



NEWSLETTER FROM MURIEL THOMSON

2014—Update from Chennai on my Indian Project.

Issue No. 8—March 2014

*Girls Bedrooms completed

*Top Marks for Tamil medium pupils.

*Gifts for all at the CHES Home for HIV children.

*Visiting other Little Drops Charity Trust projects.

*Treats for all the children.

*Support still required for children's Hostel Care needs.

*Renovation work nears completion at the Centre.

*Doctors visit to attend to health problems.

*Wedding Bells for young Jayamarie.

Vanakkam,

This has been another busy trip to Chennai with lots of things going on during my visit. The second phase of the renovation work started last year at the St. Joseph Centre is now almost complete.

The day after my sister Ruth and I arrived in Chennai we joined three of the children who live at the St. Joseph Centre as they took their first communion at the local Catholic Church.

The Sister Bakkiam Award which I set up three years ago in memory of the Founder of the St. Joseph Centre is now well established and I enjoyed meeting the recipients when I went to present the awards at the schools.

It is now 8 years since I first visited the St. Joseph Centre and it is great to see how with your support, the health, welfare and education of the children have improved. Many of the children who were in primary in 2006 are now nearing the end of their school studies or have moved on to college. The younger ones who are supported through this project on the 'English Education Programme' are growing in confidence and assisting those at the Tamil school with their spoken English.

Prior to arriving in India Brother George the former Principal of Montfort School in Chennai arranged for us to meet the Director of Montfort Community Development Society. Ruth and I spent a very interesting day visiting the many projects that MCDS run. Their projects target the most vulnerable women and children in some of the worst slum areas throughout Chennai and one of the most moving experiences was visiting one of the many classrooms they have set up to educate children as young as 6 years old who they have saved from child labour.

We also took a few days out to travel across to the west of India to the Nilgiris Hill area to visit other projects that had in the past been supported by Little Drops Charity Trust.

A huge thank you to all who have supported this project to help the 'children of Chennai'. May God Bless all the staff at the St. Joseph Centre and the wonderful work they are doing.

Romba Romba Nandri, *Muriel*



1st Communion Day for Cyril, Antony & Precitha.

The girls bedrooms are now completed.

Last year the work was started converting the large hall on the upper floor into separate bedrooms for the girls. It was great to see the transformation into five beautiful pink bedrooms with fresh blue & white floor tiles. The rooms are now completed with bunk beds and electric fans which are essential in India. The boys very enthusiastically helped the workmen carry the beds upstairs—was this just being helpful or are they delighted that the girls have moved upstairs and



The girls enjoy their new bedrooms.

they now have their own space too!!! Three of the rooms have been fitted with the bunk beds for the older girls and one larger room is a dormitory for seven of the young ones. The fifth room has been allocated to one of the Sisters. The girls had already chosen their rooms and there was great excitement the day they moved all their belongings in and made the space their own. They are now enjoying having a floor to themselves with their new bedrooms and their own toilets and washing facilities. Safety measures had to be put in place to allow the younger children to use the upper floor. Handrails were fitted to the staircase and a gate was erected to prevent the children getting access to an outside staircase which leads to a water tank on the roof.

Top marks for Vijay and William at the Tamil school.



William & Vijay show off their certificates.

For the 2013 term Vijay & William were presented with Certificates of Merit and book prizes at their Annual Day show for achieving 1st Rank in their studies. Not only are they achieving well academically but Vijay is showing great talent with his art work. William on the other hand has always shown a great flair for making mechanical objects from any odd bits and pieces he can find and old batteries. William's latest invention is a miniature, mechanical four wheel vehicle. It's encouraging to see that some of the other children at the Tamil medium schools are also achieving high marks in their exams and there was a very noticeable improvement in their English grades and spoken English. Great credit must be given to the Sisters and staff at the St. Joseph

Centre for their all round care and their attention to a structured study programme. The children at Montfort School on the 'English Education Programme' continue to progress successfully through their studies. Their spoken English has improved greatly since last year and we are now able to converse very easily with them. They are interacting well at the school with some having joined the scouts and guides. Ruth and I had a marvellous evening at the Montfort School Annual Day show when we watched a number of our sponsored children dancing, singing and giving recitations. The chief guest at the show was His Excellency Dr Rosaiah the Chief Governor of Tamil Nadu.



Aishwarya & Renuka join the guides.

Gifts for Annie and her friends at the Emirates-CHES Home.



