



NEWSLETTER FROM MURIEL THOMSON

2011—Update from Chennai on my Indian Project.

Issue No. 5—March 2011

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Hello,

I have returned once again from another memorable visit to St. Joseph Social Service Centre in Chennai. There have been some changes since my previous visit last year. It is with great sadness that I have to report that Sister Bakkiam the founder of the St. Joseph Centre passed away last September at the age of 59. She was a remarkable lady who was mother to all the children and has been a great loss to all at the Centre as well as to everyone in the community.



Some of the girls set off for the Tamil school.

Sister Jayaseeli who is now in charge of the Centre has been fortunate to have friends who have stepped in to help her deal with the many problems which occur in the day to day running of things. The staff have also rallied round and taken on extra work to ensure that the smooth running of the Centre continues. The Centre is being run as before in the way that Sister Bakkiam had always done and you could still feel a very strong presence of her around the Centre. The children are all growing up very fast and this year I noticed a big change in them all. Many of the ones who I'd met back in 2006 as youngsters have now grown up into fine young teenagers. This year my sister Ruth accompanied me on my visit to India. We arrived at the Centre in the middle of the night to find all the children waiting up for us and we were greeted with a wonderful welcome. The children also performed a lovely show for us during our visit with songs and traditional Tamil dancing. I would like to thank everyone who has supported this project and those who have continued their support as sponsors of the children. My thanks also go to those who donated learning materials for use with the children. May God Bless everyone at the St. Joseph's Centre and those of the neighbourhood area and grant them good health and success throughout the year ahead.

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Happy faces at the Annual Day Out.

Muriel

A Tribute to Sister Bakkiam—founder of the St. Joseph Centre.

Sister Bakkiam a Franciscan Nun set up the St. Joseph Social Service Centre back in 1984. She was moved by the plight of young children who were left roaming the streets on their own while their mothers toiled endless hours, earning barely enough to survive on. She started the Centre by taking in 40 children, providing them with nutritious food, medical care and a little education. Ten years later she started to give refuge to children from broken homes and those who had nobody to call a family. Gradually the Centre opened its doors to the elderly in need. What started as a little act of love by Sister Bakkiam has now developed into an institution caring for the needy from various sections of society. Sister Bakkiam's love for the poor and needy was at the forefront of her dedicated work over the last 26 years. She has touched the lives of thousands of children during the time she ran the Centre and without her kindness, love and compassion the Centre would not be here today. For the last ten years of her life she had been unable to walk through illness and ran the Centre tirelessly from the confinement of her room. She was very much respected and admired by all the children and staff and everyone in the community who knew her. She always put everyone before herself and was a great role model for all the children she has given a home to over the last 26 years. I feel very blessed to have known such a remarkable person and to have been able to share in a small part of her life.



A remarkable lady—Sister Bakkiam
Born 7/5/1951 — Died 11/9/2010

4 new recruits join the Montfort School.



4 New Recruits who start school in June.

Four more children will have the opportunity to be educated at the Montfort English speaking School. Three of them live in the St. Joseph Centre and the other one whose mother works in the Centre lives nearby. They will start in the kindergarten stage at Montfort School when the new school year resumes in June. The other 23 children who are already attending the school continue to enjoy their schooldays there and most of them are doing well. Hebciba who you will have become familiar with over the last few years continues to get A grades for her studies. She is speaking English very well now and enjoys reading English books whenever she gets the chance. Her teacher is delighted with her studies and she has been rewarded by being appointed Class Captain. The six children who we moved from Marian School last year to Montfort School have settled in well.

Four of them are in the same class in II Standard and they were all given a glowing report from their teacher who said they were delightful children and it was a pleasure for her to have them in her class. Kathrin and Precitha have also gained A grades for their term exams and Kathrin has been rewarded for being a good student by being appointed Assistant Class Captain. Dharini who is in I Standard and gained A Grades, received a trophy and certificate for being 2nd in her class for her terms exams. Most of the other 12 students in I Standard are receiving very good grades too. Naturally they can't all be brilliant and one or two are finding it difficult to grasp English. Two of the older boys we have at the school are finding things much harder now that their work load has doubled. Montfort School are doing all they can to help them by providing after school coaching classes and I have employed teachers to give extra tuition in the evening when they finish school. We are doing whatever we can to give them every opportunity to improve their grades.



