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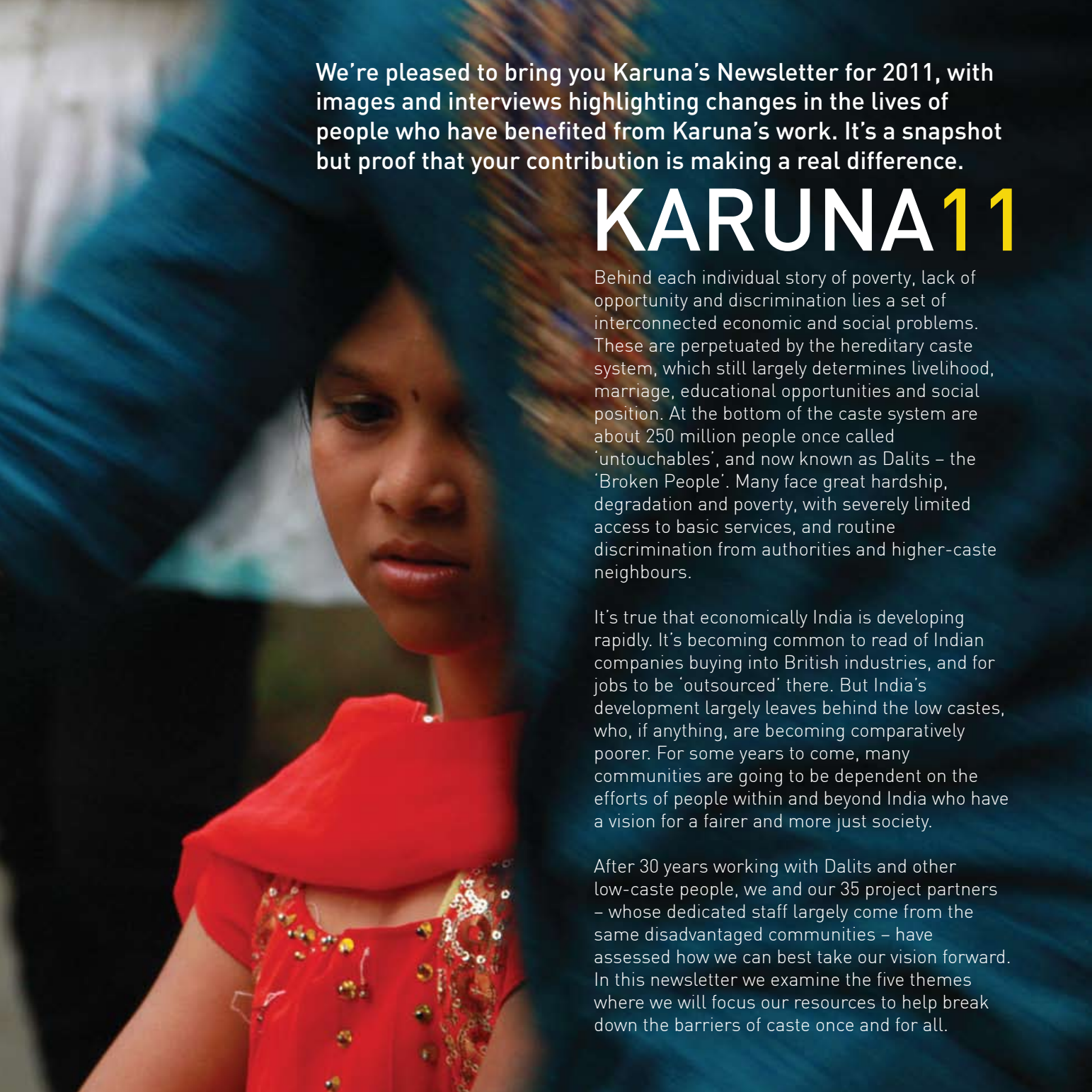
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KARUNA11



KARUNA
compassion in action



We're pleased to bring you Karuna's Newsletter for 2011, with images and interviews highlighting changes in the lives of people who have benefited from Karuna's work. It's a snapshot but proof that your contribution is making a real difference.

KARUNA11

Behind each individual story of poverty, lack of opportunity and discrimination lies a set of interconnected economic and social problems. These are perpetuated by the hereditary caste system, which still largely determines livelihood, marriage, educational opportunities and social position. At the bottom of the caste system are about 250 million people once called 'untouchables', and now known as Dalits – the 'Broken People'. Many face great hardship, degradation and poverty, with severely limited access to basic services, and routine discrimination from authorities and higher-caste neighbours.

