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2009 Newsletter from Muriel Thomson

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

Latest news on my Indian Project - March 2009



Hello,

I'm just back from my annual visit to the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre in India where I had a memorable time in what has now become my second home.

This is my third newsletter which will update you on the progress of my project which I set up three years ago, to initially educate only one child. You will see throughout this newsletter how the project has grown and how things have improved for the children of the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre and those from the poor neighbourhood area.

This year the St. Joseph's Centre celebrates its 25th Anniversary and great credit must be given to Sister Bakkiam for her dedicated work over the last 25 years. Had it not been for her love of poor and needy children the St. Joseph's Centre would not be here to-day, improving the lives of many children and giving them a chance to fulfill their dreams. I have told Sister Bakkiam on many occasions that 'God has blessed her with many talents', but how well she has used these talents over the last 25 years to run the Centre. It is not an easy task to run a home bringing up more than thirty semi-orphaned children, as well as caring for almost 100 under five year olds to prevent them being left on the streets while their mothers go to work earning barely enough to survive on.



Recognition must also go to the other Sisters and the workers of the St. Joseph's Centre for their dedication over the years in bringing up the children in what is a very happy home. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported my project. It is thanks to your generous support that the future looks brighter for some children in a small corner of India. I will be continuing my fund raising talks during 2009 to secure the children's future education, give them the security of a refuge in the St Joseph's Centre and to improve their health care and well being. May God bless everyone at the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre not only during this their special Silver Jubilee Year but for many, many years to come.

Muriel

The Marian School students are doing well.

I have seven children who are being supported for their education at the English speaking Marian School. All bar one have now settled in at the school and although this is a very different school from the Montfort School the children are really enjoying their education there.



This year I visited the school again and spoke with their teachers who were very happy with their school work. Antony who is in his third year at the school and Precitha, & Kathrin who are in their second year have all received the top 'O' Grade. Cyril and Renuka are also doing well and have received the next Grade which is 'A'. This is not only due to the quality of teaching at the school but this can be attributed to the excellent work that has been done by the teacher I employed last year, to help the children with their after school work. Teacher Precilla ran an after school class throughout the year for all seven children, spending time with them, helping with their homework, encouraging them to speak more English and assisting them to improve their hand writing. The children's writing and speech has improved a great deal from the previous year and their books are neat and tidy.

I was encouraged that the after school sessions had made such a difference. Cyril who is seven years old now only speaks to me in English. Sometimes he struggles to make himself understood but he perseveres until he finds the right words. He was even translating for the children who only speak Tamil.

The new recruits settle in & Hebciba continues to get top marks.



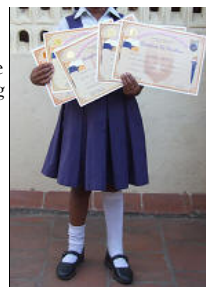
You may remember last year that I enrolled thirteen new recruits into the Lower Kindergarten Stage at the English speaking Montfort Matriculation School. Three of them are semi-orphans from the St. Joseph's Centre and the others live in the poor neighbourhood area. They started at the school in June 2008 and all have settled in well. Many of them have received Certificates of Excellence for their term exams and although they are only 4 years old it is very encouraging news that they have started so well. I visited the school and spoke with their teachers who were very pleased with their work.

I have 4 other children studying at Montfort school. Hebciba who is 5 years old and in the Upper Kindergarten Stage continues to be a real star. Once more she has received A+ Grades for all her term exams having received 100% all year for every subject except

Tamil language which she only got 98% !!! Her parents are delighted that she has been given this great opportunity to be educated at Montfort School.



