

2016 NEWSLETTER FROM MURIEL THOMSON

10th Anniversary update on the 'St. Joseph Centre Project'.



St. Joseph Centre children at the 10th Anniversary Day Celebrations – 2016

Hello, February in Chennai brought the 10th Anniversary of the St. Joseph Centre Project being set up. The Anniversary day started with the Centre's Superior, Sister Jayaseeli giving a special prayer in Tamil to thank all the sponsors and supporters of the last 10 years. Then 12 year old Hebciba read a prayer in impeccable English that she had written herself. The celebrations began with the cutting and sharing of the Anniversary cake. The party then got underway with the children putting their artistic

talents to good use to decorate the main hall with their colourful drawings. We all enjoyed a special feast before the afternoon party games began. The laughter and noise could be heard far and wide over the St. Thomas Mount area. As we celebrated the 10th Anniversary I looked back to my first meeting in 2006 with Sister Bakkiam the founder of the St. Joseph Centre. She was an amazing lady who inspired me to set up this project to raise funds to help the children of her Centre and those of the poor neighbourhood area. I never thought going out to India on my first visit back in 2006 that I would return let alone be continuing to do so ten years later. Previous to my visit this year the people of Chennai had suffered badly in the terrible floods that engulfed the city when over 300 people lost their lives. A number of the children we support on this project had their homes completely flooded losing all their possessions. The children told us of how they feared for their lives when escaping their homes neck deep in water. The Anniversary Celebrations brought some light relief and helped lift the children's spirits after the trauma of the floods. My thanks go to all the sponsors and those who have supported this project over the last 10 years. It is only with your support that we have been able to achieve so much. This newsletter tells of the improvements in the health, welfare and living conditions for all the children since this project began.

Muriel



Meeting Sister Bakkiam – 2006



Cutting the 10th Anniversary cake – 2016

2006 – 2016.

Improvements to the Building: When I first visited in 2006 I was taken aback at the conditions the children were living in. The building was very dark and basic. All the children slept together on mats on a concrete floor in the main hall. The bathrooms and kitchens were in a poor state and in general it was a cheerless environment for the children. Now as soon as you enter the main gate the new changes can be seen. A dusty bare earth area inside the



St. Joseph Centre – 2006



St. Joseph Centre – 2016

main gate of the Centre has been transformed into a welcoming entrance concreted over and decorated with beautiful bright painted flowers. This now provides an ideal playground for the children. A coat of lovely bright blue and yellow paint has greatly enhanced the look of the dreary grey exterior of the building. The concrete floor in the main hall has been completely tiled and the walls are painted in fresh coral.

2006–2016 - Improvements to the Building continued:



Sleeping conditions – 2006.



Spacious new bedrooms – 2016

Five new bedrooms, toilets and washrooms have been built on the upper floor for the girls giving them their own private space. The boys now have their own sleeping area and washing facilities on the ground floor. This means that the St. Joseph Centre now complies with the new government regulations

governing children’s hostels. Both the kitchens have been completely renovated and include an extension that provides extra undercover facilities for cooking. New hand washing areas have been installed. Other upgrades to the building include a complete roof replacement, a water tight wood store, a huge underground water storage tank and the installation of clean drinking water. All at the St. Joseph Centre now enjoy a home that is bright, clean, spacious and welcoming.

The English Education Programme: When I first visited the St. Joseph Centre in 2006 the children were being educated at the local Tamil school. During many talks with Sister Bakkiam we both agreed that the way for a child to move out of poverty was through education. For this to happen a child would have to be educated at an English medium school. The seed was sown for the ‘St. Joseph Centre Project’. Back home I began to raise funds to give one child a chance to go to an English medium school. Now 10 years on we have 26 children funded at English medium schools. We are beginning to see the fruits of this investment with the children speaking fluent English and also sharing their knowledge of English with the others who are attending the Tamil medium schools. A number of the children are getting A grades for their term exams but naturally we have one or two who are struggling to grasp English. An added bonus is seeing just how much the children obviously enjoy their school. When I first met Principal Brother George of the Montfort School back in 2006 I remember him saying “Normally children walk to school and run home, but here at Montfort our children run to school and walk home!” Some of the children are gaining other awards for essay competitions, art work and sports. At the annual school sports they won medals and certificates for long jump, running & shot putt and Vignesh won the Champions Cup for winning 3 gold medals. Dance plays a big part in India and the school hosts a wonderful Annual Show with traditional and modern dancing, music and drama. This year’s Annual Show was a special celebration to inaugurate a new school block that houses a huge auditorium with full air conditioning and 16 new classrooms. Three of our girls performed Traditional Indian and Western Dances in front of the Chief Guest Mr. Ishari K. Ganesh, Chancellor of Vels University.



One child - 2006



26 Children sponsored at English medium schools – 2016

Other Support for the St. Joseph Centre: The project also provides full hostel care support for 25 children. This covers all their hostel care needs, medical care and school uniforms. Apart from those on the English Education Programme these children attend the local Tamil medium schools where the majority are studying well and getting good grades. To assist the children with their homework we now have three teachers who run our after school tuition classes for the children at the English medium schools. Our drivers Seenu & Joseph are employed for the school runs, hospital visits and the daily trips to the local food markets. Seenu has been a great asset driving us to remote villages to visit some of the children who have moved on. Educational toys and uniforms have been supplied for the daily crèche that the St. Joseph Centre runs for 70 children from the poor neighbourhood area. Christmas gifts, a picnic day and a sponsors day party are other treats we provide annually for all the children and the staff.

2006 – 2016 - continued



St. Joseph Centre children 2006 – where are they now?

