

# An update plus a new addition to the program!

## By Suraj Kumar - Project Manager in India



### **Blossom Bus update August 2016:**

Since the new academic session started in the beginning of July 2016, we have increased the number of girls participating in the Blossom Bus to College bus service from 18 to 40. This was due to the high demand expressed by parents and girls who had previously rode the Blossom Bus. Blossom Bus is becoming very popular in the villages and parents are even approaching the school heads to request extending the transportation service to new villages. To answer these requests, we have added Rajpura village to the bus stop, a town where very poor families from the lower castes live.

Two sisters studying in ninth grade, Manisha and Babita, are new entrants on Blossom Bus from Rajpura village. Their mother Prakasho told us that her husband Bhim Singh died two years ago after suffering from some disease. Manisha is the eldest of six sisters with one brother and no male breadwinners to feed the family. After the death of her father, her mother started working as laborer in the village fields on daily basis and earns bread and butter for the whole family. The mother was worried about the continued education of her two daughters who graduated from eighth grade. She visited the Aharwan School with some villagers and was very happy to learn White Lotus had agreed to provide transportation to the girls from their village.

It is very difficult for Prakasho to pay school fees and buy books for her daughters but she is working overtime to earn a little more so that she can afford the fee, books, and uniforms for her daughters. She believes in education and hopes that once graduating they will become financially stable enough to support their younger siblings through school. She is very hopeful and thanks White Lotus for the support given to the village.

Two more sisters from the village Rajpura and Samana are in grade sixth and ninth grade. They are from a Muslim family with five older brothers. The brothers had studied as far as eight grade in the village school and then started working on their family's local property. Their father, Jaan Mohammad, refused to send the daughters to high school because he was worried about the harassment that they would receive.

Samana insisted on furthering her studies and requested her brother to convince her father to allow her to go to school at Aharwan. Her brother was also apprehensive of the harassment but was well aware that if she didn't receive a continued education, she would be stuck working in the fields with all of her brothers. The brother thought about it and argued with his father to allow his two sisters to travel together on the Blossom Bus. Jaan Mohammad met the school Principal and some other girls attending school traveling on the BB as he wanted to be sure that his daughters would be safe. He was very pleased after speaking with the principle and granted his daughters the opportunity to continue their educations.

#### **Education Quality Addition program (EQ+):**

In addition to our Blossom Bus Program, we will now be implementing the Education Quality Addition program also known as EQ+. The EQ+ program (Education Quality Addition) was designed because of the lack of remedial measures in government schools where teaching/learning outcomes have fallen behind. The graduates of the Blossom Bus Program have the chance to give back and become ambassadors and teach in their local villages and encourage other young girls to pursue their dreams in education. The EQ+ program is a pilot program that is being developed in collaboration with the government of Haryana. Currently the program is targeting 150 students from first to eighth grade in five different schools. These five different schools will be taught by five different Blossom Bus graduates.

We want to continue spreading the practices of Blossom Bus because the pass rates show the immense impact that the program has on its students. For example, last year only one student out of 120 passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade exam in Hathin village, whereas the school that the Blossom Bus girls attended had a 60% pass rate. These recent graduates will not only teach classes based on what information is necessary to be prepared for college, but the teachers will also be role-models for these younger students as they provide proof of the fact that there is purpose in education.

*Thank you to all that have supported the Blossom Bus Program. You have played a large role in its success.*



*EQ+ teacher, a graduate of BB to College.*





*An EQ+ teacher, a graduate of BB to College.*



*Girls boarding the Blossom Bus to college*