I had a lovely visit to her home when both Hebciba and her brother sang a little song into the video for her sponsors back in Aberdeen. Britto who is 6 years old, also started at the school last year. He was studying in a Tamil school and doing very well and Sister Bakkiam asked if I could help by getting him into the Montfort School where he would be educated in English. He settled into the school very quickly and has received very good Grades all year. Two of the boys, Parameshwaran who is 9 years old and Nirmal who is 10 have had a tough time, finding their studies hard during last year. However, it was discovered that Nirmal had a problem with his eyesight and needed glasses. He couldn't read the blackboard and was finding it hard to keep up in class. I spoke with both their teachers who suggested they stayed for after school tuition. This they are now doing and I am confident that the school will do whatever is necessary to ensure they improve their Grades over the next year.



Once again I give a huge thank you to all who have committed to sponsor a child for their education and give them this great opportunity. A school link has been set up with Ashley Road Primary School and Montfort School by Lakshmi Manivannan who initially instigated my first visit to St Joseph's Centre in 2006. The pupils have been corresponding for the last nine months and both schools teachers and pupils are excited about what this link will bring in the future.

Two Teachers employed to assist the children after school.

Unfortunately, Teacher Precilla who I employed last year has moved on to a full time job at an English school nearby. However Selvi who assisted her has now taken on the work of running the after school class. She will take over as being in charge of ensuring that the children's homework is done. She will run the after school class for all the children I have at the Marian School and also for all the new recruits at the Montfort School, many who still use the St. Joseph's Centre after school until their mothers finish work. This class is greatly assisting the children to grasp the early skills necessary and give



them a good grounding in their school work. I sat in with Selvi's class on many afternoons and she seems to be coping and doing a very good job.

This year while I was in India I spoke with Principal Brother George of the Montfort School regarding some extra tuition for the 13 new recruits at his school. He was very willing to assist and I have now employed one of the teachers from Montfort School to give extra tuition at the school for all 13 children on Saturday mornings between 9am-12noon. This will help them with their school work and give them a chance to speak more English. Hebciba who is a year above them will also attend this class. I have employed the same teacher to give them extra tuition Mon-Sat from 9am-12noon during the month of April when the children have their school

summer holidays. This will not only help the children but will greatly assist Sister Bakkiam, who as you can imagine has the very difficult task of keeping a large number of children interested and amused throughout the summer holidays.

A Special Day Out for the 25th Anniversary Year.



As it was the 25th Anniversary Year of the St Joseph's Centre I allowed the children to choose their day out. They all voted to go to Queensland-Chennai's answer to Disneyland. There was 57 of us who set off in two buses. As usual there was a race between the buses with much laughter and very loud chants of 'Super Driver, Super Driver' accompanied by even louder clapping and shouting every time one bus over took the other.

Queensland amusement park was ideal for a day out as it had many different rides suitable for all ages. Once in the park gates we were greeted by some amusing dancing clowns which the children loved. I spent the morning taking photographs of the younger children as they enjoyed the tiny tots rides. We all met up for lunch and then in the afternoon I enjoyed myself on some of the more daring rides when I joined the ladies. There was a huge swimming pool in the park and the latter part of the afternoon was spent there, when to my surprise everyone jumped in the water fully clothed—no such thing as bathing costumes in India!!

The funniest part of the day for me was when we all stopped for ice cream. In the heat of the day the ice cream was melting faster than the little ones could eat it. They were covered from head to toe in ice cream—it was on their shoes, in their hair and all down their clothes and the ice cream was dropping off the sticks before they could get it to their mouths.



A Celebration Day for the 25th Anniversary of the Centre.

The main Silver Jubilee Celebrations will be held later in the year but Sister Bakkiam very kindly laid on a Celebration Day to coincide with my visit. It was such an honour and a privilege for me to be there to share in their 25th Anniversary—a remarkably achievement for Sister Bakkiam and all concerned with the running of the Centre. There was much excitement for a few days prior to the event. The children were practising their dances and songs and all the workers were buzzing about getting things ready.

The Centre was decorated and a banner I'd taken from Aberdeen which was made by mothers of Ashley Road School pupils was hung up for the big day. The Day Care children were all dressed in their new bright yellow and maroon Silver Jubilee logo uniforms.