Hebciba—Class Captain.

Three teachers will now help with the children's homework.



Lots of homework to be done.

A couple of years ago we employed two teachers to work with the children out with school hours. Teacher Betty from Montfort School will continue to help the children for the month of April while they are on holiday by running a class every morning specifically to encourage the children to speak English and give them more confidence to do so. Selvi who has done great work over the last year will continue to run the homework class for 13 of the children who are in I Standard. We have now re-employed Precilla a teacher who worked with us a few years ago. Pricilla who speaks very good English will run an evening class for 9 of the older children to ensure their homework is done and that they have a good grounding and understanding of English. She will also conduct a morning class on Saturdays specifically for speaking English. I have asked all the teachers we employ to encourage the children to read English books. The library I set up a couple of years ago now has an extensive range of books that will be available to the children at all times.

The 'Sister Bakkiam Award' is set up in her memory.

An Award has been set up in memory of Sister Bakkiam. I wanted to keep her memory alive and let others become more aware of the great work she did during the 26 years she ran the St. Joseph's Centre. I met with the Heads at Montfort School as well as RCM School & St. Helen's Girls School which are the Tamil schools in the area and all three Heads were delighted to become involved in such a prestigious Award. The 'Sister Bakkiam Award' will be awarded annually to the student of each school who has during the year most shown the characteristics that Sister Bakkiam had become renowned for. The student who shows initiative and enthusiasm in helping others in the community with some type of social work - a sort of 'Young Carers Award'. The Awards which will be engraved with the St. Joseph's Centre logo will be presented annually by myself during my visit to India. A donation of schoolbags for some of the poorer children at each school will also be presented alongside the Awards. Myself and all at the St. Joseph's Centre are delighted that Sister Bakkiam's great work will be recognised and remembered in this way.



Sister Bakkiam surrounded by her children.

Meeting the families on the home visits.

During my stay I try to visit the homes of all the children that live in the neighbourhood who are supported on the English Education Programme. It is always lovely to have the opportunity to meet up with their families and it's a great privilege for me to be made so welcome in their homes. During my home visits I dropped in on one of our boys who is 7 years old and found him teaching English to his 4 year old brother. This is just the sort of thing we hope will come out of the English Education Programme - that those on it will help their siblings to speak and read English. We held a parents meeting at the St. Joseph Centre and were grateful that teachers Betty and Deepa from Montfort School who run the extra coaching classes were also able to be present. We once again stressed how important it was for the parents to be spending some time with their child to ensure that they were making the best of this great education opportunity.



Enjoying a visit to Pavithra's house.

A doctor visits & the 6 Monthly Health Checks uncover problems.



Annie is examined at Ramachandra Hospital.

Through 'Little Drops Charity Trust' we were fortunate to have Dr. Santhiya visit the Centre to check the health of all the children living there. This highlighted one or two problems as well as the ongoing concern with little Annie who contracted a liver disease from her mother at birth. Annie who had various tests throughout last year at the government hospital has been diagnosed with Glycogen Storage Disease. Dr Santhiya recommended a liver biopsy to assess the type and extent of her disease. We visited the Sri Ramachandra hospital the following week for the usual 6 monthly health checks and had Annie reassessed. They too recommended a liver biopsy and with the help of the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' representative in India moves were made and Annie will be admitted to hospital soon for her liver biopsy and tests. Although there is no cure for her disease the doctors will be able to assess which organs will be affected

and whether the disease is likely to stabilise or escalate as she develops. The hospital visits also brought to light some other problems with some of the children. Ten year old Cyril was having ear ache problems and after ear drops were administered to clear a bad infection we made a follow up visit. We were advised that he needed two operations to repair a perforation in both ear drums caused by the infection. These operations have now been set up and Cyril will be admitted to hospital

during his school holidays in April. A four year old boy was also seen for an ear infection and speech problems. The infection was treated and he is now attending speech therapy sessions at the hospital. One of the boys we have on the English Education Programme was having difficulties after an illness he'd had and the teachers had noticed that his school work was deteriorating. After the doctors at Ramachandra hospital checked him out it came to light that he had suffered some fits during his illness and his eyesight and speech had been affected. Spectacles have been supplied to him and he is attending speech therapy sessions as well as having full tests done in case of other damage. Immunisations were also given to those who needed them. I am extremely grateful to all at the Ramachandra Hospital, to Dr Santhiya and for the assistance we have received from the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' Representative. A supply of medicines for worms, iron deficiency & coughs as well as vitamins were given free of charge to the Centre.



