



# SOWHOPE Newsletter

*"Where there is despair, let me sow hope."* FRANCIS OF ASSISI

## LITERACY LIBERATES IN INDIA

On a recent trip to India to visit literacy projects supported by SowHope, several women shared with SowHope board members, Ruth Posthumus and Beth Leeson, about the extremely positive difference it makes in their lives to now be able to read.

The women, who all live in the same tent city, have been attending classes to learn how to read, write, and do arithmetic for almost a year. Class is held each evening for two hours a night, five nights a week. The women bring their paperback textbooks and personal chalk boards and sit together on a mat right outside one of the tents. The class is held in the evening because most of the women work as "day-laborers" earning about \$1.60 per day for wages.

One of the young ladies, Balamani, a 25-year-old mother of three, works whenever she can as a day-laborer washing clothes and cleaning houses. Her wages are 600 rupees per month (\$10). She is a natural leader and very motivated to learn. She goes around each evening encouraging everyone to come to



*"We feel so free now!" Balamani and others-Literacy learners in India*

class. The women say they are very tired after working all day, but they are so happy now that they have all made the effort. Once the class is over, they expect to pass the final exam, which will give them the equivalency of completing 5th grade, by government standards.

When we visited, they were just beginning the Income Generation portion of the class. They were nervous, but excited to show us how they could read out loud. They completed some math problems given to them by Sowhope president Mary Dailey Brown. When asked, "What the best part about being able to read?" They enthusiastically told us that one of them was the first woman in the city to ever go to a bank!

Now, because they are able to read signs and determine which bus to ride, they are able to go to nearby larger towns, where they can buy products to sell. Before, they could not count or use money. Balamani says with great delight, "We feel so free, now!" Literacy changes lives by liberating the learners.

## A DOCUMENTARY FILM EVENT

WHERE THERE IS DESPAIR

# LET ME SOW HOPE

"Let Me Sow Hope", is a documentary film exposing the overwhelming challenges and vulnerabilities faced by impoverished women in the Developing World and the transformational effect of hope.



- Feb 25 - EECAD Date Night in Abu Dhabi, UAE 7pm
- Mar 6 - Harper College in Palatine, IL 1pm
- Mar 7 - Village Church of Gurnee, IL 7pm
- Mar 8 - AMC Event Postponed - New Lenox, IL TBA
- Mar 12 - GVSU in Grand Rapids, MI 4:30 & 7pm
- Mar 18 - Ferris State Univ in Big Rapids, MI 11am
- Apr 23 - Rotary Club in Lexington, VA 7pm
- Apr 28 - Honduras Coffee Shop in Stuart, VA 7pm

**Public welcome! - More details at [SowHope.org](http://SowHope.org)**

## Grand Rapids, Michigan Celebrates International Women's Day

Mayor George Heartwell will act as host of the March 12th evening event.

There will be a light reception in Grand Valley State University's Meijer Regency Room at 6pm. The SowHope Documentary will be shown in the GVSU Loosemore Auditorium at 7pm followed by a Q&A expert panel discussion.

This event, open to the public, is also sponsored by the Hauenstein Center and GVSU student groups.

## MEET A BOARD MEMBER

Jonathan Williams was drawn to Mary, the president of SowHope, and her story from the first time they had a coffee. He was touched and inspired by her passion to give a voice to the voiceless. He says he'll never forget that she told him: "If we empower a warrior we get a warrior, but if we empower a woman we change a village."



Jonathan Williams

Jonathan brings a widely varied skill-set to the SowHope board. He is the cofounder of Failure:Lab, a partner in The Elemental Project, and works as a business growth consultant at Graybridge Company. Jonathan says: "I have learned my lessons in the trenches of entrepreneurial ventures."

Jonathan hopes to bring some of this entrepreneurial experience to contribute to SowHope. His immediate goals in joining the SowHope Board include: helping to share the message of SowHope more strategically, becoming an ambassador to the local network, and connecting with SowHope's work abroad.

Ever since the very beginning, women have been important in Jonathan's life. He says: "I am constantly inspired by my mother who has lived her life in the service of others. She is an incredible nurse who has worked in the ER, Hospice, and now Holland Hospital. I would consider her the greatest heroine in my personal story."

Photo of Jonathan by Brian Kelly

**SOWHOPE  
EXISTS**

TO INSPIRE  
WOMEN AROUND  
THE WORLD  
BY PROMOTING  
WELLNESS,  
EDUCATION, AND  
ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITIES

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - MARCH 8TH

SowHope celebrates International Women's Day, IWD, which falls on March 8th every year. In different regions of the world, the general focus is often a celebration of respect, appreciation, and love towards women to celebrate women's economic, political, and social achievements. In some regions, the day is an occasion for men to express their love for women in a way somewhat similar to a mixture of Mother's Day and Valentine's Day. Many countries celebrate this day as a national holiday with parades and other public festivities, and the wearing of purple ribbons. In Italy, to celebrate the day, men give yellow mimosas to women. Yellow mimosas and chocolate are also one of the most common March 8th presents in Russia and Albania.

The idea of an International Women's Day was first introduced in 1910 at the second International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. The conference was attended by over 100 women from 17 countries. They proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day, a Women's Day. The suggestion met with unanimous approval and the next year IWD was honored for the first time on March 19 when over a million women and men rallied for women's rights to work, vote, be trained, hold public office, and to end discrimination. In 1913 IWD was transferred to March 8th and this date has remained the global date for IWD ever since.

For many years the United Nations has held annual IWD conferences with strong social awareness themes such as ending violence against women, ending poverty and hunger, uniting for peace, and empowering women educationally and economically. 1975 was designated as the 'International Women's Year' by the UN. In the United States the whole month of **March** is now designated as '**Women's History Month**'.

This year, the UN theme is 'Inspiring Change', which ties directly to our mission statement: to inspire women around the world by promoting wellness, education, and economic opportunities. At SowHope we see the intrinsic value of investing in women to bring hope to the world and to help end poverty. We also want to celebrate the common value that unites us all - the women who have given each of us our very lives.

See more info at: [http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp#UvJR8Y\\_Tu4](http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp#UvJR8Y_Tu4) & Wiki

## DID YOU KNOW?

SowHope has impacted over 38,000 women in its 8 years of existence. That impact represents things like having help during birth, learning how to read, or receiving a microloan.

This averages out to helping:  
*4750 women every year,*  
*396 women every month,*  
*91 women every week,*  
*13 women every day,*  
*1 woman every 2 hours*

**Average cost per woman - \$35**

## Mother's Day Brunch

Saturday, May 3, 2014

9:30 - 11:00

Location: Comfort Suites, Comstock Park

Tickets \$100

Go to our website  
[www.SowHope.org](http://www.SowHope.org)  
 to order your tickets  
 and get all the details!

Limited seating so get your tickets now!

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Ruth Posthumus - Chairperson  
 David Kelson - Vice Chairperson

Alfred Longtin - Treasurer  
 Melissa Miller - Secretary

Richard Butler  
 Carol Washburn

Sylvia Juta  
 Jonathan Williams

Beth Leeson