

## For all, a second chance at survival

### - 13-year-old association extends hand of help to every patient of blood disorder

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Amalendu Pal: Blood bonds.  
Picture by Pabitra Das

Mohammad Shakib has thalassaemia. The four-year-old's father is a fruit vendor in Arambagh, and can't afford the expensive blood transfusions required every three weeks for the child to live. Fourteen-year-old Sujit Mondol, from Diamond Harbour, lost his father a few months ago. His family lives from hand-to-mouth, with his mother being the sole breadwinner. His neighbours donate the blood required for his transfusions, but the thalassaemic child needs a place and the equipment to undergo the procedure.

Thousands of children like Sujit and Mohammad, and their families, face similar problems in the fight for survival. It is to help youngsters like them that the Indian Association of Blood Cancer and Allied Diseases was set up by a group of concerned individuals over 13 years ago. Today, about 1,000 new patients are added to its register every year.

From testing, diagnosing, arranging for blood, and treatment of all blood-related disorders, the Association aids "anyone who comes to us", irrespective of financial status. Haemophilia, leukaemia, thalassaemia, sickle cell disease... there's no cure, but help is at hand for a "normal life and brighter future", says Amalendu Pal, president and co-founder of the NGO. Through the years, the Association has built up a staff of 16, including five doctors, nurses and technicians, and the expensive but necessary equipment, through donations from beneficiaries, mostly from outside the city ("Calcuttans," he says, "are

more interested in supporting political, rather than social, causes”).

There are no overnight facilities for patients, “because it’s not necessary”, but there are seven beds for daylong treatment, from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm, including chemotherapy for leukaemia. “We never turn anyone away, no matter what the circumstances. There are charges, but whatever the patients or their families can, they pay. For those who can’t afford it, we do it free. And we never say no to blood, either. If we have it, we give. If not, we arrange for it,” says Pal. So, Soumen Kabiraj, 28, from Burdwan, pays about Rs 150 for his thalassaemia treatment, which he farms from his small piece of land. His niece, who also has the disease, gets treated free.

Awareness campaign is a key activity for the Kasba-based Association, which also has a laboratory for research purposes, free for use by Ph.D students. “We constantly work to improve product and process development, and treatment protocol. Our main aim is to give the patients a second chance at life,” Pal sums up.