



Beyond the ordinary

*Discovering some
of Pakistan's
'diamonds in the rough'*

Ruth William is no ordinary school principal. She lives in a Christian village at the heart of a bamboo plantation and directs two schools, St. Peter's 1 and 2. She is a true diamond in the rough, in a society where few women ride motorbikes or do what she is doing. We watched her proudly mount her motorcycle to make the journey on rough, rural tracks from one village school to another. Ruth and her husband William are outstanding examples of ordinary people who have set out to transform and uplift their community. Read more about them on page 3.



***"What did you go out to
the desert to see?"*** Luke: 7v24

Jesus asks the crowds what they expected to find when they went to see John the Baptist. Not someone comfortable to listen to, not someone rich, as they belong in palaces, but actually someone so much more important than that!

It's a question I asked myself several times on both trips to Pakistan in the past 6 months. What did I expect to see? In those hot, dusty, deprived rural villages or slum areas of Lahore and Karachi, what did I expect? Of course the schools and homes in these areas would be far removed from those in the UK. Of course they were going to be cramped, poorly equipped with under-qualified teachers and many pupils struggling to gain a basic education. It is no surprise that I saw quite a few like that. However, what amazed me was that some weren't; there were several 'diamonds' in the rough; people bold enough to break through their circumstances and shine brightly in their communities.

There's **Mission School**, boldly asking for computers so that their pupils could learn computing skills. There's **Kingdom of Heaven School** with a PE teacher going the extra mile to develop gymnastics with minimum equipment. And **scholarship students** who, from village backgrounds, are soon to qualify as Chemical engineers, Doctors and IT specialists. In fact, it's my belief that within each and every school and home, there are plenty of diamonds waiting to be discovered. You are helping to change expectations, raise standards and turn ordinary lumps of coal into extraordinary diamonds. Please continue to pray, give and get involved so that even more lives can be touched. - Rob Bavington, CEO

Students given a chance to shine

This past year, Starfish Pakistan has awarded more scholarships than usual due to the growing level of need and the inspiring Christian students who applied. Awards given to 247 students mean that our scholarship funds are stretched. However, our commitment to these young men and women was affirmed when Rob & Mike met some of them recently:

Higher Education Scholarships

Nine students, all working towards higher degrees, met at Danishmand's home to share stories and ambitions. All of them paid tribute to the scholarship programme that is enabling them to realise their dreams. Starfish Pakistan also encourages them in their faith, challenging them to champion the need for education to fellow Christians.

Mazenod College, Youhannabad

This is an impressive new college run with excellence by a Catholic order. We met the principal, an efficient and friendly priest who was proud to show off his institution. 25 students from schools supported by Starfish Asia are in their first year there. We met with 14 of them, all dressed in smart uniforms and all positive about their future hopes.

Imran Masih comes from a poor family from a village just outside Lahore. He got the chance to study at a Starfish school and has been supported through the scholarship programme to do his FA (Intermediate exams). He is now well on his way to completing a BA degree. His desire is to practice Law, which will entail several more years of study.

Shaiza is in her 4th year of medical studies. She was clear in her ambition: *"I want to become a cardiologist."* Small in stature, but big in heart and vision, this ambitious young lady had no chance of going through medical college as her father is a plumber (low waged in Pakistan) and her mother is a house wife. Your support brings hope to young ladies like her.

Cyril John had an older sister at university and so his parents couldn't afford to send him too. Thanks to a scholarship, he has now graduated as a Chemist and is currently working as an intern in a lab in Lahore. He said *"I'd like a well-paid job so that I can then also support poor students to study further just like you have done."*



"If you have the spirit to do something, you can do everything"

- Aruja, Mazenod college student

We are committed to the future of these young men and women. Would you consider a gift towards ensuring they fulfil their dreams? As little as **£20** can support a student for a month.

Starfish supporter Ian Pratt joined Mike and Rob on their recent trip. We asked him:

What made you want to get involved with Starfish Asia?

I spent a year with Operation Mobilisation in 1974/5, and have been involved with OM ever since! I am on a small board called Special Projects, and each year until Covid the team used to hold a retreat at Otford Manor in Kent. Mike Wakely presented the vision of Starfish each year, and invited me to go with him to Pakistan in 2017. My wife Sally is a keen supporter too.

What encourages you about the Scholarships programme?

I am encouraged by the scholarships programme as it is giving Christian young people opportunities for further education that they would otherwise not have. It means the students will have a chance to make a greater impact as Christians in Pakistan in future years. It was a pleasure to be able to meet some of the students in person recently.

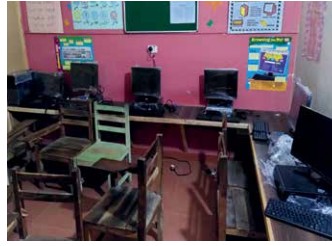


Ian entertaining the children at a Sunday School service with some balloon modelling.

The hidden gems raising hopes for the poor

Mission School

Rose and her daughter Tamsil strive to be creative in preparing students for a better future. Younger pupils enjoy interactive learning and play using apps, whilst older pupils are getting equipped for the computer age. None of their 16 year olds had ever touched a keyboard before Starfish supplied the school with 6 computers. Now they can be trained, and hopefully get jobs with IT rather than as labourers or house servants.



