and in part disabled.

Bhola's Children was registered as a charity in 2007 after purchasing the freehold of the property with generous help from Swedish, Spanish and English supporters. In four years we managed to organized over 130 cleft lip operations and, thanks to our generous supporters, we have achieved much else besides:

● Thanks to friends working at FAO in Rome, we were able to buy a large piece of agricultural land (Valumia) containing two ponds in which we breed fish, where all the children, including the blind, help with cultivation of vegetables and fruit, an important part of their education. Not only will Bholas Children be self-sufficient, but we also plan to sell the fruit and vegetables at the local market.

● We also hope to be able to build soon the first farm where some of our grown-ups can go to live once they need to leave the home/school.

● In 2009 we completed the construction of the new hostel to house 50 children and staff, and the new kitchen where finally the pipes supplying local gas are being fitted, so no more cooking on dangerous open fires!

● Our first major purchase was a Toyota people carrier, allowing the children to go out on excursions which are very important and beneficial, both educationally and socially.

● We also raise money to fund the running costs of the home. These, due to the 2007 cyclone and problems with the rice harvest in Myanmar (Burma), have soared to £50,000 a year. At the same time, as we take in more children, we face rising expenses because of the cost of medical and dental treatment. In Bangladesh there is no NHS and we pay for all the medicine.

● We are now fundraising for a new building to house the workshops and the tailoring room.

● Our boys after completing three years in the school, if not suited to mainstream education, are offered training in wood and metal work. The girls are offered training in tailoring and arts and crafts.

Ali and the staff design and make most of our furniture and a wide range of remedial devices for use by children suffering from cerebral palsy in our home and they are also loaned or sold to families on the island.

The present workshop is a very poor corrugated iron-roofed area next to the gate, where some of the staff members also sleep; the new workshop will have accommodation on the first floor for married members of staff.

We would like to build it along the boundary wall bordering the road. This will involve filling one half of the pond, an additional but necessary expense, producing a total cost of £80,000.

Once the new workshop is up and running we hope to earn extra income from outside orders.

If you would like more information about Bholas Children in general, please don't hesitate to contact us at [www.bholaschildren.com](http://www.bholaschildren.com) and/or through Bruna Colombo-Otten. ■



From top: Half the pond will be filled in to allow the new workshop to be built; the Toyota people carrier allows the children to go on trips; Ali has worked with disabled children for forty years; the charity's staff make most of the furniture themselves.

### Sponsored walk

Four days before Christmas, Bruna Colombo-Otten slipped on the ice outside her London home and broke her leg. Undeterred, however, she will go ahead with her planned fundraising walk at the end of May, covering the last 120km of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, from Sarria to Santiago, in just five days!

You are invited to support her by donating online at [www.bholaschildren.com](http://www.bholaschildren.com), or sending a cheque – payable to *Bholas Children Foundation* – to Bruna Colombo-Otten, 26 Campden Hill Square, London W8 7JY.