

LIGHTING UP LIVES...

LEADING INDIAN CHARITIES IN THE UK

Diwali, the festival of lights, is unequivocally the most important festival in the Indian calendar. With its very own tradition of giving, it is in many ways India's equivalent of Christmas. To mark this special occasion, we profile some of the leading Indian charities in the UK – organisations which play a notable role in lighting up the lives of hundreds of thousands of underprivileged Indians on an everyday basis.

■ PRATHAM

Pratham is the world's largest grass roots literacy movement based in India. The organisation works with volunteers, teachers and state governments in villages and cities across India to teach children to read, write and do basic mathematics. It develops and utilises special accelerated teaching methods for early childhood learning, which provide children with basic reading and writing skills in as little as 4-16 weeks. Pratham was founded with the help of UNICEF in Mumbai in 1994, and thanks to its replicable and scalable model, has been able to roll out its highly successful programs in 23 Indian states. Today, Pratham operates in over 380,000 villages, partners with 11 state governments and has brought literacy to over 33 million children nationwide. Pratham is supported at the grass roots level by numerous international Pratham chapters, of which Pratham UK is one. Pratham UK has two main responsibilities: to raise funds to support Pratham's programs in India; and to raise awareness of Pratham, thus mobilizing the skills, support and enthusiasm of the Indian diaspora as well as the international community.

■ CRY: CHILD RIGHTS & YOU

CRY UK, a non-profit organisation registered in the United Kingdom, is a partner of India's leading child rights organisation CRY. CRY is driven by its vision of a just world, in which every child has an equal opportunity to develop to her or his full potential. For the last 30 years, CRY, along with its 300 grassroots partners, communities in villages and slums across 20 states in India, and 1.5 lakh individuals have been striving to make its vision a reality for all children, especially the marginalised. In India, CRY is amongst the oldest secular, non-partisan organisations standing up for children's rights. It does this by connecting 'You' – women, men, children, corporates, government functionaries, community groups – to the cause of making sure India's 400 million children get their basic rights.

■ ASHA

Asha for Education (ASHA) is a secular organisation dedicated to bringing about socio-economic change in India through education. The UK chapter of ASHA works in partnership with non-governmental and governmental organizations which work at the grassroots levels in India, in order to understand local issues and run projects. ASHA's projects span the broad categories of formal schooling, supplementary education, orphanages, disability programs, health care and community-based interventions. Through these initiatives, ASHA aims to reach out to children from some of the most deprived backgrounds, including bonded labourers, prostitutes and marginal farmers. The organisation's unique model of zero-overheads, enabled by the fact that its volunteers bear all operational costs, allows for

the highest levels of fundraising efficiency. Today, ASHA has over 400 volunteers in the UK, in addition to several thousand supporters around the world.

■ MAGIC BUS

Magic Bus is a UK and India based not-for-profit organisation which works with children and youth living in extreme poverty in India. It believes the elimination of poverty is not an act of charity, but a human right, and its work is based on the principle of dignity and the ability of the individual to change his/her life. Magic Bus works to instill a sense of belief and provide the skills and experiences for individuals to find a purpose and take more control of their own future. This is achieved through the medium of sport in weekly outdoor learning sessions, weekend camps and day trips. Far more than just play, these sessions use sport to teach children about life, their potential and their choices. Magic Bus reaches out to 140,000 children and youth across India.

■ WINGS OF HOPE

The Wings of Hope Children's Charity is a unique and thriving charity committed to empower children through education. Wings of Hope supports holistic education programs for children in India, and in HIV-AIDS ridden Malawi in Africa. Through the Wings of Hope Achievement Award (WOHAA) – a unique social enterprise award – the charity works with nearly 5,000 secondary school students across the UK, giving opportunities to UK students to work at innovative fundraising projects, raising money for children in India and Malawi, whilst developing their team-work, leadership, communication and enterprise skills along the way. In India, children from extremely poor backgrounds get a completely free education – which includes tuition fees, food, clothing, lodging – and access to a holistic value based education.

■ THE HINDUJA FOUNDATION

The Hinduja foundation's philanthropic activities, which include promoting education, healthcare and interfaith understanding, span India, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Foundation's activities primarily focus on education and healthcare, inspired by the conviction that these are God-given rights to all human beings. In the field of education, the activities of the Foundation in the UK include the Hinduja Cambridge Trust scholarship program and the Dharam Hinduja Institute of Indic Research at Cambridge, a scholarship program at the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission School and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. In the field of healthcare, the Foundation has made contributions to a range of charities including Children with Leukaemia and Cancer Research UK.

Detailed information on UK registered charities can be sought from the Charity Commission which is the official regulator for charities in England & Wales.