Annie receives her new outfit.

It is a year since Annie moved into the Emirates-CHES (Community Health Education Society) Home. The Home which is funded by Emirates Airlines and run by CHES caters to the needs of orphans of AIDS, children infected and affected by HIV. It provides medical care, a small hospital and a counsellor as well as leisure facilities which include a library and games room, computer room and music room. After my visit last year I pledged to return annually with a gift for all the children. It was decided to present each of them with a new outfit before we realised the difficulty in purchasing 83 outfits for children from ages 6 months to 20 years old. Prior to our visit to the Home we went to the main shopping area in Chennai with members of staff from the Home to purchase the outfits. After over 5 hours in the store we left fully laden with a trail of shop assistants helping us carry the many bags of purchases! On arrival at the Home we were greeted by Annie surrounded by her many new friends and we could immediately see there had been a marked improvement in her health. The children sang us a welcome song and put on a show of singing and dancing before we presented them with their new outfits.

A Visit to the Nilgiris Hills and Little Drops supported Projects.

My sister Ruth and I travelled over to the Nilgiris hills in the west of Tamil Nadu to visit some projects that were initially supported by Little Drops Charity Trust and are now run by the Koodu Trust. We visited a tribal village where we were entertained by the people's unique cultural dancing. Koodu Trust provides some of their children with an education at a local English medium school and the adults are assisted with reading and writing. Pregnant goats had been supplied by Little Drop Charity Trust to 15 farmers and many of the farmers now have up to five goats. We visited a bio gas plant that had been installed to enable a farmer to use his cow dung to provide all his fuel needs as well as giving him an income from selling the residue dung. A well worth project costing only around £250. Free tailoring Centres were set up in the villages and many who had attended them in the past have now started up their own businesses or got jobs stitching school uniforms etc. We visited free computer training classes for school children and after school clubs that help them improve their reading and writing. We took some time out to visit the tea plantations and relaxed with a picnic day out to a beautiful waterfall to end our trip but sadly Ruth took a slip returning to the car and fractured her ankle. This meant she spent her last few days in India with her leg in plaster and sadly missed out on many planned activities.



The farmer with his goat supplied by Little Drops

Treats & Special Days for the children.



Partibhan & Vignesh enjoy Caramel Logs.

Every year sponsors kindly supply treats for the children. This year the children were treated to 'Tunnock' Caramel Logs which went down just as well in India as they do in Britain! They also enjoyed Bronte biscuits supplied by Paterson Arran Ltd. Wood Group Kenny kindly donated 40 water bottles which the children were delighted to use with their school packed lunches and they also supplied packs of crayons which we used on Sponsors Day for the drawing competitions. On the day the children drew 'trees of hands' then beautifully decorated large paper butterflies which we hung up around the hall to brighten the place up. Noisy games along with their favourite chicken 65 and ice cream completed another very successful Sponsors Day. As usual three packed buses took us on the Annual Picnic Day when we went to one of the local fun fair amusement parks. The

Tsunami wave pool and a spectacular water ski show were the highlights of the day for the children and the workers from the Centre. In previous years it upset me to see the state of the crèche children's pants when we changed their clothes after lunchtime—many had pants which were completely threadbare and full of holes. On hearing this a work colleague kindly donated 50 pairs of pants which the crèche children were delighted to receive. During the monsoon season many of the children had been getting completely soaked when they walked to school so we treated over 40 of the school children to rain coats and umbrellas. Dictionaries and Geometry sets were also purchased for the thirteen students who will require them when they move up to V standard after the summer holidays.



New raincoats for the children.

Sponsors required for youngsters Hostel Care needs.



Sponsors needed for Anbalaki & Charulatha

Last year when I visited there were ten new children that had been taken into care at the St. Joseph Centre. These children are either orphaned or children from broken homes who have no one to call a family. I have been successful in finding support for some of them but still require sponsors for the Hostel Care needs of two young boys Partibhan & Vignesh and two sisters Anbalaki & Charulatha. It costs around £175 to support a child for a whole year (£15 monthly)—this covers their full Hostel Care needs, food, medical care and their uniforms and education at the local Tamil school. All of them will be cared for in the St. Joseph Centre until they complete their school years. I am also seeking sponsorship for Selva-Lakshmi a young girl who has completed her school studies and is at present taking a nursing Diploma at a local college. If you can help by supporting any of the children or know of anyone who can, please contact me on the details overleaf.

