

Afsana makes history

By Rachel Curtis - Development Manager



"I'll graduate before I'll marry"

Afsana recently received the wonderful news that she passed grade 9. But her achievement isn't only a personal milestone; her entire community is marking the occasion. That's because Afsana will be the very first female in Mehluka village to reach grade 10.

Finishing grade 9 at 16 years old, Afsana is a tad behind by western standards. But in the remote, rural district of northern India where she is from, an unwed, childless girl of her age is a rarity. Afsana's own mother was 14 when she married, and neither of her parents even attended school.

A striking contrast also lies between Afsana and her two older sisters, only one of whom reached as far as grade 5. (The other never went to school.) While Afsana amiably leads our field staff on a tour of her home, her sisters remain

in their rooms; on the way out, our officers are discouraged from acknowledging their veiled forms at the door. As married women, they must keep their heads covered, and certainly not address men other than their husbands.

“It’s like seeing the past and the present in one place at the same time,” remarked our director of field operations, Glenn Fawcett.

This surreal juxtaposition almost didn’t come to pass. Despite her visible passion for education, in the year after grade 8 Afsana remained at home, helping to look after her nieces, nephews and the housekeeping. With her secondary school too far away to safely walk to alone, Afsana’s parents pulled her out of school. She resigned herself to the idea of an early marriage.

That’s when news of Lotus Outreach’s Blossom Bus, a school transportation program designed specifically to reach Mewat’s secondary school-aged young women, blew through Mehluka village.

“When I heard about the chance to return to school, my heart almost burst,” says Afsana.

Not only did she sign herself up for the Bus, she rallied four of her friends who had also dropped out to re-enroll with her. Now first in her class of 16 girls, a confident Afsana declares, “I want to finish grade 12 before even thinking about marriage.”

Today the Blossom Bus provides the vital link to continued education for 150 girls across Afsana’s home district of Mewat, many of whom are blazing trails for their younger sisters, just like Afsana. We could never do it without your

support! Thank you so much for keeping these girls in school.



Afsana at home with her younger siblings



Studying 2-3 hours every night