Space for a computer lab was created in faith that computers would be provided somehow.

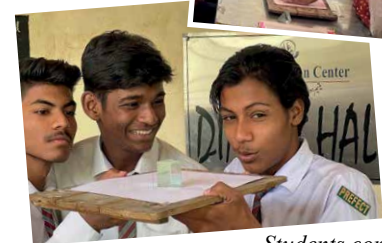


Sharing space, gaining skills

One of the challenges faced by many of the secondary schools we support is the lack of qualified science and maths teachers willing to work for little reward – and the equipment to enable them to teach well. We trialled online lessons for the past two years but, although the teaching was of a high standard, the online experience was not successful. Now we are aiming to raise standards by other means.

One new initiative was taken by the **Ghuri Wisdom School**. As they have both a well-equipped lab and good teachers, they invited students from the surrounding area to their school for some practical lessons in physics, chemistry and biology. Pupils enjoyed sharing equipment to conduct many experiments. They received a warm welcome, were entertained and given delicious food!

This is a great example of cooperative learning and was well received.



Students conducting an experiment about the refraction of light

Kingdom of Heaven School

At the Kingdom of Heaven School there is little in the way of equipment. However one teacher found an old mattress and metal frame and started teaching the boys how to perform back-flips for their P.E. lesson. Yet another example of how a simple idea can flourish and the skills that can be uncovered if you are willing to invest in the young students.



St. Peter's School

St. Peter's School (see front page) is a joy to visit. Ruth, the Principal, and her husband William, opened the school on the roof of their in-law's house for the children of Christian families working on the surrounding bamboo plantation. Starfish Asia began to support them in 2007, adding extra classrooms and enabling them to expand and grow.

Concerned for the Christians in several nearby villages, they bought an old bus and William drove every day to bring about 30 children to the school. But the bus was old and often broke down so last year they sold it. In 2020 they opened a second school in neighbouring village Haripur.



Mike and Rob visited in March, impressed as ever by the enthusiasm of both students and staff. There are now 102 students in the Burj Klan school and 87 in the Haripur branch. Ruth tells us proudly that graduates from the school are working as teachers, nurses, lab technicians and in the army. Ruth is a lady with great ambition, for herself as well as her students. She is eager to learn to speak English fluently (if possible overseas), and to raise the standard of her school to secondary level for the benefit of the Christian families working on the plantation.

Left: Ruth helps transport students to and from school.



Can you describe three highlights from your trip?

1. Meeting Danishmand, Jasmine and their lovely children,
2. Visiting the Sunday school in the brick kiln and seeing the fervour, as Christians, of the residents and how contented they appeared with so little, humanly-speaking,
3. The warm welcome given to us at several schools, especially at St. Peter's school near Kasur where students acted out a very moving tableau with music (pictured right).



Academic Planning Meeting - 8th May 2022



"It was a very informative and blessed day. Thank you Starfish for organising a wonderful meeting"

Naeem Younis - Shine Education School, Gujranwala

"Most school-going children in Pakistan are getting a poor quality education. Why is this state of affairs persisting? Is it that the people of Pakistan do not value education? They do not want to give quality education to their children? This does not seem to be the case."

Faisal Bari, from Dawn Newspaper, 4th Mar 2022

Exams in Progress

Over the past few weeks students have been sitting annual exams to determine if they will progress to the next class. Jasmine has written test papers for the younger children in nursery, pre-primary and primary years, whereas the older students in class 10 are taking standard matriculation exams. Temperatures in Lahore are currently in the 40's which makes sitting exams very uncomfortable.



School Books Distribution



Students from Community Development School receive their new books

Thanks to your support we've been able to fund new school books for over 8500 children, which are being distributed in preparation for the new academic year. We will also look to see if we can finance books for any non-Starfish schools.

Danishmand and Jasmine welcomed 40 school principals and project leaders from the local area for a planning meeting in preparation for the new school term. The aim of the meeting was to cast a vision of what they are striving for and offer advice on how to make improvements, especially for those schools that are struggling.

Jasmine focussed on setting goals for the year ahead. She covered the next academic calendar, syllabus and some helpful insight in to some of the reasons students drop out of school, including:

- Lack of parental awareness
- Poverty
- Management weakness
- Children's Lack of interest
- Drop of Education Quality of School
- Non-qualified Staff
- Lack of motivation for students

Keeping children in education remains a huge challenge throughout Pakistan. The attendees engaged in group discussion and were encouraged to come up with their own suggestions for preventing this happening in their schools.

Danishmand followed up with some guidelines for what data is required from each school (attendance records, salaries, student details) in order to meet the standards expected from a Starfish supported school. The vision is for all schools to become 'Star' status schools.

The meeting was well received with positive engagement and feedback. The hope is that leaders will take on board the suggestions and start the new term both encouraged and better equipped to make improvements going forward.

"It was a really good opportunity to be in the company of such enlightened people"

Naeem Dean - Dean Public School, Lahore



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