

## 2007 Newsletter from Muriel Thomson

### Working with the St Joseph's Social Service Centre, Chennai, India

#### Latest story from India – March 2007

Hello, I'm just back from a month in India which I again spent doing voluntary work at the St Joseph's Social Service Centre in Chennai. When I arrived in Chennai and met up with everyone again it was just as if I'd never been away!



This is my first newsletter and I will update you on what has been happening since I returned from India in February 2006 . During 2006 as you may know, I ran a series of talks throughout the North East of Scotland to raise funds for the children living at the St Joseph's Social Service Centre and those of the poor neighbourhood. The support and interest I have received has been tremendous. Sister Bakkiam who runs the Centre is extremely grateful for all support from the people of

the North East of Scotland.

Last year's trip was a life changing experience for me in many ways. As I set off this time I was so excited about seeing everyone again and being able to move on to phase 2 and set things in place with the funds I have raised. Much has happened in the year which you can read about in this newsletter. I had a very busy and productive month and I am delighted with what I have managed to do so far. I have outlined the most important things in this newsletter. My main fundraising in future will be to give children an education at the English school and assist with their health care. I look forward to many years working with the St Joseph's Centre. May God bless each and every one of them.

#### *Muriel*

#### Children of Chennai start the English school



1st June 2006 I started four children at the English Marian school in Chennai. Those at the Marian school are doing well and enjoying it very much. In June 2007 more children will join them from the Centre and the poor neighbourhood, taking the total to 11 and I now have their education fees secured right through until the end of their school days. I was privileged to be able to attend the Marian School when the new recruits for 2007 were taken for their entrance exam. It was lovely to be there,

hear the little 3 and 4 year olds give their names, say the alphabet, recite a short rhyme and count to ten in English. The Marian school is a very cosy friendly school.

I also have two boys sponsored who go to the Montfort school, an excellent school where I have introduced Golf . This is a huge school of 1,750 pupils which has only been open for 5 years. Already pupils there are gaining above average grades. The Principal, Brother George is very forward looking and the children have an excellent education and upbringing there. In future, I will be sending all children to the Montfort school.

## Children will have full health checks twice a year



The children do not get regular health checks for hearing, sight, teeth, etc etc and this was something I thought was of great importance for me to set up. After a very successful meeting with Dr. Mallikesan, the Medical Superintendent at the Sri Ramachandra Hospital in Chennai, I made arrangements to take all the children under 12 years of age who live at the Centre and almost 90 children who come for day care for full checks twice a year. All the children at the Centre will have this done until they reach the age of 12 and it will be done for all

the children attending the day care. I will now be raising funds for the health checks, all medicines and any treatment required from such checks. This now means that the St Joseph's Centre will have full records for all the children in their care and somewhere they can call on when the children are sick. During my final week in India we took the first group of 30 children who are around 2-3 years old. We arrived at the hospital at 8.30am and they were sent on a rota system to the various different departments. A variety of problems came to light, although nothing serious. There were many with ear and throat infections, one or two were underweight, some had skin problems, many needed dental treatment and all were given a course of vitamins and iron tablets. I am delighted to have been able to set this up and take care of their medical needs.

## Children and workers are treated to a day at the zoo



When I visited last year I asked Sister Freeda if the children were ever taken on a day out to the animal farm, the beach or the lakes. Her reply was 'No, not possible to take them out there's too many of them.' The older children living at the St Joseph's Social Centre go out to school and when school is finished, they are confined within the Centre. They don't get a chance to have the freedom of the outdoors, to play and explore other parts of Chennai. I have made arrangements with Sister Bakkiam that an annual day out will take place when I visit India to let the children explore their own city. This year we selected the zoo in Chennai. We agreed that the working ladies of St Joseph's Centre also deserved to have at least one day out per year, so we made arrangements to have something to eat in the restaurant at the zoo so they wouldn't have to cook.



There was great excitement in the air as we boarded the two mini buses we had hired to take us there. The zoo is situated around 1/2 an hour from the Centre. The children chattered the whole way there, shouting and pointing out of the windows. The zoo was great, with a big expanse of cages in amongst a lovely leafy park. The children ran as fast as they could from one animal cage to the other and shouts of 'Anty, Anty, photo, photo' were heard all day. We had lunch in the restaurant at the zoo, then after hours and hours of fun on the swings, merry go round and climbing frames we headed home with a stop for ice cream to finish off the day.

## Christmas gifts for all—11 children get 5 years support



As Christmas drew near I couldn't help but think of my new family in the St Joseph's Centre. I arranged for some funds to be transferred so all the children and the workers could be given a Christmas gift. The children were all given new school uniforms and it is nice to see them now all dressed up and ready for school, whether they are going to the Tamil school or whether they are one of the ones who are being educated at the English speaking schools. As well as their uniforms they were each given a small tiffin box with some sweets, balloons and a toy.

