

APRIL
FOCUS

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

"The Environment is where we meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is a thing we all share." – Lady Bird Johnson



RID 3291
Rotary
Garden Reach



Light

WEEKLY NEWS LETTER

April 1st, 2025 - Vol. 47 No. 36

2307th Regular Weekly Meeting
Attendance: 17

Greetings on Birthday
April 4th : Shrijita, Daughter of Rtn. Jayanta Hati

Kashmiri youth fought to keep Tribal Girls in School

Kifayatullah Malik knows the pain of nearly losing his education. Now, at 25, he's helping tribal children overcome the same struggles — ensuring they stay in school despite financial difficulties. His inspiring efforts won him the President's Award, but his true victory lies in changing lives, one child at a time.

As a child growing up in Lawaypora village in Bandipora, North Kashmir, he saw many of his friends drop out of school, forced to trade their dreams for domestic responsibilities and financial burdens. He could have been one of them — but he fought to stay in school, becoming the first in his family to do so. Now, at 25, he is making sure no child in his community has to give up on their education the way so many before them had to.

Through his relentless efforts, Malik has helped re-enrol more than 700 children who had dropped out of school due to financial hardships. But his work goes beyond just getting students back in classrooms — he is shifting mindsets, advocating for education as a right, not a privilege.



A personal struggle that sparked a movement

Malik's journey began with his own struggles. Born and raised in Lawaypora, he was the first child in his family to attend school. From an early age, he saw many of his peers abandon their education due to financial struggles and domestic responsibilities. Determined to make a difference, he completed his master's in social work from Amar Singh College, Srinagar. It was during his college years that he gathered a group of like-minded youth to address the dropout crisis in tribal areas.

"It began with collecting the used textbooks from my friend circle and then from our locality and others. Then we used to distribute them to needy students to ensure that no student would be left behind from getting basic education," he recalls. "Most of the students throw the books away after getting promoted to the next class or reading them, but someone wishes to have that book."

Today, Malik is not working alone. He now leads a team of over 10 volunteers, who help him in his mission to bring tribal children back to school.

Bringing dropouts back to school

Bringing dropouts back to school

One of the students who benefited from Malik's efforts is Sumaiya, a young girl from the tribal community. "In our community, most girls drop out due to a lack of resources. I was one of them. I had to leave school in Class 5 because my parents couldn't afford to educate both my brother and me. It was heart-breaking to watch my dreams slip away, knowing that education was a privilege I could not afford," she shares.

For two years, Sumaiya remained out of school, her aspirations put on hold. Then she met Malik, who not only provided her with books and stationery but also counselled her parents on the importance of education. Thanks to his intervention, she re-enrolled last year. Today, she dreams of becoming a teacher, determined to support girls like her who are forced to sacrifice their education.

The problem of school dropouts is widespread. According to official data from the Jammu and Kashmir government, the tribal community and other marginalised communities have the highest school dropout rate at the secondary level, with 14.17%. This includes 19.05% among girls and 10.55% among boys.

Afshana Gul, a teacher in Uri, North Kashmir, has witnessed this harsh reality first-hand. "No one wants to drop out of school, but financial hardships force many to do so, especially girls. It is heart-breaking to see bright students leave their education midway," she says. "As a teacher, nothing hurts you more than seeing one of your bright students drop out midway. Some of my best students from three years ago are now at home, unable to continue their studies." Despite the challenges, Malik remains determined. "When your intentions are clear, there will be support for you," he says. His initiative runs entirely on crowdfunding, with people contributing small amounts — Rs. 100, Rs. 200, or Rs. 500 per month. "Now people have trust in me, and these small contributions, though minimal for them, help us enrol students and fulfil their dreams."

"There's no support for us from the government, but we do awareness sessions in tribal areas to educate people about labour government schemes and their importance," Malik says.

A vision for the future

Malik's work has not gone unnoticed. He is a district coordinator for **REACHA (Research and Extension Association for Conservation of Horticulture and Agroforestry)** as part of the Smartpur project, which aims to bridge the digital divide in Kashmir's remote areas. "To Kifayatullah, REACHA is not just an organisation but a mission to touch the remotest corners of the country, enlightening people with education, IT literacy, and sustainable projects," he says. But his ambitions do not stop here. Malik's long-term mission is to bridge the digital literacy gap and ensure basic education for all tribal children who left their education midway because of poverty. He plans to expand his efforts beyond North Kashmir and sustain his initiatives through NGO partnerships.

