NEWSLETTER NO. 23
JULY 2026

JAN CHETNA MANCH BOKARO





Greetings from **Jan Chetna Manch Bokaro!**

This is our newsletter covering the cold misty months of January to the early monsoon month of June – from the season of red lilies to one that brings white lotuses.

During the last six months JCMB has been busy as usual. Most of our activities are ongoing, but we have initiated some new activities recently. New partnerships have been launched too, which we hope will flourish in the future.

Through this newsletter, we bring you a glimpse of our achievements and challenges. All of this has been made possible by the unwavering support of our generous donors, friends, well-wishers and the community around us.

We would love to hear your feedback!

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A Journey from Hunger to Hope: The story of Mala Devi

This is the story of Mala Devi, one of JCMB's Swasthya Sakhis (Health Friends), whose life is a journey from childhood poverty and hunger to dignity, confidence and hope.

Mala was born on 1 January 1993 into a very poor family. She had five sisters, and her father worked as a daily wage labourer. His earnings were barely enough to support the family. With so many children and very little income, the family struggled to meet even their most basic needs. There was little opportunity for education, but somehow Mala managed to attend school until the 5th class.

Mala's childhood came to an end when she was only 13 years old. In 2006, she was married to Bahadur Mahato, from Bundiyatand village. Her husband was also from a poor family, and life after marriage brought little relief from poverty. Rich rural families boasted that they ate rice three times a day – a sign that they had much land, and food. But for Mala: *"We ate rice only once a day after my marriage."*





Mala at home with her mother-in-law, husband and son

Pregnancy followed soon after marriage: *"My first child – my son – was born the next year – I was only 14 years old. I did not have anything to eat the day after my delivery. My mother-in-law had to ask a neighbour to give us some rice. I still remember the hunger I felt – more painful than childbirth!"*

Two years later – at 16 years of age – Mala had another child, a daughter.

Her experience of childbirth was Mala's first contact with JCMB – both of her children were born in our health centre. During her pregnancies and visits to the centre, she came into contact with our staff. She desperately wanted to work, earn and feed her children, but had no idea how to go about it.

At the probably illegally young age of 18 years, she chose to get sterilised. She – and her husband – did not want any more children. Following her close interaction with JCMB's health programme Mala started to help other such poor women of her village. In 2012, one of our community health workers visited Mala's village and, inviting all the members of the women's self-help groups in her village, selected Mala as their Swasthya Sakhi.

This was the time that the government was promoting the selection of their own community health workers – known as Sahayas in Jharkhand.

Mala recalls: *"When I was selected, the village Sahaya beat me up once. She said this is my village; don't you dare start taking pregnant women anywhere else for delivery!"*

Though threatened, Mala did not back down. Even though her daughter was only three years old, she continued her work and slowly gained confidence and recognition in her community. In her endeavour she was solidly supported by her family – especially her husband and mother-in-law. Her frequent absences from home, at all times of day or night, have never been objected to by them.



In a Swasthya Sakhi training programme in 2017



Helping women during childbirth at CMSK in 2026

Six years later, in 2018, Mala was elected as a Board Member of the 'Chetna SHG Mahila Swalambi Sahkari Samiti' (CSMSSL) (the women's self-help cooperative). In 2023, she was elected again – obviously a recognition, from the women she helps. She received 3262 votes out of 4123 votes cast, a huge victory!

Today, Mala has her feet in both organisations: JCMB and the CSMSSL. The young girl who once knew the pain of hunger and had almost no control over the direction of her own life has grown into a woman of substance. She participates in decision-making, serves her community and helps other women.

Mala's story is a reminder that sometimes, one opportunity can change the course of a person's life.



Inaugurating the Women's Health Centre in Koromtanr in 2022



Attending the women's cooperative's board meeting in Chamrabad in 2026

Games for Village Women: 'Gramin Mahila Khel-kud'





Organising games for village women is a relatively new initiative for JCMB – and the first of its kind in the villages of Chandankiari and Chas. We especially included elderly women; inviting women beyond 60 years of age. JCMB had noticed that there wasn't much by way of entertainment, or simply 'fun' activities for women after marriage in our villages. Boys can be seen playing sports or glued to the screens of their smartphones; young men interact with their peers during their working time or days off; elderly men can be seen hanging around the tea shops. But for women? We knew that village women were keen for an outlet for interacting with others and sought entertainment beyond the confines of their home. Self-help group meetings of village women were always eagerly participated in; the annual women's day meeting has always been greatly anticipated and attended; and they went along in large numbers to watch the sports events for girls – if only to cheer on their daughters. The drudgery of cooking, cleaning, caring for both the young and old, consumed much of their time. Breaks in the monotony of their lives were religious occasions, marriages, births and deaths: all of which usually involved more work for women – not exactly 'fun' activities!