It's true that economically India is developing rapidly. It's becoming common to read of Indian companies buying into British industries, and for jobs to be 'outsourced' there. But India's development largely leaves behind the low castes, who, if anything, are becoming comparatively poorer. For some years to come, many communities are going to be dependent on the efforts of people within and beyond India who have a vision for a fairer and more just society.

After 30 years working with Dalits and other low-caste people, we and our 35 project partners – whose dedicated staff largely come from the same disadvantaged communities – have assessed how we can best take our vision forward. In this newsletter we examine the five themes where we will focus our resources to help break down the barriers of caste once and for all.

Education

The first of our themes is education, which has always been at the heart of our work following the example of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, the great leader of the Dalits, who saw it as the best way to break out of the 'hell of caste'.

Women's Empowerment

Next there is women's empowerment, since low-caste women are doubly discriminated against in a traditional, patriarchal society. For example, only two or three percent of Dalit women own land, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and subordination.

Human Rights

Human Rights was a key for Dr Ambedkar, as it breaks the feudal traditions of observing caste duty, which for millions of Dalits locks them into a cycle of exploitation.

Leadership Development

Leadership Development is probably the least developed of these five themes, which is hardly surprising, for the high castes have always dominated the decision-making processes. But, as you'll see, some outstanding individuals within the Dalit community are becoming mentors and guides and increasingly using their skills and experience to empower others to take responsibility.

Mind Change

Finally there is mind change, which necessarily underlies each of the other four themes. Indeed, Dr Ambedkar said 'caste is a state of mind', and changing views is the way to liberation and empowerment. It was for this reason that he converted to Buddhism in 1956, to give himself and his followers a social and religious identity that cherishes the qualities of each individual, rather than their social background.

This newsletter, co-written by our dear friend David Keefe-Manjusvara who died suddenly in June, is dedicated to him. He gave so much to Karuna in so many ways and for so many years - director of fundraising, newsletter editor & fundraising mentor.

On our visits to India we always receive heartfelt expressions of gratitude from the staff and beneficiaries of the initiatives Karuna is funding. We would like to pass on to you their gratitude and appreciation, and hope that you find it as inspiring to read about the projects as we did to witness them at first hand.



