



The Leprosy
Mission
Australia

Keeping
in
Touch
Issue 3, 2022



International
Women's Day
March 8, 2022



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Your prayers help bring hope, inclusion, and a brighter future! Thank you!

Sudha is one of around 900 staff working for The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI). Sudha looks forward to each day, teaching an adult literacy class, spending time with local women, discussing their issues, and facilitating collective solutions.

"We used to take adult literacy class, educate women and then include them in self-help groups. The formation of the self-help groups not only promoted savings, but it also facilitated discussion on education and health."

"We give them information on antenatal care, postnatal care, vaccinations for women and newborn baby, promote institutional delivery and encourage them to go for regular follow-ups during pregnancy."

"We also talk about gender discrimination and focus on domestic violence issues, trying to solve it through Crisis Response Wing (CRW), an informal group formed by women collectively. Many cases have been reported and domestic violence has reduced a lot in the village."

Sudha's consistent efforts and advocacy have supported many women to gain housing, finances, and disability aids.

Sharing her experience of working with TLMTI, Sudha says, *"After association with The Leprosy Mission, there has been a lot of change in my life. I can meet and talk to the government officials like the District Magistrate and Sub divisional Magistrate at ease and without hesitation to discuss village issues."*

"The Leprosy Mission has instilled a lot of confidence in me, and I feel a lot of pride in my work."

Please pray for Sudha and the other staff of The Leprosy Mission Trust India, who do wonderful work promoting education, health, and support for women. Pray for the projects in India that you and other Australians support through The Leprosy Mission Australia: Inclusive Empowerment, Vadathorasalur Vocational Training Centre, Salur Hospital and Kothara Hospital.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.

— Philippians 2:3

"Thank you for being my guardians! God bless you as you continue to pray!"

Rajobala lives at a Snehalaya attached to one of the hospitals run by The Leprosy Mission (TLM) in India. Here older people affected by leprosy and who have nowhere else to go, can receive care. She has two married children, one son, and one daughter, who do not visit. They too face stigma because she is their mother. Rajobala does not want to add to their problems by living with them.

If her family had known that she would develop leprosy, they would not have let her marry. They say it has now destroyed two families. A fever following the birth of her second child left her weak. Soon blisters appeared all over her body and her husband beat her because she could not work. *"My husband told me to go away and die somewhere and that he would dig the grave,"* said Rajobala after discovering that she had leprosy.

Not until a villager suggested leaving her at the TLM hospital did Rajobala start to get help. *"It was before the time of Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT), so my hands began to claw, I lost most of my toes and my nose has problems."*

"Initially my husband visited me about once a year but soon it became less frequent."

"He died in 1995. I went back to the village for his funeral, but they would not even allow me to be part of the rituals. I was told to stay away and watch from a distance. No-one wants me there."

Now Rajobala earns money working in the kitchen at the Hospital. *"You are like my guardians,"* she said, touched by all the compassion that supporters like you have shown her.

Pray for Rajobala and all who suffer from the stigma which is often associated with leprosy. Pray that they might experience unconditional love like that shown by Jesus, in their families and communities.





Isha breaks the bias to end discrimination and stigma

Tuesday March 8th marks International Women's Day. The theme this year is **#BreakTheBias**. Imagine a gender equal world, free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, fair, and inclusive for all.

The Leprosy Mission Australia values a gender equal world. As a follower of Jesus, thank you for joining us in supporting women affected by leprosy and disability. We value your prayers for inclusion for women who face discrimination and stigma.

Let me tell you about Isha. Isha is a 17-year-old girl from Nepal, currently studying in Grade 7.

Isha said, *"I noticed a skin patch on the finger on my right hand. I did not know about the signs and symptoms of leprosy. I didn't understand why there was a patch on my finger. One day a female Community Health Volunteer in my community noticed the patch on my finger and suggested that I go to the nearest health post. The person at the health post suspected it was leprosy, but he couldn't confirm it. They referred me to a general hospital. There, the doctor suggested that I visit Anandaban Hospital's satellite clinic at Butwal."*

Isha was suffering and decided to visit one more local doctor. They could not diagnose her disease either.

"Finally, I visited the skin specialist at Anandaban Hospital, and it got diagnosed as leprosy. I started Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) medication for 12 months."

"After a week of MDT medication, I got complications. I suffered jaundice and stopped taking the MDT myself. Due to the COVID-19, a nationwide lockdown had started, and I couldn't go for any further check-ups and stopped taking MDT completely for seven months." After lockdown eased, Isha came to Anandaban Hospital and continued Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT).

"After taking MDT I felt the improvement in my health and wanted to continue my studies. I went back to secondary school to continue my class, but the school's principal and administrator told me that leprosy was an infectious disease and that I should stay at home. They further told me that they would send me the exam papers at my home, and I should be taking all of them in order to continue my education. If I wanted to return back to school, I was asked to show the written proof of having zero sign of leprosy from the doctor."

This devastated Isha. Soon many people in her community knew what had happened. Project staff from The Leprosy Mission, as well as the community

champion, visited her principal. They explained all about leprosy, including its cause, transmission, signs and symptoms. Their visit convinced the principal who has now given a positive response. *"I can join the school now and I am overjoyed to be continuing my classes."*

Isha broke the bias. Thank you to The Leprosy Mission Nepal (TLMN), the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and generous people like you for supporting her.

"Thank you very much TLMN's IMPACT project for your great effort to help me continue my study."

Pray for Isha and other young women like her, that they will thrive in their education and be able to live life to the fullest. We give thanks for the staff at The Leprosy Mission in Nepal and the community champions. Pray that they will continue to call out bias and bring about equality and an end to discrimination.

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

— 2 Timothy 1:7



UNCONDITIONAL
Love
LIKE
Jesus

We love because He loved us first

—1 John 4:19

Following the example of Jesus, I seek to welcome and help heal people with leprosy through The Leprosy Mission.

Sunday 30 January 2022 is World Leprosy Day.

Churches across the world are called on to raise our voices against the stigma and discrimination people with leprosy suffer.

Pray that churches like yours will be inspired by the unconditional love of Jesus to hold a leprosy focused event between now and the end of April 2022.

Rajobala, the lady on the front of this newsletter, shared: *"My husband was told by the villagers that he had to choose between his wife and living in the village. If I remained, he would not be allowed to use the water or get employment. So, my husband told me to go away and die somewhere and that he would dig the grave."*

Pray for an end to the stigma and discrimination faced by Rajobala and others affected by leprosy and disability.

If you'd like to find out how your church can be part of this, and hold a World Leprosy Sunday event between January-April 2022, please contact Glen Coleman at engage@leprosymission.org.au OR to access World Leprosy Sunday resources, go to www.leprosymission.org.au/world-leprosy-sunday-resources/

Thank you!