During these last six months JCMB has actively promoted events to facilitate fun and games for women – especially the elderly. Simple games were devised: hitting some bottles with a rolling motor cycle tyre from a distance of only 20 feet or throwing balls into a basket. When some elderly grandmother hits a bottle there would be cheers and when she fails, which is the case most of the time, there would be roars of laughter in which the grandma herself would join. It is fun, pure and simple and hence very popular.

The prizes are also simple: a kilogram of pulses, a litre of mustard oil or packets of spices! But for most of the women who win, it's the first time in their lives that they have 'won' anything, or recognised for their worth. The pride they exhibit is worth much more than the prize itself!

Since it does not take much time, money or preparation we held it in ten villages like Dungritand, Laghla and Galgaltand in the month of March 2026.

Continuing Partnerships: Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi

JCMB has had a partnership with the Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi, since 2014. Each month a team of psychiatrists visit our health centre and provide a much-needed service to poor, rural patients who have mental health problems. The number of such patients is increasing, probably for two reasons: villagers are nowadays less likely to resort to traditional practices and the reduction of stigma attached to mental health problems; and the lack of such health services in the area. Although Ranchi is historically well endowed with mental health facilities – with large institutions set up by the central and state governments, as well as one which is privately run – it is difficult for rural poor families in our area to access these services. Even 'free' treatment is not 'free' for villagers who need to spend on travel to reach there, a distance of around 130 kms.

In June this year JCMB was honoured to host the Director of CIP, Dr V K Chaudhary. He took a tour of our health facility, accompanied by the team leader and long-time supporter, Dr Varun Mehta, and interacted with our team. JCMB gave a presentation which showed that the majority of patients receiving care from this CIP-JCMB partnership fall into the category of serious mental health problems or epilepsy. That day more than a hundred patients accessed mental health care in our centre.



The Director of CIP Ranchi visits CMSK



Huge crowd waiting for treatment from CIP team

Initiating a New Venture: Collaboration with The Spine Foundation, Mumbai

During the last few months JCMB has ventured into a new partnership, with The Spine Foundation of India.

Following a preliminary visit in March this year by Dr Nishant Kumar, a 'spine doctor' now based in Ranchi, we were honoured to receive Dr Shekhar Bhojraj – Founder and Trustee of The Spine Foundation, which is based in Mumbai – in May.



Dr Shekhar & Dr Nishant at the CMSK



Dr Nishant treating patients with back problems

JCMB is now hosting monthly clinics for patients with back problems thanks to this collaboration.

Strengthening Friendships: Shaheed Hospital, Chhattisgarh

Shaheed Hospital, in Chhatissgarh, has been a source of inspiration for JCMB for many years. In addition, some of our nurses and health workers have visited there several times over the years to learn various skills. The expertise that the CMSK nursing team currently possesses owes much to the willingness of the doctors and nurses of Shaheed Hospital to share their knowledge and skills.

This year was the first time that health workers came to us!

We were fortunate to host Dr Amit Babu, a doctor working in the Shaheed Hospital for more than a year. He came to us for over two months when we were in dire need of a medical professional. Not only did he fulfil our requirement for a medical doctor, a fruitful exchange of practices also took place. From the CMSK, Amit saw a different technique of instrumental (vacuum) deliveries; and from him our team learnt a safer way to induce labour!

Whilst he was here two nurses from there also visited us, Urmila Kashyap and Neha Sen. Both were experienced midwives in the Shaheed Hospital, and were keen to see how births – especially normal births – take place here. They participated in the birth classes and exercises that we teach to facilitate a normal birth.

The interaction between these nurses and our team has helped solidify the friendship between JCMB and Shaheed Hospital. Our team of health workers were extremely proud that such an exchange was possible!

JCMB hopes for more such exchanges in the future.



Nurses from Shaheed Hospital, Urmila Kashyap and Neha Sen (in the white jackets) with the CMSK team



Dr Amit Babu preparing to leave JCMB

Overcoming Obstacles, Achieving Recognition: Dr Sona Shafi

Dr Sona Shafi completed her Social Obstetrics Fellowship programme in January 2026. She left many of our team in tears, after making a place for herself amongst us.

