



NEWSLETTER FROM MURIEL THOMSON

2015—Update on my Indian Projects.

Issue No. 15—March 2015

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Hello, Just back from my first visit to Chennai since retiring from Portlethen Golf Club. It was lovely to be able to relax and enjoy my visit with the children, knowing that I didn’t have to go back to work on my return. On our arrival my sister Ruth and I thought the St. Joseph Centre was looking great after all the renovation work we’d had done on the building over the last two years. All was not as it appeared!! During the rainy season water was pouring in through the roof that we had patched up a couple of years ago. We were advised by the engineers that the only solution was to replace the whole roof. This was not good news and a big expense that we hadn’t anticipated! However in order to avoid completely ruining the new bedrooms we’d put in last year we had no choice but to go ahead with the replacement. Ruth who is a retired teacher was delighted to be invited to visit a Government school. Her mode of transport to get her there was on the back of a scooter. As she took off on the scooter into the madness of the Chennai rush hour traffic, weaving amidst cars, autos, motorbikes and of course cows, I thought “rather her than me”! I was privileged to be invited along to a special Golden Jubilee Mass for nuns who had given 50 years service. This was a grand affair attended by many priests and nuns from all over India. The Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop of Mylapore. At the end of the Mass I was welcomed with the traditional Indian silk shawl and given a gift in recognition of my work with the St. Joseph Social Service Centre. I found this recognition an overwhelming and humbling experience amidst so many dedicated people. The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph help children all over India and are involved in many wonderful projects including the St. Joseph Centre. It has been a privilege for me to have worked with them over the last nine years. Thank you once again to everyone who has supported this project. *Muriel*



The Girls looking fabulous in their new Christmas dresses.

Hebciba—Our star student at Montfort School.



Hebciba continues to get A Grades.

We support 24 children at Montfort School on an English Education Programme. They are growing up fast and are now chatting to us in English just like any children of a similar age in Scotland. Hebciba who is now in VI Standard continues to be our ‘star’ student. Ever since she started in the kindergarten years she has achieved A Grades for all her term exams. This year she won the second prize at the school’s annual essay competition. She’s also a beautiful dancer and along with some of the other girls on our Programme she was performing a Traditional Indian Dance in the Annual Day show at the school. (Sadly I was unable to see them perform as the show was held the week after I flew home). Hebciba’s a wonderful role model and enjoys helping others who are struggling with their school work. Her ambition at the moment is to become a doctor. One evening at the afterschool study classes I was delighted to see Pavithra reading the Indian Express (printed in English). I then discovered that the boys were also reading the newspapers, preferring the sports pages to follow their favourite footballer—Ronaldo! Montfort School is encouraging the children to read the daily news. The newspapers are available in the school for the children to pick up at the office for their project work and a daily display board at the school.



Pavithra enjoys the daily Newspapers.

School fees increased to fund Montfort School extension.

Last year the new Principal at Montfort School informed me about his plans of a two year project to build some new classrooms and an auditorium. The funding for this had to come from somewhere. I found myself faced with a huge bill for the school fees for the 24 students we have on the English Education Programme. After several meetings & negotiations with the Principal I was given a special concession and although this was still around a 30% increase it was a lot more reasonable than the initial request. Shortly after arriving in Chennai this year I met with the Principal to discuss the fees for this year. I was



New classrooms and an auditorium/sports hall for Montfort School.

happy to settle on a 10% increase. The new building that is to be opened next year will house 16 new classrooms and an auditorium/games hall. This will allow the school to hold indoor sports events with other schools during the rainy season. The Montfort School hit the headlines in the Indian newspapers earlier this year with it's addition of a new roof vegetable garden. It is the first school to follow the 'State Horticultural Development Scheme'. Principal, Brother K K Thomas proudly showed me around his roof garden saying "Children usually only see vegetables in the market—this will give our Montfort School children a hands on experience and allow them to see the vegetables growing stage by stage.

Annual visit to the CHES Home for HIV children.



Annie and her friends at the CHES Home receive new school bags.

Once again Ruth and I paid a visit to Annie at the Emirates-CHES Home (Community Health Education Society). Annie was previously in care at the St. Joseph Centre along with her older brother and sister. She was diagnosed with HIV having contracted this from her mother who died shortly after Annie was born. Annie has now been at the Home for two years and with the proper medical care that she's receiving her health has greatly improved. The Home that 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 full medical care, a hospital, a counsellor and leisure facilities. Ruth and I always look forward to our visits to the Home to see Annie and her friends when we have a sing song

and some dancing with the children. During our visit we presented all 80 children with new schoolbags. We will continue to visit the Home annually with a gift for the children. **I am actively seeking sponsorship for this—Can you help?**

The girls do well in their College Exams.