David Francis Director

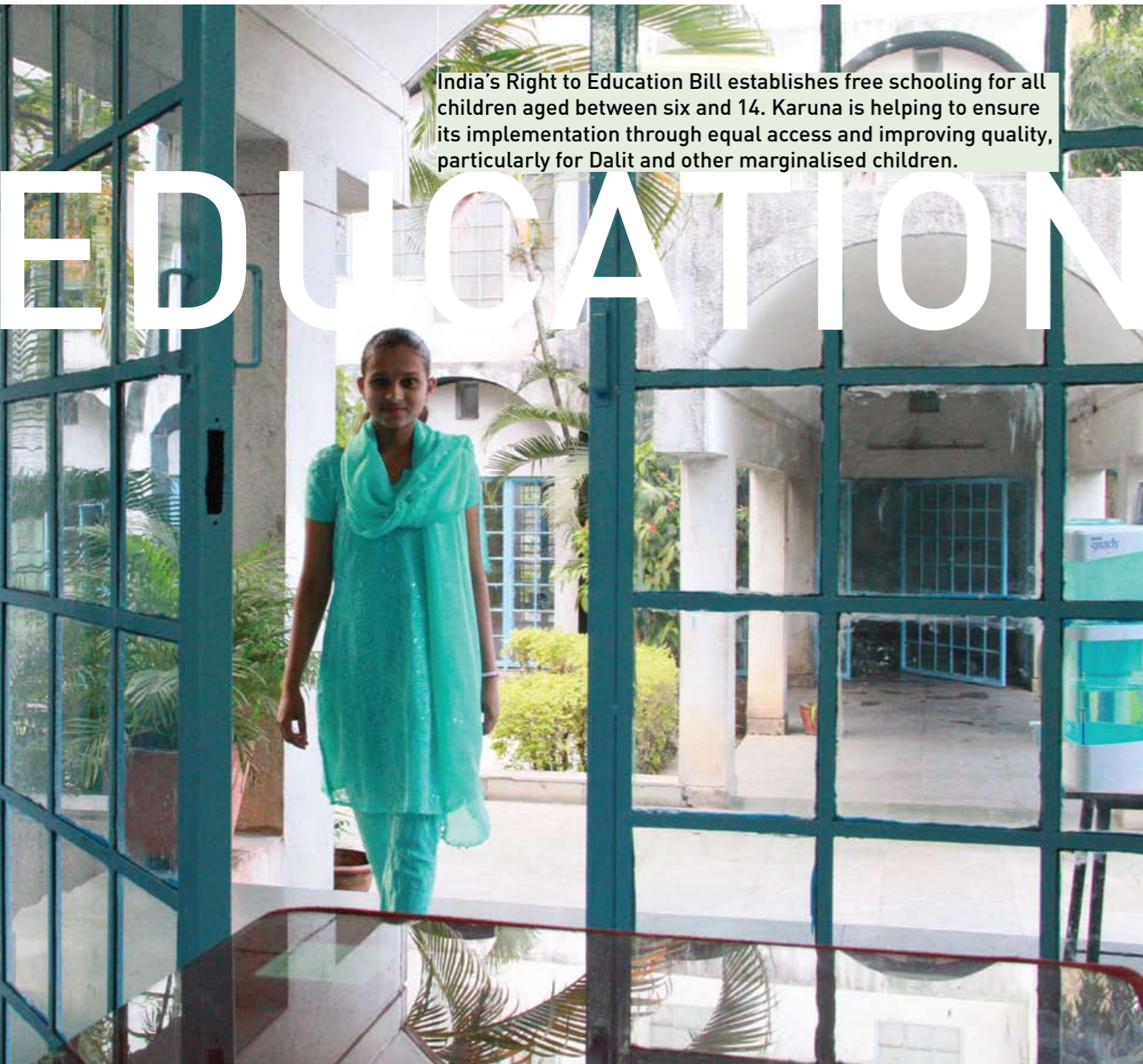


Ulla Brown Chair of Trustees

Komal Ashok Shewale

India's Right to Education Bill establishes free schooling for all children aged between six and 14. Karuna is helping to ensure its implementation through equal access and improving quality, particularly for Dalit and other marginalised children.

EDUCATION



Our education programme has four dimensions: hostels to help school-aged students complete their education; early childhood support, including parenting skills for illiterate parents; ending discrimination, since it is common for Dalit children to be forced to sit apart and do menial jobs while others play; and improving employment opportunities by accessing government-reserved jobs.

In the following pages you will meet girls from rural and slum families who, by attending the Vishrantwadi Education Hostel in Pune, are finding hope for the future.

Komal Ashok Shewale

Komal is 15 and has lived at Vishrantwadi Education Hostel for four years. She moved to Pune when she was six with her younger brother and her mother, who was seeking work after her husband committed suicide following family rows over money. Eventually, Komal's mother found employment in a hospital, leaving Komal at home all day to look after her brother.



Komal is a very bright young woman, making the most of the positive conditions the hostel provides. She is particularly good at maths and hopes to go to college to study engineering. She wants to become successful so she can help other poor children have an education.

Playtime at the hostel



Krishna and Nanda



Savita Vikhar



Pooja Baban Lahane



Krishna and Nanda Vikhar

Krishna is 40, but looks older after years of hard physical work. He is a field labourer at the Karuna-funded Bhaja Rural Retreat Centre, where his wife Nanda is the cook. Krishna went to school for a few years but his wife is uneducated. They are from a tribal fishing caste that moved inland to find work in a village a few miles from Bhaja. Although they could earn more elsewhere, Krishna and Nanda are happy at the retreat centre, where they are treated well and enjoy working in a supportive and friendly atmosphere.

Because they don't have a 'caste certificate' they are unable to claim state entitlements – such as school placements and government jobs – or social security. For certification they need to show 50 years' worth of evidence that their families have lived in their village, but they fear

that if they hand their documents over to the government they might not get them back – a predicament that has already befallen some of their neighbours. The community at Bhaja Retreat Centre is helping them to get their certificate, and has also helped their daughter Savita stay at Vishrantwadi Education Hostel for the past three years. Krishna and Nanda hope that through education she will grow to be an independent woman, free to make her own choices.