Initially we were all a bit hesitant, probably even Sona herself! This was the first time that she had spent so many days away from her family. The fellowship meant so much to her that her whole family was split up for six months: her son in Bangalore, husband in Uttar Pradesh, and her daughter spent part of the time here in Chandankiari and left for the last couple of months. Both Sona and her husband were working in an even more deprived part of the country than here, a small town with a poor health system, yet just 2 hours out of Delhi.

Sona was not only serious about the fellowship, but highly motivated, driven and passionate about her profession. The sacrifice the family was making weighed on her – she was determined not to waste a single day!

She shuttled up and down between the guest room in Chamrabad and the quarters in the health centre in Koromtanr, 3 kilometres away. We jokingly called her room in Chamrabad as her maternal home – *mayke* –, and her room in Koromtanr as her in-laws' – *sasural*. She walked, cycled, or, if she was lucky, would get a ride in the ambulance.



Sona accompanying Thandi, one of JCMB's Community Health Workers on a field visit



Embracing and caring for the newborn of a mother in the Women's Health Centre

A few weeks into the fellowship Sona had her doubts:

"How can I learn how to attend to women during childbirth? There are so many nurses here, in my area I will be alone. But the community expects me to…."

Fortunately, after a couple of months her hesitancy reduced and her confidence grew.



Receiving her Social Obstetrics Fellowship certificate during the visit of Drs Elizabeth & Shubhro

Sona rarely took leave; often attending night calls and managed the clinics during the day. Though she was supposed to take a day off every week, she secretly told our nurses: "If there's any patient in need, please call me – but don't tell madam!"

She will be fondly remembered for many years to come. Months later families still ask about her.

An update about our financial situation

During the last 6 months we have been helped by several organisations and many well-wishers.

The **Ekam Foundation, Mumbai**, continues to help us provide subsidised care to small babies. A generous donation from **Pardos Real Estate Pvt. Ltd.** ensures we can continue to provide health care services to poor families. With the support from the **Ram Pyari Gupta Memorial Scholarship,** we are continuing to provide bright and ambitious girls a stipend for higher studies. Our partnership with the **Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Jharkhand** in the implementation of the 'Janani Surakhsha Yojana' scheme helps subsidise childbirth costs.

The **Azim Premji University** helped us provide better quality care as a result of their research grant to assess our initiatives to improve male involvement. The research was completed by January this year, but the activities initiated during the programme continue. Our mental health programme continues, fortunately, with the support of the **Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi**. A new partnership with **The Spine Foundation** was initiated in May, and monthly clinics have started with their help.

Medical professionals have volunteered to help us too. **Dr Poonam Dixit** and **Dr Jyothi Unni,** both obstetricians, helped update our nursing team in various ways; **Dr Saudamini Nesargi**, a neonatologist, helps us with the treatment of very small newborns; and **Dr Vibha Singh**, a clinical psychologist helped in training to identify mental health problems. **Dr Elizabeth** and **Dr Shubhro Mallick** – an obstetrician and a paediatrician - gave valuable inputs for monitoring women in labour, and caring for the neonate.

Though JCMB provides evidence-based treatment, quality health care costs. We subsidise the cost of health care for many poor families that are in need of help, in particular care for preterm neonates, mental health treatment, which is often much, much more than families here can afford.

We request all our well-wishers to share this newsletter. We welcome all sorts of help – in cash and kind: volunteers to help with documentation; prepare training modules; train our nursing team, and of course medical professionals to help us provide health care. In kind, we need help to support our 2nd Daughter Celebration packs: cotton clothes and frocks, baby wraps, and other useful items. Our health centre, as ever, is in constant need of materials to ensure that we continue to provide quality care.

We'd like to thank again all our friends and well-wishers, without whose support JCMB could not continue to provide the quality of care and range of activities. During the period from January to June 2026, we have been helped in various ways by the following institutions:

Ekam Foundation Mumbai
Pardos Real Estate Private Limited
Puru Indu Upadhyaya Foundation
Sanmat Foundation
Tribal Health Initiative
Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi
The Spine Foundation
Shaheed Hospital, Chhattisgarh

And the following individuals (sans honorifics):

Anand Bharathan
Chandrashekhar Vinayak Apte
Jyothi Unni
Neha Bisht
Punam Dixit
Sandhya Sharon
Suma Singh
Vasu Raj

Our contact details: email address: janchetnamanch@rediffmail.com

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