Kitchens renovated, a wood store installed & play area cemented.

Other areas that needed upgraded in phase two of the renovation work are now almost complete. The kitchen that is used for cooking for the Sisters and the workers was in dire need of upgrading. We erected new shelving, put in a sink and tiled the floor and walls to upgrade the whole kitchen. The kitchen facilities on the lower floor used for cooking for over 100 children are very small and are separate from the main building so the cooking has to be done outside. We erected a canopy roof unit to join it to the main building and allow shelter for cooking in the rainy season. We also installed sinks to provide an area for the children to wash their hands before meals. Wood is required for cooking and there was no proper wood store so an area was cleared up on the lower floor, a store created and a roof canopy erected to keep the wood dry during the monsoon season. We cleared another unused area and installed racks for the children's sandals to be kept tidily. One main problem had been the area used as the children's playground. It was covered in sand and dirt and created health problems for the children as they picked up many infections while playing in the dirt there. We arranged for the whole area to be cleared up and cemented and it now provides a much cleaner environment for the children to play in. Finally the whole inside of the building was painted in a fresh bright lemon colour.



The upper kitchen now beautifully upgraded.



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Thank you to all who have supported this project to help the children of the St Joseph's Social Service Centre and those from the poor neighbourhood area.

If you want to give a donation or would like me to run my presentation talk on my work in India please contact me on the details opposite.

All donation cheques should be made payable to: **'Little Drops Charity Trust'**. (Registration Number: SC 028069) and sent to me at the address opposite.

Please note 100% of your donation goes directly to my project.
All postage and administration costs are borne by myself.

Please pass this newsletter on to your friends.

Doctors visit to clear up some health problems.

In the past we had taken the children to the Sri Ramachandra hospital twice yearly for full health checks. However the logistics of transporting around 100 youngsters to the hospital was just not working. We were very fortunate that Joseph our Little Drops Director in Chennai arranged for two doctors from Punch Charity to visit the Centre. Dr Manigandan who had just returned to India after working in the UK for 11 years was delighted to be back practising in Chennai where he could give extra help to the children of his community. Over 80 children and workers were given thorough examinations. It was a very timely visit with an outbreak of scabies being diagnosed and one or two children needing help with more serious problems. With your help we were able to provide all the medicines, vitamins, etc prescribed by the doctors. Diet and living conditions are the biggest contributors to the many health problems. The doctors gave advice on dealing with the scabies outbreak and on how to prevent it spreading in the future. Discussions took place with Sister Jayaseeli, staff and children to remind all of the importance of good washing routines and personal hygiene.



A busy day for Dr. Manigandan.

Wedding Bells for Young Jayamarie.



Jayamarie with her Husband.

At the end of last year Jayamarie was married. Jayamarie and her husband Lourdusamy are now living in her home village around 3 hours from Chennai where Lourdusamy runs a tailoring business with his brother. We were delighted to have a visit from them at the Centre and we spent a lovely afternoon looking through their wedding photographs. Jayamarie was supported by this project while she completed her school studies and then attended college for two years teacher training. She has now qualified to teach up to 5th standard. Jayamarie had a spell doing supply teaching and she hopes to secure a permanent post very soon. She has been teaching dance to children from the village church and at Christmas the children laid on a performance with Lourdusamy joining in the festivities dressed as Santa Claus.

WHAT THIS PROJECT COVERS — This project funds all the Hostel Care needs for 24 semi-orphaned children who are living in the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre. It funds the education at the English speaking Montfort School for 25 children from the St. Joseph's Centre and the poor neighbourhood area. School uniforms are provided for around 50 children at English and Tamil schools as well as uniforms for 80 crèche children. We employ 3 teachers to assist with their homework, and a driver to transport the children to and from school. A Health Programme is funded for full health checks for 80 children under the age of 5 years old who live in the neighbourhood and we provide medical care for the children who are living in the St. Joseph's Centre. An Annual Day Out, Sponsors Day, Christmas gifts and other treats are provided for around 80 children and staff at the Centre. Various other things as required are funded through this project including the reconstruction programme to bring the St. Joseph Centre up to a suitable standard.

My thanks go to Sister Jayaseeli and all the staff at St Joseph's Social Service Centre, to the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' in the UK and Joseph our Director in Chennai, Montfort School, St. Thomas Hospital & Punch Charity doctors for their support of this project.

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