"Every child, no matter where they come from, deserves a chance to learn. I will keep working until every tribal child has access to education," Malik shares.

For Malik, the journey is far from over. He continues to work tirelessly, ensuring that no child in his community is denied the right to education. "If you change one life, you create a ripple effect. Today, we are re-enrolling students. Tomorrow, they will be the ones advocating for education in their own families," he says with conviction.

Through his vision and persistence, Malik is proving that grassroots efforts can drive meaningful change. In the remote villages of North Kashmir, where access to education was once uncertain, opportunities are now being reclaimed.



PEACE AND CONFLICT
PREVENTION / RESOLUTION



DISEASE PREVENTION
AND TREATMENT



WATER AND
SANITATION



MATERNAL AND
CHILD HEALTH



BASIC EDUCATION AND
LITERACY



ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT



SUPPORTING THE
ENVIRONMENT

RI President Stephanie A Urchick – March's Message

As the chill of winter gives way to the warmth of spring, we have an opportunity to rejuvenate our commitments to each other and to the communities we serve.

A shining example is the Rotary Club of Windsor-Roseland in Ontario, whose members support a program providing hot meals to people facing homelessness and food insecurity. On any given evening, the Soup Shack run by Feed Windsor-Essex serves up to 130 people, offering nourishment and a sense of community and care.

Club member and Past District Governor Aruna Koushik got the club involved after seeing a news segment about the Soup Shack.

Koushik collaborated with club members to quickly approve the purchase of a stove, pots, and pans for its new permanent space. Soon after, club members met with the Soup Shack team, toured the new location, and presented a check for 3,000 Canadian dollars (about US\$2,000) to support its efforts. They also committed to volunteering their time to prepare and serve meals once the facility is operational.



This exemplifies how Rotary members can come together to address community needs, foster engagement, and make a tangible impact. By identifying opportunities for service and mobilizing resources, we not only support those in need but also strengthen our bonds with each other and with the communities we serve.

As we embrace the renewal that spring offers, let's take inspiration from the Windsor-Roseland club. Consider these ways to reinvigorate engagement within your club:

Identify emerging needs: Stay attuned to the evolving challenges in your communities. Engage with local organizations to understand where your club's support can make the most difference.

Mobilize resources quickly: When opportunities arise, act swiftly. Leverage the skills and networks within your club to gather resources, from financial contributions to equipment to volunteer time.

Foster collaboration: Encourage members to take initiative and collaborate on projects. Empowering individuals to lead and contribute their unique talents enhances engagement and drives success.

Commit to ongoing involvement: Beyond initial contributions, pledge continued support.

Regular service keeps members connected and reinforces the club's commitment to sustained impact.

By embracing these approaches, we can harness the energy of spring to renew our dedication to service and engagement. Let's seize this season as an opportunity to revitalize our efforts, strengthen our connections, and continue making a positive difference in the world.

This is **The Magic of Rotary** — transforming lives, inspiring hope, and creating lasting change for the communities we serve.



Water is a promise we must keep

Cindy Howe & Kathryn Lucero (Directors), DigDeep

World Water Day is 22 March, a global reminder that clean, running water is not a privilege – it is a human right. Yet, here in the United States, more than 2 million Americans live without running water and proper sanitation at home. This crisis remains hidden, largely absent from national discussions, but for those of us who have experienced life without running water, it is a daily reality that shapes lives, communities, and future opportunities.

As DigDeep Project Directors for the Navajo Water Project and Colonias Water Project, we have seen how lack of water access has ripple effects across communities.

Cindy: Growing up on the Navajo Nation, I lived without running water at home between the ages of 12 and 14. My family had to go to Bluewater Lake to get barrels of water, use rubber hoses and buckets, and heat water on the wood stove because we didn't have a water heater. My aunt, like so many elders in our community, waited decades to get running water. She was 72 years old when she got running water at home. And still, today, thousands of Navajo families are waiting, hauling five-gallon jugs and driving 35 miles one way to fetch water for their basic needs.



