



NEWSLETTER FROM MURIEL THOMSON

2013—Update from Chennai on my Indian Project.

Issue No. 7—March 2013

*Water Purifiers & a water storage tank installed.

* School studies are going well & a third teacher is employed.

*Annie gets medical help & settles into a new Home for HIV children.

*Annual Picnic Day, Sponsors Day & Scottish treats for the children.

*The new computer proves a great success.

*The Centre is renovated to provide separate sleeping accommodation.

*Children supported for further education colleges.

*Sponsorship needed for 10 new children.

Hello,

My sister Ruth and I have just returned from our annual visit to the St. Joseph Centre in Chennai and it was a delight for us to be back with all the children again. This year's visit was particularly busy as changes which were planned to improve the living conditions for the children were started. Although it was a busy time for Ruth and I, we did manage a short break for a few days to visit Kerala and Kanyakumari at the very southern tip of India where the Indian Ocean meets the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. As our flight arrived in the south of India at 6pm the pilot announced 'Welcome to Trivandrum airport the temperature outside is a very lukewarm 31 degrees'!! On our trip down south we also took the chance to visit Pushpa a good friend who had worked at the St. Joseph Centre since my first visit. Once again I enjoyed visiting the three schools that the children of St. Joseph Centre are educated at to present the annual Sister Bakkiam Award which was set up last year in her memory. Sister Bakkiam was the founder of the St. Joseph Centre which over the years has touched the lives of thousands of children. The Centre to-day provides a home for 40 children, a day care crèche for 70 children, a refuge for women and care for the elderly. Since our visit last year ten new children have now been taken into care in the St. Joseph Centre from various parts of South India. These children are either from broken homes or orphaned children who have nowhere to call a home. I will be continuing my fund raising talks to secure the future of the children of the St. Joseph Centre and those from the poor neighbourhood area and to raise funds to improve the living conditions at the Centre. This newsletter will update you on the progress of the project since it first started in 2006, initially set up to raise funds to educate one boy. A huge thank you once again to all who have supported this project to help the 'children of Chennai'. May God Bless all at the St. Joseph Centre and the wonderful work they do.



Children get clean drinking water.

Muriel

Clean drinking water and installation of water storage facilities.

A few days after arriving in India I met with an engineer and Joseph our 'Little Drops Charity Trust' Representative to discuss ways of improving the water situation at St. Joseph Centre. Many of the children's health problems are due to the fact that they do not have access to clean drinking water at the St. Joseph Centre. After discussions, it was decided to install two water purifiers that can purify 60 litres of water per hour to provide constant clean drinking water for over 100 children who are cared for by the St. Joseph Centre. During the dry season the St. Joseph Centre also suffers from water shortages and water has to be bought and brought in by lorry. To solve this problem we decided to build a large underground water storage tank and within a week of our meeting with the engineer the work began digging the hole for the tank. Gaining access with a JCB was impossible as the St. Joseph Centre is situated at the end of a very narrow road so the job of digging the hole had to be undertaken manually. Five labourers undertook the heavy work in the intense heat and completed the job of digging a hole 8 feet deep, 12 feet wide and 15 feet long in two days. The storage tank was then built, it was given a waterproof sealing and tiled inside and will have the capacity to hold 2,500 litres of water. This additional tank will make life a great deal easier as the St. Joseph Centre will now have access to water all year round.



Construction of the water storage tank gets underway.

English students studying well and a third teacher is employed.



Homework time for Suriya at the afterschool class.

The 27 children on the English Education programme at Montfort School continue to progress with their studies and all but one or two are getting a good grasp of the English language. The Montfort School has undergone some changes over the last few years with a new Principal and a change in the education system. All schools in India now work from the same curriculum. The children have adapted to the changes and are continuing to obtain good grades. This year many of them have been made class monitors—proof they are taking an active role in school life. With the children growing up and their school homework load increasing I felt it was the right time to employ a third teacher to take on some of the work load at the afterschool homework classes. I was fortunate to find a very good teacher who speaks good English to assist with the classes. She started work immediately and for the first three