This project supports the college fees for the older children at the St. Joseph Centre. Vinitha who has lived at the St. Joseph Centre since she was a six month old baby started her two year English Literature college course last year. During her first term she found things extremely tough as she had previously studied in a Tamil medium school and the college course was all conducted in English. However after a lot of hard work she soon found that her English was improving and she was delighted to gain a pass for all her first year exams. On completion of this course she plans to join the Indian Police Service. We are also supporting Selva-Lakshmi who is taking a Diploma in General Nursing & Midwifery at the well known Miot nursing college. Selva-Lakshmi also studied in a Tamil medium school and she struggled for her first few months at college with not only having to learn everything in English but also with the difficulty of having to learn all the medical terms as well. Selva-Lakshmi has put a lot of extra hours into her studies and she was relieved and delighted to pass all her first year exams. The girls have been a great support to each other both having had to settle into college life together. We will continue to support these two girls until they have completed their training and have secured jobs.



Vinitha & Selva-Lakshmi studying well at College.

Children enjoy treats and special days.

My thanks go to everyone who sponsored treats and the special days for the children. Walkers Shortbread generously donated a box of their snack packs that were quickly demolished by all—the smile on Shiny's face says it all! Skin-a-licious.co.uk provided me with their lovely Scottish Thistle design soaps at a greatly reduced price for the older girls and the ladies who work at the St. Joseph Centre. We received sponsorship for the boys to be treated to several new pairs of underpants and 25 children to be kitted out with new sandals. The St. Joseph Centre runs a crèche for 80 children who are cared for during the day to allow their mothers to work. We were able to supply bright coloured building blocks for the crèche and there were



Crèche kids enjoy the new building blocks.

great squeals of delight when the blocks arrived. The children loved them and happily sat playing for hours each trying to build the highest tower. The annual picnic day to a Theme Park was once again a great success. It is always a fun day out for the children and for the workers of the St. Joseph Centre. The Sponsors

Day party is now a highlight of the year not only for the children and the workers but for Ruth and I too! The mornings activities saw the main hall fully decorated with the children's own artwork of 'India & Scotland'. Flags fluttered, Highland dancers & India dancers adorned the walls, as well as their wonderful drawings of Scottish Castles and the Indian Taj Mahal. After a traditional lunchtime feast the afternoon took on a party atmosphere with noisy team games and everyone 'ducking for apples'.



Shiny loves Walkers Shortbread

Funding needed for rice, uniforms & spectacles.

St. Joseph Centre provides 200 meals per day for the staff, children and the crèche costing almost £2000 per annum. The price of rice has rocketed recently and with this being their staple diet it has put a heavy burden on the finances of the Centre.

A 75KG sack of rice costs £30, rice for a day costs £5—Can you help?

The local children attending the crèche come from the poorest families in the area. Some barely have a change of clothes. 8 Years ago we supplied crèche uniforms—now these need replacing. ***2 x sets of uniforms for a child costs £5—Can you help?***

Our regular health checks have highlighted that eye problems are common in India—possibly due to the poor diet. A number of our children are now requiring spectacles. This expense is out with the means of the parents of the neighbourhood and puts an extra burden on the Centre. ***A pair of spectacles cost £12—Can you help?***



New Crèche uniforms needed.

Supporting the Koodu Trust Projects.

Last year we travelled to the Nilgiris hills in the west of Tamil Nadu to visit some projects run by the Koodu Trust. Prior to my visit I was contacted by Dr Sunny who runs the Trust. He asked if it was possible for me to provide him with a laptop for his work. After posting a request on my Facebook page I was overjoyed that within half a day one of my former members of Portlethen Golf Club generously donated his laptop. Dr Sunny travelled 12 hours across India to meet up with us in Chennai and receive the laptop. Dr Sunny said "This will be invaluable to me to run the many projects I have throughout the hill station villages". During his visit he spoke of one of the families he needed help for. The family have two children of 9 and 12 years old. For the last 7 years the older child who is a Type A diabetic has had to visit hospital regularly. The father is unskilled and works on the tea estates. He is only able to get casual work one or two days in a week