Kathryn: For me, when I was growing up, I didn't realize it wasn't normal to live without running water at home until I saw that other kids took those sorts of things for granted. When I began working, I met Diana, a mother whose children were bullied at school because they couldn't shower regularly. She spoke up at a water district meeting, but was dismissed by a board member who told her to "get educated." So, she did. She learned how to get water for her entire community. Stories like hers show us that fighting to ensure every family is granted their human right to water is not just about infrastructure—it is about dignity, opportunity, and breaking cycles of poverty.



People assume that if someone in America lacks water, it's because they chose to live somewhere remote. But that's not true. Many families we serve live in communities just minutes away from cities, or a streetlight over from communities with full water access. They use porta potties and rig car batteries to power water pumps. They are resourceful, and invest countless hours into hauling and storing water—but this is time they could be spending with their children, working, playing, or simply resting.

On the Navajo Nation, over 30% of households still do not have running water or a flush toilet. In Texas, colonias communities have waited decades for promised infrastructure that never came. But this crisis is not limited to these areas. From rural Appalachia to the San Joaquin Valley in California, millions of Americans are living without safe water, often in communities of color and low-income areas where systemic neglect has made them invisible.

The good news is that we can solve this crisis. At DigDeep, we have connected thousands of families to clean, running water through community-driven projects. And we do it differently: by listening to the people most affected, ensuring they are part of the solution-making process. We don't make promises we can't keep. When we say we're going to do something, we do it.

This World Water Day, we invite you to be part of the solution. Because in the wealthiest country in the world, no one should have to live without running water.

Water is life. Water is dignity. Water is a promise we must keep.



Incredible April Fool's Day pranks from History

Playing a light-hearted joke on our friends and family on 1st April is one thing. But here are rather more elaborate pranks that have well and truly gone down in the historical hall of fame.

1. The Washing of the Lions

It was in 1698 that people were first tricked into attending the 'washing of the lions' at the Tower of London. That makes it one of the oldest-known pranks in the historical record, and it would be repeated multiple times during the 18th and 19th centuries.

One iteration occurred in 1848 when a journalist distributed cards inviting the public to the washing of the lions. As an onlooker wrote: 'I was not prepared for the extraordinary credulity of the British Public. They flocked up in shoals to see the lions washed. The warders were almost at their wits' end. They had the bits of pasteboard flourished in their faces, with angry gestures and angrier imprecations, by the indignant crowd of sight-seers and seekers.'

2. Big Ben goes Digital

In 1980, the BBC World Service announced that London's most famous landmark was getting a facelift. The broadcaster told listeners that, to help tourists tell the time, the Big Ben clocktower would be going digital, and would henceforth be known as 'Digital Dave'.

The new and improved monument wouldn't just tell the time – it would also issue a five-minute news bulletin every night. On top of that, the iconic bongs would be replaced with beeps. While some listeners clocked that this was an April Fool's jest, many others rang in to express their outrage. A BBC spokesperson commented: 'Surprisingly, few people thought it was funny.'

3. The Volcanic Eruption that Wasn't

One of the most audacious pranks of all time was the fake eruption of the Mount Edgecumbe volcano in Alaska. It was carried out not by a media outlet, but by a local logger named Oliver 'Porky' Bickar and was a hoax, years in the making. Bickar diligently collected 70 tyres which he stashed away in an airplane hangar, waiting for an April Fool's Day with clear enough skies and the right weather conditions to pull off his plan.

That day came in 1974 when Bickar used a chartered helicopter to deposit the tyres into the volcano's crater. He then doused them with fuel and set them alight, causing a satisfyingly thick and ominous plume of smoke to billow up.

Local townsfolk rushed into the streets, fearful that the long-dormant volcano was going to blow. While the police and fire service were in on the joke, Bickar had forgotten to inform the Coast Guard. They flew over to inspect the situation, but instead of seeing molten lava, they saw the old tires ablaze, surrounded by giant spray-painted letters reading 'APRIL FOOL'.



Young Changemakers: 17-year-old Elizabeth Chen

Claire Sibonney

While her friends were vegging out, Elizabeth Chen was trying to crack the code on how patients with leukaemia respond to CAR T-cell therapy, one of the newest and most promising treatments for blood cancers.

One Saturday night in the spring of 2023, while most of her friends were vegging out, Elizabeth Chen was studying in the basement of her family's suburban home. She was trying to crack the code on how patients with leukaemia respond to CAR T-cell therapy, one of the newest and most promising treatments for blood cancers.