Savita Vikhar

Savita, now 13, states quite clearly, 'I don't want to work in rice fields. This won't give meaning to my life. I want to become a computer engineer.' Prior to being at the hostel, Savita had walked four hours each day to attend school. At home, she had to help her parents work in the fields. The village had limited electricity, so after dark it was

hard to study. Now, however, she has supportive conditions and is doing well at school. She is also learning yoga – and karate!

Pooja, our cover star

Pooja is 12 and from Mumbai, where her family live in an unsafe slum district. She has been at the hostel for six months.

"I have lots of friends here at the hostel."

How you have helped

The Vishrantwadi girls' hostel was set up in 1987 and began to receive government funding in 1991. Since then, more than 1,250 girls have benefited from living in this hostel. With your help, we're giving the hostel an annual grant of £13,000. This means 78 poor students such as Savita are benefiting from a supportive environment to pursue a much-needed education. Without this support, girls like Savita would almost certainly have already dropped out of school.

For over 30 years Karuna has worked to increase the status of Dalit women and girls. Historically this was achieved by improving their material conditions in the areas of health and education. However, for more sustainable long-term impact, we are increasingly educating women and girls about their rights and how to access them.

Here we learn of women in the slums of Dapodi in Pune, who are accessing projects organised by Jeevak, a long-standing partner of Karuna, now run entirely by women.

EMPOWERMENT

WOMEN'S





Bharati in her shop

Bharati Suryawanshi

Bharati lives in a corrugated hut that looks a little lopsided but is painted a beautiful turquoise-blue, with flowers hung over the entrance door. This small but immaculately clean place is home to Bharati, her husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandson.

As she sits outside her door, Bharati recalls her life as a labourer and how, through a loan from her saving group, 11 years ago, she set up a small shop in her home selling basic groceries. A previous loan had helped her and her husband pay for their son's marriage. (Marriage is very important in India, and often leaves poor families burdened with debt.) When they have paid for their shop, she wants to get another loan to build a more secure cement dwelling.



Jana Bhaydade

Jana Bhaydade sits in her small, one-room hut, surrounded by packets of herbs and spices that she sells wholesale across Pune.

By setting up her own business with a loan from her saving group, Jana has increased her family's monthly income from £30 to £130. Prior to this Jana and her husband were labourers. Now their children are literate and gaining from an education their parents never had. Another

loan will allow them to buy some nearby land to expand their business and recruit more local women to join the four already employed.

Jana has a particularly supportive husband. She relates how, when they married when she was only 12, they decided to share everything. This wasn't always easy, as some relatives questioned the non-traditional style of their marriage.

Jana and her husband at work



Jana speaks with ease and confidence. Having a supportive husband helps and they show that being illiterate isn't necessarily an obstacle to running a successful business.

How you have helped

Jeevak is providing training and support to 1,175 women members of 47 self-help groups. By pooling some of their money and taking out low-interest loans, self-help groups (SHGs) enable women to generate extra income for purchasing items, such as sewing machines, or setting up shops in their homes. SHGs also act as pressure groups. Last year a group of Jeevak women lobbied the local administration to get a regular supply of drinking water for 50 families. Karuna is supporting Jeevak's women's empowerment projects with an annual grant of £3,000 over a 3-year period.



India has good laws, including Article 17 of the Constitution prohibiting the practice of 'untouchability'. The problem is implementation. To help Dalits access their rights and participate fully in society, Karuna funds legal aid centres and organisations responding to atrocities suffered by Dalits.

Here we highlight the Sadhana Institute, working with – among others – the scavenging and tribal communities at the Dehu Road 'cantonment' in Pune. The cantonments are areas associated with military bases, where people who provide basic services live. Caught between the Ministry of Defence and the state government, neither of which take responsibility for their welfare, cantonment residents have become a 'forgotten' population, most of them are Dalits, excluded from mainstream services and entitlements.

Anusaya Malvi Suryawansu:

Anusaya is 65, and has been widowed for 11 years. She moved with her husband, two daughters and a son (who died of alcohol-related problems) to the Dehu Road cantonment in 1972, when a drought forced them to migrate into the city. Life in Dehu Road was not easy. Unable to communicate with her neighbours because she could not speak the local dialect, Anusaya was often verbally abused and felt very vulnerable.

Anusaya and her family lived in a makeshift hut, which consisted of plastic sheeting. From time to time the military would remove the huts. She would plead with them not to take away the bits of material that made up her home. There was no water facility, so she walked several miles across a railway track to use an office tap.

