



Ever heard someone say, "I've just got too many balls in the air right now?" I immediately picture a juggler desperately trying to keep up with the impossible. Whilst we're not trying to achieve the impossible, there's a fair bit going on at Freeset right now and it's mainly because we have big dreams for freedom.

In the last newsletter we talked about "getting to the source," made in reference to a place 200 km North of Kolkata called Murshidabad. Our concern that many young girls are being stolen and sold from that area motivated us to commission a study to see whether what we have heard is true. The research is in and sadly it confirms our fears. There are villages in Murshidabad whose economies are reliant on selling their daughters into prostitution. This has been going on for generations – and our research shows it is strongly connected with poverty. Our question is: how can we help bring choices to the village families through business so they don't have to sell their own daughters? It's an economic problem and it needs an economic solution. Over the next few months a few of us from Freeset will be spending some time in different parts of Murshidabad getting to know people and organisations to see how best to respond. We'll let you know how we get on.

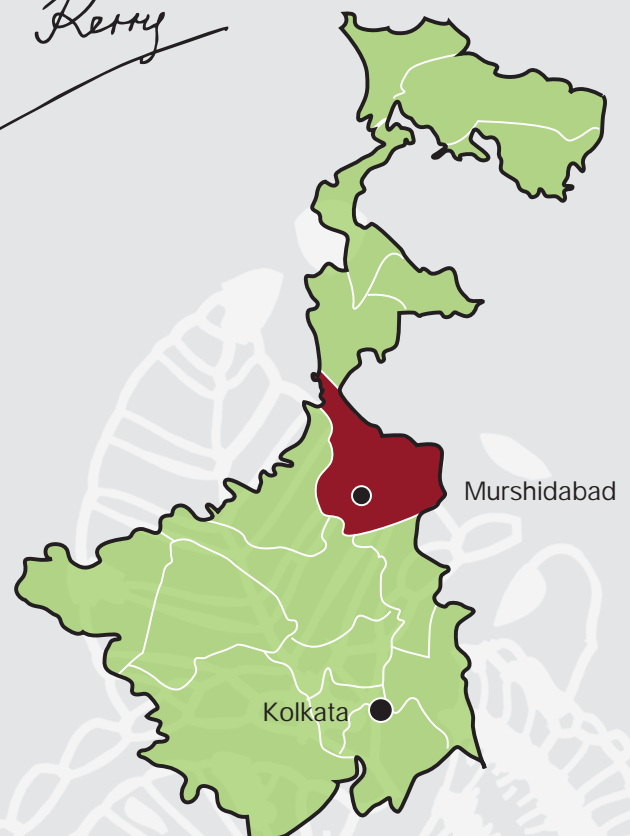
We see the need to help couples and singles, foreign and Indian alike to establish new businesses in areas such as Murshidabad where there are high levels of trafficking. Why wait until little girls are stolen at 10, 11, 12 or 13 years old and sold in our neighbourhood of Sonagacchi? Better never to be wrenched from family and lose all dignity and hope in the first place - a "top of the cliff" approach. Of course, the need for freedom for women and

girls already trapped in prostitution remains, so Freeset will always focus on establishing and growing new freedom businesses in red light areas in West Bengal and Bangladesh as well.

I'm interested to hear from anyone with a bit of entrepreneurial spirit who thinks they have nothing better to do than give up the rest of their lives for the privilege of journeying with others in freedom. Who knows, you might just find your own freedom in the process. I have.

Regards,

*Kerry*



*State of West Bengal*



*In her own words...*

## **Rupa's story**

Rupa has worked at Freeset for the past eight years. She demonstrated excellent leadership ability quite early in her employment and was given the position of assistant to the production manager in bags a couple of years ago. Recently, she was promoted to

*I want the women who are still standing in line to be free and to have time to laugh."*

Production Manager of T-shirts. Her responsibilities include making sure that production runs smoothly and that production goals are met so that shipments can go out on time. She also makes sure that all of the women in T's are working well and producing good

quality work. When asked if she likes her new position she replied, "Yes!" with a broad smile. As the mother of two daughters she said, "Life has been so much better since I started working here. I have a good salary. I can give a better life to my children and they can go to school."

Rupa has a strong passion to see more women free from the trade. "I want to see Freeset grow. I want to see lives changed. I want the quality of women's lives get better and the character of their lives to improve. It's important for children to see their mothers doing good things. Then the stigma that has been on the family can be removed and the children can be proud of their mothers. I want the women who are still standing in line to be free and to have time to laugh."





## Training

The group ASK recently returned to Freeset and conducted training seminars for all of Freeset's supervisors. Training included sessions on how to be more effective leaders and 'soft skills' in how to encourage, motivate and facilitate staff. They also learned more about their own leadership style and how to capitalize on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses.

Rakesh, the screen printing supervisor said, "I liked the example that the trainers gave about how to care for a tree. How if the root is strong that the rest of the tree will be healthy and how we as supervisors need to care for it to make it strong. They said that if we help people to work together as a team, that we will work well together whether the business is small or big."



Brittany from America



Sam & Luke from New Zealand  
with Nanok



Helen from South Africa

## Volunteers

As the cooler months give way to warmer weather, we are reaching the end of the "volunteer season". This year's crop of amazing volunteers have certainly left their mark on the place! Their list of accomplishments includes: renovating room for a new office, creating a fabulous bag sales room for visitors, completing a new conference room, painting and refurbishing guest rooms, building a small kitchen used to make tea for break times, building steel frames to better utilize space for storing rolls of jute, installing new three phase wiring as part of an upgrade to the screen printing department and putting in place a new underground water tank to supply the water treatment system. Currently a room is being renovated for T-shirt cutting and storage.



## Freeset Annual Picnic

Freeset celebrated its annual picnic on February 12th. Four big buses took the entire staff two and a half hours outside of the city to a small amusement park. For women who don't get to travel often and live in a densely populated area it was a wonderful opportunity to relax, chat with friends, laugh, ride the rides, or just sit and enjoy the beauty of nature.

Lunchtime was a highlight of the day when women who used to be the lowest of society sat at tables to be served a meal of several courses by attendants in matching shirts.

"I liked the chance for Freeset to all come together as one big family," said one woman. "And I really liked the journey on the buses when we got up and danced!"





## New Bags

This year we have introduced a range of new bags and updated some classics.

Go to [www.freesetglobal.com](http://www.freesetglobal.com) and click on 'Contact Us' to find a distributor near you.

Farmhouse, Pebbles



Box Bag, with sari



Chorus, Marigold



Legacy, Stripes



Envoy, Braided River



Hope Bag, with sari



Wine Bag, Feather



Amity, Autumn



Everyday, Million Leaves



Amity, Silhouette



Everyday, Zebra



## Another Farewell...

*Sarah Adkins*



Sarah Adkins, Freeset's accountant of the past year, will return to the US in early April where she will spend time reconnecting with family and friends and considering her future.

Besides day-to-day accounting, Sarah has spent a lot of time researching options for new software to help Freeset better organize its accounts and production processes. She has also invested a lot in training up Indian staff to replace her after she leaves.

Sarah worked hard on learning to speak Bengali while she was here and made many friendships among the women. Most days she could be seen sitting amongst the women chatting and laughing with them during tea breaks. Her friendly smile will be missed!



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