Believe it or not, it was science-project work. But instead of growing crystals or turning a lemon into a battery, the 11th-grade Edmonton student was trying to find ways to make CAR T-cell therapy more effective. Unlike traditional cancer therapies, CAR T-cell therapy is a more personalized approach that involves tweaking a patient's own immune cells to fight cancer. While it has a lot of promise, the failure rate can be high, depending on factors such as the type of cancer.

Elizabeth was drawn to cancer research for several reasons: She came across a fundraising campaign for another Albertan girl, nicknamed Penn the Brave, who was diagnosed with brain cancer at age three. And when Elizabeth was younger, her grandmother had breast cancer.

So when Elizabeth was looking for a science-project topic and her father emailed her a news article about CAR T-cell therapy, a cutting-edge treatment

that still isn't well enough understood, she threw herself into finding out as much as she could.

She started with open-access data from a 2022 University of Pennsylvania and Yale University joint study examining one of the most common childhood cancers: acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. The study collected data to explain what causes resistance to CAR T-cell treatment, leading to relapse, and Elizabeth used that data to try to identify genetic biomarkers that would accurately predict a patient's response to the treatment in order to make it more effective.

Elizabeth also found a way to analyse the patient data using specialized computer programmes rather than a lab. Some of that work involved uploading hundreds of gigs of data on patients' genetic information (over many late nights) into a free analytic software platform that would help look for patterns.

What she discovered was that certain genetic information in RNA sequences—which translate into everything from hair colour to how your immune system fights diseases—could actually predict a patient's response to CAR T-cell therapy, and could one day help pave the way to more effective treatment and fewer side effects.

Starting the project two years ago, Elizabeth—now 17 and in Grade 12—took months getting up to speed with the science. At first, she found reading primary academic research articles too difficult, so she taught herself by reading books, open-source papers and watching YouTube videos designed for lay people who didn't have a biomedical research background. But that only got her so far. "I thought about giving up so many times," says Elizabeth. Instead she turned to online forums, where professional and amateur scientists alike swapped tips on tackling similar challenges.

Her original research paper, titled Optimization of CAR T-Cell Therapy Using RNA-Sequencing Analysis for Biomarker Identification, made Elizabeth not only a national science-fair champion but also won her first place at the prestigious annual European Union Contest for Young Scientists in Brussels last fall.

"It made everything feel like it was not just worth it, but like 'Oh my god, I love science!'" she says. It was also rewarding because she'd felt so out of her depth trying to tackle the research. As she graduates from high school this year and starts applying to university (she would like to be a clinician-scientist in oncology or immunology), Elizabeth is looking forward to working in an actual lab—not just in her parents' basement.



Minutes of the 2306th RWM held on March 18th, 2025 at BNR Officers' Club, Garden Reach

1. President Biswajit welcomed the members and requested them to rise for the National Anthem.
2. The installation of a water filter at BNR North Colony was discussed. PN Dr. BN Jha provided an update on the inspection conducted by Railway officials to start the plumbing and water connection works. The Club secretary was instructed to pick up the water tanks from Rotary Sadan.
3. The Cancer Awareness Camp is tentatively scheduled for April 17th, 2025 at Bata India Factory, Batanagar, from 10:00 hrs. It is expected that around 80-100 persons will be screened. A letter was dispatched to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Cancer Hospital through Rotary Club of Calcutta for assisting in organizing the camp by sending the Cancer Screening Bus to Bata Factory. The President encouraged all members to be present at this event.
4. The President proposed a visit to Bharatgarh School on April 6th, 2025, as members had not been able to visit the school for the past three months. The outstanding amount of Rs. 17,200 will be paid on that day. It is noted that PP Tapan Roy, PP Kumud Kar, and Rtn. Amar Saha have contributed Rs. 5,000 towards this amount. Rotary Garn Reach will bear the balance of Rs. 2,200.
5. PP Dr. Arabinda Ray was approached to arrange for the meeting at Parnasree Green Campus as an alternative venue to BNROC. PP Dr. Arabinda confirmed that he would check with the managing committee of the complex and revert to the club in the next meeting.
6. The Club Secretary, conducted the Club Business.
7. Minutes of the last RWM was confirmed. President Biswajit terminated the meeting.