Newsletter 2023

GMA brings hope and light to families in need in Pakistan

Greetings from the GMA Board of Trustees, Friends and Volunteers,

First of all, thank you for your invaluable support to the work of GMA. We value and appreciate your partnership in making a difference in many people's lives through our projects.

2023 has been an exciting year for GMA as we further developed our local partnerships in Pakistan and welcomed some new volunteers to join the team there.

GMA Scholarship Programme

Some of you will remember that GMA has an ongoing relationship with the Holy Cross Catholic School in Punjab, where we have provided small grants for scholarships. As in previous years, GMA requested Ms Zubaida John, the headteacher to identify children who excel in their schoolwork but might be in circumstances that risk the completion of their education. Through a thorough assessment, we found that parents who earn their families' living through casual labour are most likely to fall behind on school fees or fail to provide stationary, with dire consequences for their children. Thus, our board made the decision to pay the tuition fee for children in such hardships to relieve parents from the worry about school expenses and to maintain the children's access to education.

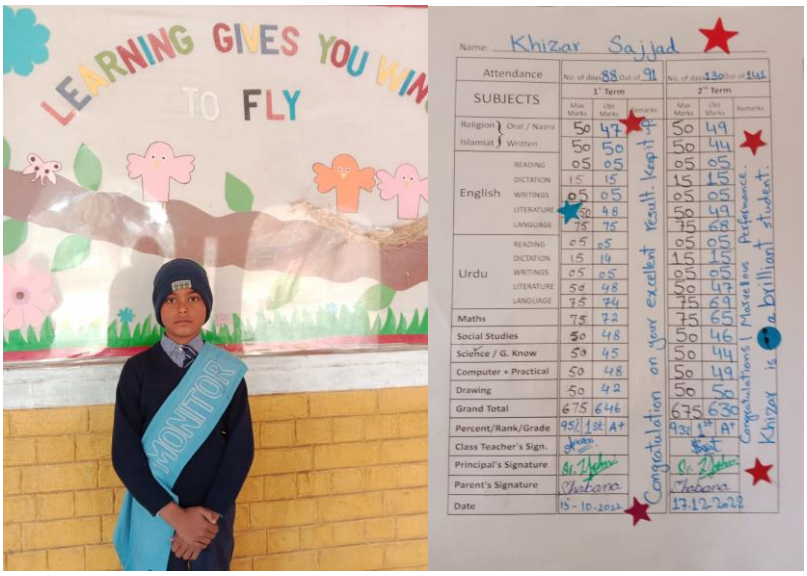
GMA supports five children by paying their fee in full and a further ten pupils by providing learning materials.

Ms John proudly shared the progress report for all the pupils we support, with our top scholars pictured here:



Minha (Class 5) and her Progress Report for 2022
'I am so happy for the help GMA has provided'.

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Khizar Sajjad (Class 4) and his Progress Report 2022
'My family and I are happy that you support me'.

GMA Emergency Response to religious violence



In September 2023, hundreds of families fell victim to an outburst of violence against the Christian community of Jaranwala in Faisalabad in the Punjab region of Pakistan. With your help, we were able to reach out to more than 80 families to provide emergency relief.

Our immediate response was the provision of cash relief so families could repair their homes as needed. We also provided food packages to families who requested them. Eventually some families received government aid, but many continue to be left without support. GMA continues to support widows and their children who are often unable to access state support.

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GMA Team delivering cash and food items to the affected families

Brick Kiln Project near Faisalabad, Pakistan

GMA's work in the Christian community in Faisalabad led us to closer engagement with families who work in the local brick kilns. The Punjab region counts more than 10.000 brick kilns, making Pakistan one of the main producers of bricks in Asia. The majority of kilns mainly rely on centuries-old brick producing technology, which is not environment-friendly and is notorious for unhealthy emissions. The industry remains largely unregulated, despite its large scale, and in addition to unsafe production there are routinely cases of bonded labour, where employers extend loans to their workers which are then deducted from their already meagre wages. Bonded labour is illegal in Pakistan; however, many cases workers lack the capacity and resources to materialize their rights.

GMA's focus in our work in the brick kilns are the children. In mid-November, our team visited the brick kiln of Malkhanwala and engaged with the local families over a community meal. We found that parents often work 12-16 hours per day and only a minority of children attends the local school as school fees are unaffordable for most families. Children who do not go to school often assist their parents in the kiln.

Following on from our visit, we identified 40 children from the most deprived backgrounds who lack even basic essentials. We hosted another community meal on 17th December 2023 where we presented all these children with new clothing and shoes. In a next step, we will work to extend our GMA scholarship program and provide these children with access to education so that they may be empowered to create a better future for their families and community.

We are happy to share some pictures of the distribution below, for more pictures and some video evidence of the joy we brought to these children you can visit our YouTube channel and watch a short clip here: https://youtu.be/Ldv-6UuvNbY?si=aGY_FHmXCGrVNC1a

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Some highlights from GMA's distribution of gifts on 17 December 2023

Beyond the aid that GMA provides, we plan to carry out research to understand the situation of brick kiln families better and investigate why bonded labour remains a common practice. We have commissioned our team to carry out a pilot study in Malkhanwala and expect to be able to provide a report in the spring of 2024.

All of our work would be impossible without the generosity and concern of our supporters. Our team extends a special thanks to Wellington Church for not hesitating to provide immediate help when the tragedy in Jaranwala hit and for their generous support over many years. The gift of love and care of all our supporters has enabled us to reach these individuals during these hard times which has made a huge impact in lives of these most needy individuals.

Thank you and we wish you a very happy festive season and a wonderful new year ahead, full of blessings, joy, and happiness.

On behalf of the GMA board of trustees,

Manassi Bernard
Trustee
December 2023

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