"Even though I am an old woman, now I can jump freely."

HUMAN RIGHTS

Anusaya Malvi Suryawansu



The financial situation was bleak, too. Her husband was a government labourer, and the family income was just a few pounds per month.

Anusaya grew up in a family of ten siblings and remains illiterate to this day. Her father would not allow his wife or daughters to leave the house. Her husband, too, would only allow her to go out to collect water.

She first became involved with the Sadhana Institute when they started running a kindergarten in the area. Frustrated by the limitations of her existence, she asked them what her and her neighbours' rights were, and whether any government schemes were available to them. She formed a women's group so they could support one another – 'together we would feel empowered'.

Within two months Anusaya had participated in her first rally in New Delhi, demanding a school system for cantonment areas. She recalls singing songs during police activity. Slowly government policy is changing, she tells us.



Anusaya learned how to use a post office and write her signature, which meant she could open a bank account. Now she accompanies other illiterate women to the bank or post office, passing on the skills and confidence she has developed. She also encourages women to get their caste certificates so they can claim their government entitlements. She recently participated in a rally to the office for caste certificates in Pune, as a result of which five women have been registered.

Anusaya leads three self-help groups and is an activist in her community, encouraging others through her example. Her inspiration is her grandchildren – all of whom go to school – so they can get the rights they are entitled to. We met her granddaughter, Chani, aged seven, who looked at ease in the company of the women of Anusaya's groups.

Although a life of suffering is etched into her face, Anusaya says with gentle dignity, 'Even though I am an old woman, now I can jump freely.'