A special Mass was held to bless the Centre and give thanks to God for Sister Bakkiam and her dedicated workers over the last 25 years. The children then put on a show with excellent dances and songs which were followed by a special feast for everyone. It was a lovely day to be a part of and one which will last in my memory for many years.



A Library is set up for the children in the St Joseph's Centre.



This year I took some books to India to set up a library for the children. This is a very important step towards broadening the learning of all the children at the St Joseph's Centre and helping them to improve their English reading and speech. It was decided to open the library once a week for a couple of hours when the children can sit and read books. At the end of the session they can choose a book to keep until the following week.

I was encouraged to see that those attending the Tamil school were also keen to read



some English books. Nirmal who is ten years old was given the responsibility of running the library but I soon realised he would need some help. I suggested to Principal Brother George of the Montfort School that we get some of the older students from the school to come along each week to help run the library. He liked this idea and has agreed to have seven or eight students get involved. They will help

Nirmal run the library and will be a great help to the children with their reading by sitting with them one to one.

The Montfort pupils will be able to use their involvement for part of a Merit Certificate awarded by Montfort School to their pupils for helping others.

Medical Care for the children is now fully covered.



Two years ago I set up twice annual health checks at the Sri Ramachandra Hospital for the children living in the St Joseph's Centre and those taken care of in the Day Care Centre. These hospital checks for around 100 children are now well established. After the new intake of children for the Day Care Centre takes place in June, records are made up for each child and they are then taken for a full health check. This has worked well thanks to the co-operation we have had from all at the Sri Ramachandra Hospital.

Any emergencies are dealt with at the nearby St Thomas Hospital and Sister Bakkiam also has a local Doctor who she can call on at any time. Working with the two hospitals and the local Doctor now means that all medical care for the children is well and truly covered.

Each year I take out a supply of basic every day medical needs such as plasters, Calpol, antiseptic wipes and creams etc. which is always much needed.

The Golf Programme continues at Montfort School.

The Golf Programme that I started at Montfort School in 2007 with the help of the R & A and the IGU is still continuing. Last year golf was given to hundreds of pupils at the school and Jayanan the Golf Professional heading the programme has selected around 30 children who will now receive more specialist coaching.

Jayanan will work with the selected group for the next year, improving their skills on the driving range nearby the school. Three boys and two girls are already showing promise. The school teachers will continue to use the Tri-Golf kits in the school playground as part of the school's sports programme for 10-12 year olds.

From the Tri-Golf sessions they will run a selection process and those showing a flair for the game will then be moved up to the driving range for the specialist coaching with Jayanan.



With the £British now so weak the big drop in the exchange rate has meant that the funding for my project has increased.

* Part of my fundraising covers the full Hostel Care costs for 21 children living in the St. Joseph's Centre—13 of the children go to the local Tamil school & 8 are supported for an English education. The cost to provide full Hostel Care is approximately £175 per child per year. You can sponsor a child for any length of time up to five years. This can be paid £175 annually or £15 monthly by standing order. Please contact me if you are interested.

* To sponsor a child to be educated at the English speaking Montfort Matriculation School in Chennai, where English will be their main language, costs approximately £260 per year. This covers the cost of education, uniform and books. You can sponsor a child for as many years as you wish—there is no obligation to sponsor for all their school days. Sponsorship can be paid £260 annually or £22 monthly by standing order. Please contact me if you are interested.

My thanks go to Sister Bakkiam and all the staff at St Joseph's Social Service Centre, to the Montfort Matriculation School, the Marian School, the Sri Ramachandra Hospital, and to the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' for all their help and assistance.

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 at Portlethen Golf Club, Badentoy Road, Portlethen, ABERDEEN, AB12 4YA Tel 01224 782571.

All donation cheques should be made payable to: '**Little Drops Charity Trust**'.— (Registration Number: SC 028069) and sent to Muriel Thomson at Portlethen Golf Club marked 'Personal'.

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

HELP WANTED—I am looking for help to print my Newsletter or sponsorship for the printing costs—

Tel 01224 782571 if you can assist.

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