Jeevitha gets her immunisation jab.

New learning ideas introduced to the children



Ruth helps 3 little ones with their ABC's.

My sister Ruth, a retired teacher was able to introduce new learning ideas to those on the English Education Programme and also the Day Care children. We thank Port Elphinstone & Ashley Road Primary School for their help and supply of materials. Ruth and I ran sessions with the young ones to help them recognise the English Alphabet & numbers so they were prepared for starting school in June. By the time our visit was over they were able to recognise and write the letters. We also assisted Selvi who runs the homework classes by helping her with the children's reading, spelling and maths. Ruth introduced some 'finished first' cards which allowed them to do extra homework. Ruth was invited as a guest to Montfort School and spoke to the school children during one of their assembly programmes.



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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 living in the poor neighbourhood area.

Please pass this newsletter on to your friends.

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 Portlethen Golf Club marked 'Personal'.

Please note 100% of your donation goes directly to my project.

All postage and administration costs are borne by myself.

Pradeep returns for a visit to join us for the Annual Day out.



Meeting Pradeep once again.

During my stay I was delighted to have a visit from young Pradeep. Pradeep had been brought up by Sister Bakkiam in the St. Joseph Centre since he was around two years old and I met him on my first visit back in 2006 when he was just a young boy of 12 years old. He has now finished his school days and has moved to another part of South India to live in a training Hostel for young boys where he is at present enjoying doing a Carpentry Course. He has grown up to be a very fine young lad. It was great to meet up with him and to hear that he is very happy living in his new Hostel and enjoying his Carpentry work. He travelled 12 hours by bus to return to the St. Joseph Centre for a week end and was able to join us for our Annual Day Out. He thoroughly enjoyed being back at the Centre and having the chance to spend some time with all the children he had grown up with. This year for the children's Annual Day Out we went to an amusement park in Chennai. Once more it was a memorable day when everyone had a great time. Around 50 of us participated including the staff who work in the Centre and it was good to see them all getting a well deserved day off.

The children perform at their schools Annual Day shows.

I was fortunate enough to attend the Annual Day shows at Montfort School as well as the show at St. Helens Girls Tamil School. It was a delight to be able to watch some of the children who are supported through this project perform in their schools show. One of our girls took part in a beautiful dance, one of our boys took part in his school dance and a number of our youngsters gave a recitation. Both school shows were first class performances which were enjoyed by thousands who came to watch. The fabulous colourful costumes and the very high standard of traditional Indian dancing particularly stood out. The Golf Programme which I set up a few years ago continues, despite it no longer being supported by the IGU. Montfort School have had some help from volunteers from the local YMCA and they are doing well to keep the golf programme going. Coaching classes take place most mornings for a couple of hours on the golf course nearby. I attended the classes and was delighted to see the school children having fun and enjoying the chance to try golf as a new sport. The PE master has also been running target golf competitions for them on the golf range.



The Montfort School Annual Day show.

WHAT THIS PROJECT COVERS — This project funds all the Hostel Care needs for 24 children who are living in the St. Joseph's Centre. It funds the education at the English speaking Montfort School for 27 children from the St. Joseph's Centre and the poor neighbourhood area. We employ three teachers to assist with their homework, and a driver to transport the children to and from school. A Health Programme is funded for 6 monthly health checks for around 90 children under 5 year old who live in the neighbourhood and we provide medical care for all the children who are living in the St. Joseph's Centre. An Annual Day Out, Christmas gifts and treats are provided for around 50 children and staff at the Centre. Please pass this Newsletter on to someone you think may be able to support this project.

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

If you do not wish to receive future newsletters please inform me so I can delete you from the mailing list.