months will work with a couple of the students who are struggling to help give them a better grasp of English and improve their reading skills. When the new school year starts in June she will take around nine of the students for their daily homework classes for an hour and a half. This will make a great difference as we will now have three smaller classes where the three teachers will be able to devote more individual time to each of the students. My sister Ruth who is a former teacher again spent a day at Montfort School as a student sitting in with an VIII standard class as she had done the previous year and enjoyed meeting up with some of her 'school chums'. Ruth found it interesting to be able to compare the education system in India to that in Scotland and she was impressed with the standard of teaching that the children were receiving. The other children living in the St. Joseph Centre who go to the local Tamil speaking schools are also doing well in their studies with a number of them achieving A Grades. Their homework classes are taken by one of the Sisters working in the St. Joseph Centre who previously taught in a Tamil school.

Annie settles into a new Home for HIV children.

Annie, who you will know from my previous newsletters, suffers from various health problems which were contracted from her mother who died shortly after Annie was born. Annie has glyco-gen storage disease and was admitted to hospital last June for a liver biopsy which sadly diagnosed her HIV positive. It was decided that it was in the best interests of Annie's health to move her to a Home where she would get specialised medical treatment. We have been very fortunate to find a wonderful Home specifically for children with HIV. The Home which is supported by the Emirates Airlines Foundation is run in conjunction with (CHES) an NGO. Annie is given constant medical care there and an education which is provided on site for all the children. I was delighted to visit Annie at the Home and find her happy and settled in a bright and cheerful environment. She has already made many friends. Annie's older sister Angel and brother William continue to live at the St. Joseph Centre and although both are missing their younger sister they were very happy to hear that Annie was settled and being given the medical attention she requires.



Annie enjoyed a visit.

Hebciba's family finally have their own bathroom & toilet.



Hebciba's mother happy to have bathing facilities.

The majority of the houses in the neighbourhood area don't have a toilet or washing facilities and many of the people have to walk long distances to a toilet. When children need to use the toilet in the middle of the night parents are having to accompany them in the darkness. Most families are living in rented accommodation and the landlords owning the properties are unwilling to give them that extra facility. During my house visits a number of years ago I discovered that Hebciba's parents had moved out of their rented accommodation and built themselves a small home of their own. However they were unable to provide a toilet and washroom and were still having to use the communal toilets a great distance away. At the end of last year we sent funds to Hebciba's parents for them to build their own outside toilet and washroom and when I visited them I was happy to find that the building was almost complete apart from the rendering of the walls. The

family are delighted to now have their own bathing facilities. Although this is a great boon to the family and has made their life a lot easier they still have to make many daily trips to carry water from a well up a very steep hill to their home.

Sponsors Day, a Picnic Day Out and treats for the children.

As Ruth and I travelled to Chennai on Burns Day, we thought we should treat the children to a Burns Supper. We cooked haggis, neeps and tatties then Ruth and I carried it in on a dish singing our own Scottish song which wouldn't have been recognisable to anyone Scottish! The children weren't keen to taste the haggis at first but once one or two had tried it all were eager to have some—after they'd all had a taste we had them queuing up for seconds! Each year when we go to India we try to take a traditional Scottish treat for all the children and this year Mrs Tilly's generously donated 70 macaroon bars—the smile on wee Charluta's face tells you how much they enjoyed them. Last year Ruth suggested running a Sponsors Day for all the children and it was so successful we have now made it an annual event.



Mrs Tilly's Macaroons

In the morning we had arts and crafts when the children made masks with paper plates and we had a competition when they drew pictures of the sky, land and sea. All the masks and the pictures were hung up around the walls to decorate the Centre. There were lunchtime treats of Pepsi Cola, chicken 65 and ice cream. In the afternoon we gave out their Sponsors letters, played team games and awarded prizes and medals for the winners. Then much to the amusement of the children Ruth took up a challenge offered to her and spoke in Tamil for two minutes! Another fun day was had on our Annual Picnic Day when three buses were hired and 82 of us set off to an amusement park in Chennai. After a morning enjoying the rides we had a fabulous picnic lunch which the ladies had made. Great fun was had by all in the afternoon when the water parks opened and we all jumped in fully clothed. It was a roasting hot day and Ruth who was melting in the heat was the first one in! A great favourite for the children was the water flumes and after a short time one of the boys came running over and said 'Auntie, Auntie can we come back here next week'. We finally headed home with the customary stop for ice cream on the way.