Rajeshree - Anusaya's daughter

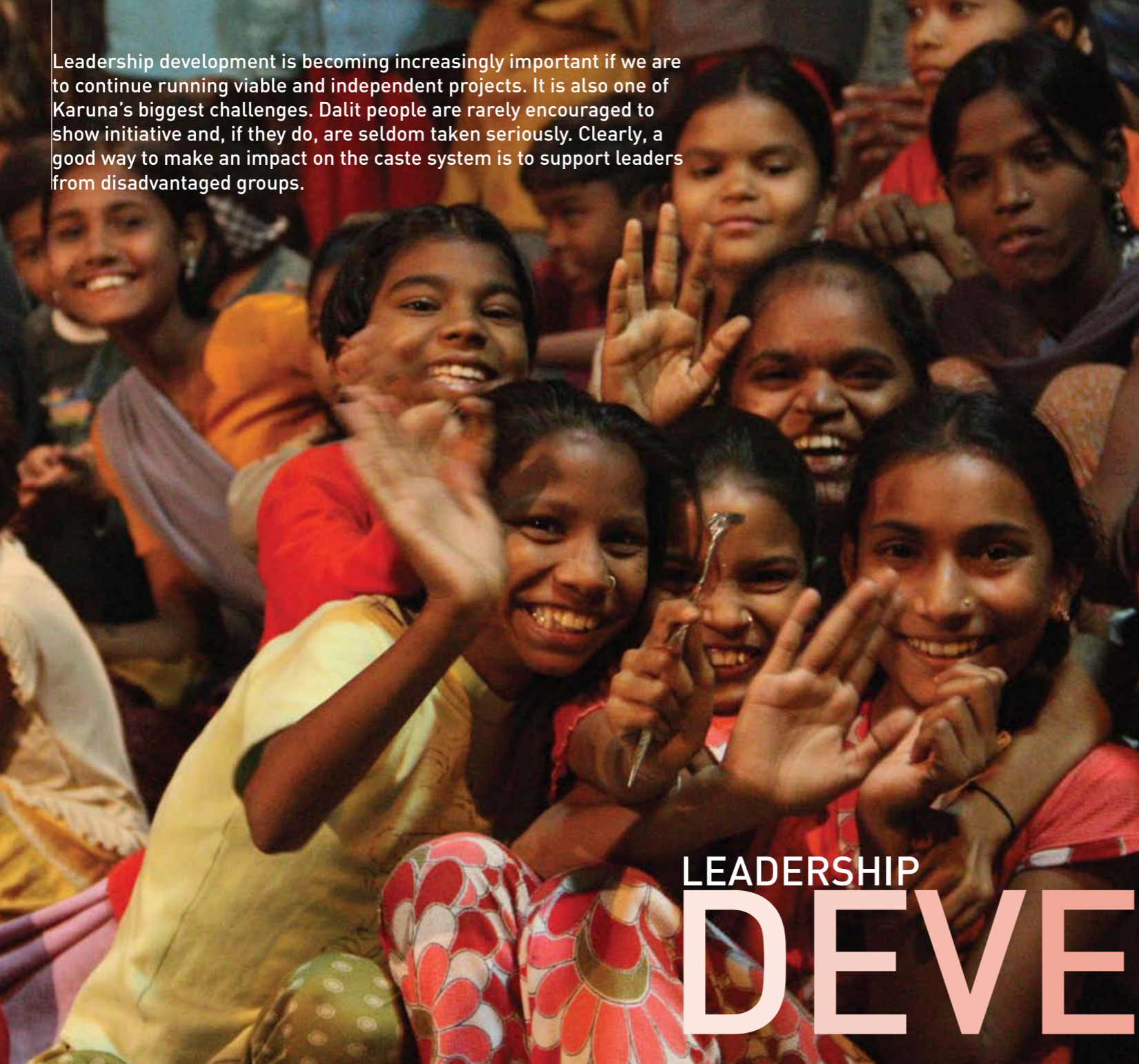


Chani - Anusaya's granddaughter

How you have helped

The Karuna Trust is supporting Sadhana Institute for Sustainable Development with a £20,000 annual grant over a three-year period, benefiting nearly 4,200 low-caste cantonment residents, like Anusaya. The project aims to empower local cantonment communities to claim and access the social services they are entitled to under government caste entitlements, such as school places or government jobs.

Leadership development is becoming increasingly important if we are to continue running viable and independent projects. It is also one of Karuna's biggest challenges. Dalit people are rarely encouraged to show initiative and, if they do, are seldom taken seriously. Clearly, a good way to make an impact on the caste system is to support leaders from disadvantaged groups.



LEADERSHIP

DEVELOPMENT

One example is Amitayus, a Dalit man who, through serving his community, has developed the skills, experience and confidence to become a leader and role model.

Amitayus's grandfather's job was 'untouchable' work, to carry dead animals away from the village. His grandparents often had no food except the flesh of rotting animals. With no land of their own, they were forced to serve the higher castes.

But his grandfather was determined his children should be educated, and eventually Amitayus's father became a schoolteacher. This meant he was able to send Amitayus to an 'English Medium' school where he received a decent standard of education.

"I feared that if people knew my background they would act differently towards me."

Amitayus lacked the confidence to tell people at school that he was a Dalit follower of Dr Ambedkar, fearing he would lose his friends and have marks deducted. He developed a stammer and started acting up. He also felt under pressure from his parents, who



desperately wanted their children to escape the stigma of caste. Being the only son, Amitayus felt the burden of expectation that he must achieve a good job to support the family.

In 1993 he attended a Karuna-supported 'Ashvaghosa' cultural programme of dramas and songs, covering issues such as alcoholism, drug use and domestic violence. Amitayus is clear that without Ashvaghosa he would have become a criminal and addicted to alcohol. He was already a gang member. Being surrounded by supportive people at Ashvaghosa, however, Amitayus began to grow in confidence. He felt that: 'People are listening to me; people trust me.'

Eventually Amitayus began performing himself and discovered he was a talented singer. He also joined a men's Buddhist residential community, and did voluntary work at the Karuna-supported Amravati Boys' Hostel, where he found particular satisfaction in looking after the new boys who were homesick. His



Amitayus

understanding of the issues affecting the local communities was also deepening: for example, through playing the role of an alcoholic, he realized the impact this had on other family members.

"Everyone feels they can have a say in decisions....we work well together as a team."

Today Amitayus is a team leader in 'Bahajun Hitay Amravati', which runs all the social work activities supported by Karuna in Amravati, the seventh largest city in Maharashtra. Through his broad experience of the projects – as a beneficiary, volunteer and worker – he understands the importance of working well together. He has tried to create an environment where everyone is valued and can have a say in decisions.

Satish Laxman



Satish has been attending the Open School in Amravati for a year, and is learning to improve his Marathi and English language skills. He also enjoys having time to play. He had previously dropped out of mainstream school because he was being bullied.

When he's not at the school, Satish works as a garbage picker, collecting plastic, metal and glass. The money this brings supports his family, including his two sisters and brother. Satish's

parents are both illiterate and had no education. His father is an alcoholic, and provides no income.

