

Aasha from Andhra Pradesh, India was just ten years old when her family sent her to work in the cotton seed production fields. Not understanding the long term benefits of giving their daughter an education, and confronted with hunger on a daily basis, Aasha's family, like many others in their region, felt compelled to accept the offer of approximately 2,000 Rupees (AUD\$45) in exchange for a full season's (3-4 months) work.

Surrounded by children as young as four years old, she would work from dawn to dusk without rest or food, doing back breaking work, which in addition to the sowing and picking of cotton could also include the unprotected spraying of dangerous pesticides.

In the evenings she would retire under a tarpaulin in the fields where she slept alongside the other children. Physical, verbal and sexual abuse of child workers is common as is malnutrition and other illnesses arising from poor health, hygiene and sanitation.

Aasha spent five years in the fields before AFAP, working alongside their local partner, was able to reach out to her and her family and offer them an alternative. Aasha was introduced to the 'Child Labour Free' Program which is being run out of the Navajeevan School for the Deaf.



Students in the 'Child Labour Free' Program learn to sew.

The Program, which began in 2007, takes children from the cotton fields and puts them through intensive bridging courses so that they might eventually join mainstream education.

In addition to receiving an education, they are also given valuable life living classes so that they can learn some of the skills they missed out on whilst in the fields. The hope of the Program is that with the life skills, education, better health and increased confidence that comes from the Program, most children will not return to the cotton fields.

Aasha excelled at the bridging course and was soon after given the skills to become a seamstress and set up her own family business. At just 16 years old, having set up the business and employed several of her family members, she has since been offered a scholarship by the State to study nursing. She has taken this on and is already doing exceptionally well. Her sewing business meanwhile has been left in the capable hands of her family.

Aasha's success story is also the story of many who have done the Program since it first began. Indeed a significant percentage of students entering mainstream education after



Graduating students from the 'Child Labour Free' Program who are ready to be integrated into mainstream education.

having done the Program, enter at a higher level than what is expected of them. Very few have been returning to the fields.

AFAP changes lives every day. With programs in 27 countries worldwide focussing on water and sanitation, food security, health, environment, climate change and disaster relief, we are tackling the core challenges facing some of the world's most disadvantaged people.

None of this however would be possible without your help.

In 2010 AFAP hopes to reach out to even more people in need and your donation this

Christmas would make a significant difference to the work that we do internationally.

So whether its \$10, \$100 or \$1,000, your tax deductible contribution will be most appreciated by all the staff at AFAP and the people like Aasha who we support.

Wishing you a very happy and safe festive season.

Margaret Duckett
CEO, AFAP