The working ladies and the old ladies who are given care at the Centre through the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' were all given new saris. They had cake and games and a lovely day was had by all. When I arrived at the end of January the Christmas decorations were still hanging up in the Centre and things looked very festive.

I'm a great believer in the fact that all should be treated the same. Those at the English schools have their support in the Centre secured for the years they are attending the school so I have agreed with Sister Bakkiam to also support 11 of the children who go to the Tamil school for the next 5 years.

## Golf Introduced to Montfort English School

The Golf Foundation very kindly donated me a 'Tri Golf' kit to assist in my attempt to introduce golf to the children in India. I thought it would make a nice change from cricket!!

I was very fortunate to get an appointment with Principal, Brother George at the Montfort Matriculation School where some of the children I have supported have their education. He was very enthusiastic and thought it would be fantastic to have golf at his school.



As you can imagine I was pretty excited about getting the chance to do this. I had about 20 pupils the first visit and the children absolutely loved it with many requests of 'Please Miss, can you come back to-morrow'!! I was very privileged to be invited to speak to the pupils at their assembly, when I was treated to all 1,750 pupils giving a fabulous gymnastic display. It was an awesome and emotional experience.

As I stood videoing the event the tears rolled down my cheeks! After another couple of visits when I took a whole class of 54 children, I found they were really getting the hang of things. I gave the teachers instruction on how to use the 'Tri-Golf' kit and I am now in talks with the R & A and the golf governing bodies in India in an endeavour to move things along. Montfort School are very keen to have golf on their programme and I even managed to get my photograph and a mention in the Chennai newspaper! 'Who

knows we may one day produce a golf professional from the Montfort School! - now that really would be something!!

## The Centre gets support from 'Global volunteers'



Some changes were taking place this year while I was at the St Joseph's Social Service Centre, which was good to see. 'Global Volunteers' had visited the St Joseph's Social Service Centre as they had some projects going on in orphanages, schools and a hospital in the area. They offered to help Sister Bakkiam and are at present constructing a new toilet block of 4 toilets. The basement area where they hold the day care centre for the 90 children who come in 6 days a week will all be refurbished. They will now have a separate area for doing the laundry and cooking. There will be an undercover walkway out to the toilets which means the children will not get drenched during the rainy season. This will also be able to be used to hang washing to dry as undercover space is required with the extra loads of school uniforms. The day care room will be tiled to five feet high and the whole centre will be painted inside and out. It was interesting to see the construction take place with the minimum of tools—one spade, a hammer, a trowel and a weight on a piece of string! All very effective but it would never pass our Health & Safety!

It is great to see 'Global Volunteers' getting involved and Sister Bakkiam getting the support she so deserves. The Centre will be quite different for her 25th Anniversary in 2009 from when she first set it up, caring for 40 children under a bamboo roof supported by four poles!

## Teacher employed to give extra English tuition

After talks with Sister Bakkiam we agreed that if I was going to give an English education to children of St Joseph's Centre and the poor neighbourhood then I should ensure that I was giving them the best chance possible. We decided to employ a teacher to come in for one hour every evening to give those attending the English schools some extra tuition. We will also arrange for the teacher to be available to teach throughout the summer holidays. It was felt that this would not only help them with their school work but it would also encourage them to speak English outwith school hours. After a search drew a blank I turned to Principal Brother George from the Montfort Matriculation School for help. He was able to recommend a very good teacher who will be working with the 5 children who are at the moment attending the English school. Her class will be increased to 11 when the new recruits start school in June.

My thanks go to Sister Bakkiam and all the staff at St Josephs Social Service Centre, Dr. Mallikesan and the staff of Sri Ramachandra Hospital and Principal Brother George and his staff at the Montfort School, for all the help and assistance they have given me in my mission to help the children.

Thank you to all who have supported my fundraising for the children of the St Joseph's Social Service Centre and the poor neighbourhood. Please pass this newsletter on to your friends to read.

If you are interested in sponsoring a child's education, 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 below. All donation cheques should be made payable to: 'Little Drops Charity Trust' and sent to me at Portlethen Golf Club marked 'Personal'.

Please note—100% of your donation goes directly to my mission, all administration, printing and postage costs are borne by myself.

**Muriel Thomson, PGA Golf Professional, Portlethen Golf Club, Badentoy  
Road, Portlethen, ABERDEEN, AB15 7PT** Phone: 01224 782571 - Fax: 01224  
783383 - E-mail: [muriel.thomson@murielthomson.co.uk](mailto:muriel.thomson@murielthomson.co.uk)  
Website: [www.murielthomson.co.uk](http://www.murielthomson.co.uk)