Sometimes Satish gets cut by glass, or feels scared when he finds a dead animal in the rubbish. When the police catch him garbage-picking they frequently beat him, simply because he is a Dalit and lives in the slums.

How you have helped
With your help, Karuna is supporting 12,500 impoverished people in the city of Amravati with an annual grant of £42,000. Bahujan Hitay Amravati provides education, training and guidance to children and young people as well as women from four slums and poor rural areas. This includes Open Schools for children like Satish who have dropped out of mainstream education because of difficulties at home or with learning.

Aniruddha

MIND CHANGE

Karuna's Mind Change programmes are based on Dr Ambedkar's axiom: 'The world cannot be reformed except by the reformation of the mind of man, and the mind of the world.' We support projects that offer ways to improve the emotional, psychological and spiritual quality of people's lives, using tools such as meditation, residential rural retreats, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and the arts.

Aniruddha Nonviolent Communication and the Gift of Speech

Aniruddha is from a Dalit family in Pune, and is an MBA graduate. After working in the corporate sector, in 2003 he studied with a certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication who was funded by Karuna. As a result Karuna supported Aniruddha to come to the UK for further training. He now works with disadvantaged people throughout India.

Aniruddha says: 'I returned to India with a vision to share NVC with the Dalit people to give them back the gift of speech. This is a community which had lost its power of speech for thousands of years. The intention was to help people build their self respect and dignity, and connect with their humanity. From a small start it has become a project: 'Social Change through Mind Change', associated with many Non-Governmental Organisations in India.

'NVC is all about connection – connection with ourselves and connection with our humanity.

"As Dalits we have been told we are not human, that we are even lower than animals. But, like everyone else, we need freedom and equality, and long for dignity."

NVC helps us to take responsibility for our feelings and shows that ultimately nobody can make us Dalits without our agreeing to the label.

'Once we stop doing this our life is transformed. Instead of blaming others, we try to connect with them. The image of those in higher castes is no longer there. The world is created by our minds, meaning the caste system can only be eradicated through the mind. If we take individual responsibility for our mind and our actions, the world will be a better place.

NVC training



'I feel humiliated being a Dalit. I am told I am not a human being – so who am I then? I am deprived of my human rights. I feel so lonely, yet in India I am surrounded by people. Caste creates a sense of isolation from each other. What is my identity if I am not a human being? Who am I? I am not entitled to anything. I have to live in the shadows. I ask myself, "What is the point? Where is the meaning in my life?" We live lives of helplessness and despair. NVC gives meaning to Dalit people because it is a process in which we can re-establish our individual and collective humanity.'

Vinay Jogdand
From Darkness into Light

Vinay Jogdand, aged 23, is a sincere and articulate young man. Yet his eyes betray the suffering he has already experienced in life. This is his third NVC workshop. It is being held at Bhaja Retreat Centre – also funded by Karuna – which is located in a rural area between Pune and Mumbai. Bhaja is an idyll for people who usually spend their daily lives in the noise and squalor of the city slums.

Vinay's family had been itinerant for many years. So when they finally settled in Maharashtra, Vinay was behind in speaking Marathi (the local language). Despite his obvious intelligence, his higher-caste schoolteachers waged a merciless campaign of verbal and physical bullying, causing him a series of mental health problems.

Although Vinay is being treated conventionally, he particularly values NVC, meditation and the conditions at Bhaja Retreat Centre to help him. By improving his relationship with his family, he experiences fewer quarrels and more harmony. Vinay has also discovered a gift for performing, and wants to help people to connect through traditional Maharashtra songs and dance.

Despite his traumatic past experiences, Vinay tries to feel no ill will towards those who bullied him. He credits NVC with helping him gain a broader perspective on his experience. He feels lighter away from the cramped conditions at home, and describes Bhaja as the place where his heart lives. When he walks here from the train, listening to the birds singing and the trees rustling in the breeze, he feels he is moving from darkness into light.



“As soon as I walk from Bhaja village I move from a dark place and I touch a ray of light...”



How you have helped

Thanks to you, 1,800 people like Vinay were able to participate in rural retreats and benefit from the surroundings of Bhaja Retreat Centre in 2010. Leaving behind cramped, urban slum homes, even for a short while, gives slum-dwellers a different experience of themselves and others, away from lives severely restricted by caste attitudes.