Dr Sunny delighted to receive his Laptop.

earning around £1.50 a day. With the extra expense of having to make regular visits to the hospital with their son the family were struggling to survive. Through this project we will supply a milking cow for this family. From the milk sales the family can earn £3.50 a day and this will allow them to become self sufficient. Recently we have provided to the Koodu Trust, two bio-gas plants for a couple of farmers to allow them to process their cow's dung. The processed dung provides all their fuel needs and also gives them an income from selling the dung wastage for manure. So impressed were Ruth and I with the many projects that Dr Sunny and his team were involved in that we decided to each personally donate a goat to village families. We were amused to learn that the goats had been named after us and even more amused to learn that goats 'Muriel Aunty' & 'Ruth Akka' have now each produced a kid!



Muriel Thomson
 'Little Drops Charity Trust'
 St. Joseph S. S. Centre, Project Lead
 26 Deeside Crescent
 ABERDEEN, AB15 7PT.
 Telephone: 01224 326570.
 E-mail: muriel.thomson1@btinternet.com
 Website: www.murielthomson.co.uk

Thank you to all who have supported these projects to help the children of the St Joseph's Social Service Centre and the Koodu Trust project. 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 projects.
 All postage and administration costs are borne by myself.

Medical Volunteers give valuable help.

Dr Manigandan who returned to India after working in the UK for eleven years first visited the Centre in Jan 2014. Since his initial visit he has returned at six monthly intervals along with a couple of his colleagues to attend to the children of St. Joseph Centre & the children of the poor neighbourhood. Aberdeen Dentists James Murphy & Lynne Carmichael gave us valuable help when they took time out from their busy schedules to visit the St. Joseph Centre & The Koodu Trust project last October. They attended to around 300 patients doing many dental dressings and extractions where needed. The dentists found that in general the overall oral hygiene was fair. They handed out toothpaste and toothbrushes and all the patients were given general advice on dental hygiene. Diet and living conditions are the biggest contributors to health and dental problems. We continue to work with Sister Jayaseeli and the staff at St. Joseph Centre to ensure all are aware of the importance of good washing routines and personal hygiene. We provide all medicines, vitamins, etc prescribed by the doctors.



Aberdeen Dentists visit St. Joseph's

Cyril moves back home and settles into his new school.



Cyril settled into his new school.

For the past nine years we have supported fourteen year old Cyril. Cyril who is the youngest of five children was taken into care at St. Joseph Centre when his father died and his mother found herself in a situation where she was unable to care for all her children. His mother earns a very low wage working in a kitchen. Circumstances have now changed at home with his older sister married and his other sister working away from home in Coimbatore. After discussions with all parties it was agreed that the time was right for Cyril to be back home with his mother. We will continue to support his education fees, uniform, books, etc. at an English speaking school in his home village. We visited Cyril in his village around five hours from Chennai and found him happy and settled at home. The Head Mistress at his new school was very welcoming and allowed us to visit Cyril in his classroom where we met

his new school friends. Cyril was delighted to see us and particularly so when I presented him with a football donated by Saltire Energy that had been signed by all the Aberdeen Football Club players.

WHAT THIS PROJECT COVERS –This project funds all the Hostel Care needs for 25 semi-orphaned children living in the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre. It funds the school fees for 26 children from the St. Joseph's Centre and the poor neighbourhood area to be educated at English medium Schools. School uniforms are provided for approx 50 children at English & Tamil schools and uniforms for 80 crèche children. We employ 3 teachers to assist with their homework, and a driver to transport the children to school. A Health Programme is funded for 80 children under the age of 5 years old who live in the neighbourhood and we provide medical care for the 30 children who are living in the St. Joseph's Centre. College fees are funded for the older children living in St. Joseph Centre. Christmas gifts, a Sponsors Day Party, Annual Day Out, and other treats are provided for all children & staff at the Centre. The complete renovation of the building has been funded to bring the St. Joseph Centre up to a suitable standard. Support is given to various Koodu Trust projects.

My thanks go to Sister Jayaseeli & all the staff at St Joseph's Social Service Centre, to the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' in the UK & Joseph our 'Little Drops Charity Trust' Director in Chennai, Montfort School, Punch Charity Doctors, Aberdeen Volunteer Dentists, & The Koodu Trust and to all the sponsors and supporters of these projects.

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