Growing up and flying the nest: In 2006 on my first visit there were 22 children living at the St. Joseph Centre. Over the years home circumstances for some of the children has changed and they have been able to go back to live in their home villages. It has been a delight to watch the other children from the Centre grow from babies into fine young adults. Pradeep who was twelve years old when I first met him back in 2006 was the first one to ‘fly the nest’. Despite struggling academically at school he has managed to secure himself a permanent job as a chauffeur. He loves his job and enjoys earning a wage and being more independent. Last year he was delighted to be able to treat himself to his first motorbike. Jayamary, her younger sister Venitha and their mother have lived at the Centre since their father died 20 years ago. We supported Jayamary through

her teacher training course. She is now married with a baby boy called Joshua and is living back in her family village where her husband works as a tailor. We visited them in the remote village and it was great to see her settled and thoroughly enjoying being a wife and mother. Jayamary is thrilled to have secured a new teaching post at the local Kindergarten.



College girls Selva, Pricilla & Venitha –2016



Jayamary with family - 2016



Preba, Nirmal & Nisha starting college – 2016.

Jayamary’s younger sister Venitha will soon complete her three year English Literature college course. She plans to apply for the entrance exams for the Indian Police Service. Selva Lakshmi is now in her third and final year of a nursing and midwifery course. She hopes to find work at a local hospital in Chennai to gain experience before returning to her home village. Our third college girl is Pricilla who has almost completed the first year of her Bio-science course. March saw another three children take their 12th standard Government exams that started during my final week in Chennai. All three were studying hard for their final exams and will look forward to joining the others at college after the summer holidays. It’s been a worthwhile part of this project to support these youngsters as they set out on their chosen careers.

Medical Care and Health Awareness Programme: Over the years steps have been taken to improve the medical care for all the children. Mainly due to poor diet and mosquito borne diseases the children suffer many health problems. In the early years we had to transport the children to a local hospital in batches of 30. This was time consuming, costly and a logistical nightmare. Through ‘Punch Charity’ we have now set in place regular visits from volunteer doctors to the St. Joseph Centre to monitor the children’s health. As well as giving advice on health care and proper washing routines, medical records are kept to ensure that recurrent problems are followed up. Any medication recommended



Hospital visits – 2006



Regular eye screening - 2016.

after the health checks is provided by the project. Over the last couple of years we have been fortunate enough to also have volunteer dentists James Murphy & Lynne Carmichael from Aberdeen visit the St. Joseph Centre and give dental checks and oral hygiene advice to all. In recent years it became apparent that some children were having problems with their eye sight. Annual eye screening tests have been set up for all the children and spectacles are supplied as required.

Visiting and supporting other projects – 2016

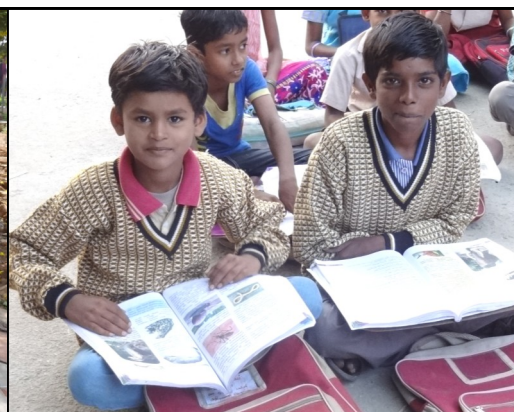
Over the past few years we have been involved in supporting a number of other projects. Three years ago my sister Ruth & I had a very worthwhile visit to Dr Sunny who runs the Koodu Trust projects in the Nilgiris Hill area in Tamil Nadu. The Trust conduct afterschool tuition classes and computer classes for children in the remote villages. They also hold tailoring classes for the ladies and give support to local farmers and the tribal people. We have funded a number of bio gas plants for local farmers to allow them to become self sufficient in gas. We supplied pregnant goats to the tribal people. Much to our amusement two of the goats that were named Muriel & Ruth have now given birth to two kids each! This year we will cover the costs for the Koodu Trust's 5 teachers who run the afterschool tuition classes for the village children. Our favourite annual visit is to Annie at the CHES home for around 100 HIV children. Annie was previously brought up in the St. Joseph Centre before being diagnosed with HIV which she contracted from her mother. Her health has improved dramatically since moving to the CHES home as she now has all the medical attention she requires. During our visit we present gifts of new clothes or schoolbags to all the children. 2016 was our first visit to the Grace Vision Centre (GVC) project in Durmapuri that's run by Pastor Manoharan. This is a Christian organisation that works with the rural poor and tribal communities assisting in the children's education and development. The children's mothers are encouraged to attend weekly health awareness programmes. 150 children are involved in afterschool homework classes that have to be held outdoors. During the winter months in the hill areas it gets very cold so we presented sweaters to all the children. For Easter we will supply sandals for all the children & pencils, stationery, etc for the tuition classes.



With Dr Sunny & family of Koodu Trust – 2016



Annie & friends in new outfits -2016



New sweaters for GVC children - 2016

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 70 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 70 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 Koodu Trust & GVC 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 & GVC and especially to all the sponsors and supporters of these projects.

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



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Thank you to all who have supported these projects to help the children of the St Joseph's Social Service Centre and Koodu Trust & GVC projects. 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.

Single donation

If you would like to give a donation, please fill in the details on this part of the form. All donation cheques should be made payable to 'Little Drops Charity Trust' and sent to: Muriel Thomson, Little Drops Charity Trust, St. Joseph S.S. Centre Project Lead, 26 Deeside Crescent, ABERDEEN, AB15 7PT.

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Amount in Words

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Name of your account to be debited

Sort Code No..... Account Number.....

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