Children enjoy Haggis, neeps and tatties

New computer installed—proves a success.

The computer we installed last year is proving a great success and is being used to assist the older students with their course work as well as helping the younger children to present their projects in a more professional way. The Internet has been a great asset particularly for accessing information for their project work. Sailaja who we are supporting to study a BCA in Computer Studies visited the St. Joseph Centre on several evenings to give computer training sessions to the older girls prior to their computer practical exams. We hope that in the future years the use of the Internet will become more valuable to them all. Ruth and I found it very useful having the computer in the Centre as it saved us having to go to the local internet cafe where the computers are 'well past their sell by date' and very frustrating to use!



Sailaja gives computer training to the girls.

Upper floor reconstructed to include new bedrooms and toilets.

A main problem at the Centre is that all the children and workers have to use the main hall, for sleeping. With a number of the boys and girls now grown up this is no longer a suitable arrangement. A large hall on the upper level was unable to be used as the roof was not water tight. We have replaced the roof and will add an inner false ceiling to keep the area cool in the summer months. The main hall on the upper floor has been reconstructed to include four sizeable bedrooms for the older girls and one large bedroom for the younger girls. This will allow the older girls some privacy and the opportunity



New bedrooms for the girls under construction.

for private study. The girls will also have two toilets and washing facilities on this floor. The roof of the former hall has been extended outwards and a large canopy erected where washing can be dried and the homework classes held during the rainy season. A canopy will also be added to the outer stairways which access the upper floors. The outside of the Centre has been given a face-lift by painting it a lovely bright blue and yellow. The girls have been excitedly watching the transformation of the hall into bedrooms and they have already booked their rooms! With these changes upstairs, areas on the ground floor have been released and washrooms upgraded for the use of the boys. Now I will be campaigning for funds to complete these changes by providing beds for the new bedrooms. I am extremely grateful to Joseph our 'Little Drops Charity Trust' Representative for his help and assistance in co-ordinating the work.



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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.

Continuing the support of further training.



Dressed for the school Farewell 'Do'.

With a number of the children coming to the end of their school years I discussed their futures with Sister Jayaseeli and agreed to give support with further training. We are at present supporting Sailaja for a BCA computer course and also funding the training fees for Jayamarie for a two year teachers training course. This year it was end of school time for Selva Lakshmi and Venitha who has been brought up in the St. Joseph Centre since she was a small baby. We have agreed to support Selva Lakshmi for her nursing training and college accommodation for three years. Venitha who will continue to live at the St. Joseph Centre while she takes a two year course in Computer Science at a college nearby will be supported for her college fees. During my visit I was also delighted to meet up again with Pradeep who was previously brought up in the St. Joseph Centre. Pradeep, who I first met as a twelve year old, has now found employment and gone back to live with his mother. It has been lovely to see these boys and girls grow up over the years I have been visiting and now finally see them embarking on their chosen careers.

Sponsors needed for 10 new children who are now in care.

When we arrived this year we found that 10 new children had been taken into care at the St. Joseph Centre from various parts of southern India. These children are either from broken homes or orphaned children who have no one to call a family. With 10 new children it has meant not only extra work for all the workers at the Centre but it has also put a strain on the Centre's financial budget. 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 an education at the local Tamil school. The 10 new children range in ages from 6-12 years old and all will be cared for in the St. Joseph Centre until they complete their school years. If you can help by supporting a child or know of anyone who can—please contact me on the details above.



Sponsors needed for Anbalaki & Charluta

WHAT THIS PROJECT COVERS — This project funds all the Hostel Care needs for 25 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 27 children from the St. Joseph's Centre and the poor neighbourhood area. School uniforms are provided for 50 children at English and Tamil schools as well as uniforms for around 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 regular health checks for around 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 the staff at the Centre. Various other things as required will be funded through this project plus an ongoing 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 Representative in Chennai, Montfort School and St. Thomas 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.