



April 2018

Annual Visit Report 2017/2018 - By Muriel Thomson

Overview: During my visit the 69th Republic Day was celebrated on the 26th January with pomp and enthusiasm at a ceremonial parade at Marina Beach in Chennai. The ceremony started with the hoisting of the Indian flag and the National Anthem. This was followed by the Parade March then cultural dances by children from various city schools and colleges. Other parades took place in all the major cities throughout India with President Modi presiding over the ceremony in Indian's capital city of Delhi. Republic Day honours the date on which the Constitution of India came into effect in 1950 completing the country's transition towards becoming an Independent Republic. It was a day for everyone to celebrate, rejoice and be proud to be an Indian. January 31st saw the rare phenomenon with the triplicate event of a blue moon, super blue moon & a total eclipse. The moon appeared blood red in colour as it passed the earth. 'Super blue blood moon' viewing events were held in various cities in India. After the suspense of nearly two hours, the blood moon finally came out of the cloud cover in Chennai and enthralled thousands of enthusiasts and sky gazers who thronged city beaches and climbed rooftops to witness the rare celestial triplicate event. Tamil Nadu Science Forum arranged for viewing with telescopes and binoculars and a tea party to dispel superstitions that one should not eat or drink during the lunar eclipse. India's economy continues to boom and the country predicts an increase of 7% growth for 2018. It'll be interesting to see if this prediction comes to fruition.



Republic Day Parade in Chennai.



Muriel with the Crèche Children in their new uniforms.

The St Joseph's Social Service Centre Society

was born out of the initiative of Sister Bakkiam, in 1984. Being a Franciscan nun, her concern for the poor and the love she had for the marginalized in the society was unparalleled. Situated at St. Thomas Mount, Chennai, the Centre started taking care of forty children providing education and medical care. Ten years later the Centre started to give refuge to orphaned children and children from broken families who had nobody to call a family. To-day the St. Joseph Centre is a home for thirty children, a refuge for women and it also provides a daily crèche for around sixty five children. The Centre has touched the lives of thousands of children over the years.

The Project: The St. Joseph Centre Project was initiated in 2006 after I spent a month in India doing voluntary work with the children at the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre. "It proved to be a life changing experience for me in many ways and after living at the St. Joseph Centre for a month I had to do

*** 100% of all donations go directly to The Project.**

*** The Project supports over 120 children in Southern India.**

*** The Project provides for the Health, Education, Welfare & Social needs of the children.**

Seven students supported at college:



Six of the students studying in Chennai Colleges.

With Selva Lakshmi having completed her nursing diploma last year and secured a job in Miot hospital we presently have seven students that we support at various colleges in Chennai. Vinitha will be the next one to complete her college years. She gained a BSc degree in English Literature and will sit her final exams for an MA degree in June. She has had ambition to join the Indian Police for a number of years now and hopes to be successful at the Police entrance exams later this year. Priscilla is in her final year of a BSc in Micro Biology and will start her Masters degree after the summer. She hopes with her degrees to secure a job in the Research Centre in Chennai. It is particularly satisfying to see the girls hav-

ing the opportunity to study at college. In previous years in India girls would have been married through arranged marriages at a very early age with no opportunity of furthering their education. Now as the country's economy booms and India moves more in line with western ideals many girls are given as much opportunity to study as boys. Nirmal who attends the Loyola College was one of the first children we supported through the English Education Programme at Montfort School. He is taking a BComm degree course and has his sights set on a job in a bank in Chennai. Vijay and Arasu are two boys who were brought up in the St. Joseph Centre and attended the local Tamil medium school. With all the college lectures being in English the boys are finding the adjustment difficult. Vijay is doing a BSc in Physics and Arasu a BSc in Computer Science. Regulations do not allow the boys to continue to live in the children's Home beyond school years. This created a bit of a problem for Sister Jayaseeli. However she found 'digs' for them in a nearby house which allows them to visit their former Home in the evenings and at weekends. All the college students have agreed to visit the St. Joseph Centre on Sunday afternoons to organise a variety of activities for the younger children and offer help if needed with their school work. It's good to see that they are willing to give something back now they realise how important the support they have had from the Project has been.

Jaya Marie settled in family life:



Jaya Marie & Sophia.

I first met Jaya Marie on my initial visit to the St. Joseph Centre back in 2006 when she was 12 years old. She had been brought up in the Centre since she was three years old following the death of her father. Jaya completed her studies to 12th Standard at a Catholic run Tamil speaking school. We then supported Jaya through a teacher training course. On completion of her course she returned to her home village where she was married. She secured a job in the village school teaching in the kindergarten. Her husband runs a tailoring business in the village along with his brother. Three years ago Jaya Marie gave birth to their first child a boy they named Joshua. Last year when Jaya Marie was only six months pregnant with her second child she was rushed to hospital with serious complications. It was a difficult and very worrying time for them when the doctors feared for the life of the child and for some time it was thought that Jaya might also lose her life. Baby Sophia was born three months premature weighing only 1.07 kgs. Jaya Marie spent many months in hospital with Sophia in an incubator. A jeep load of us including Sister Jayaseeli from the St. Joseph Centre visited them in their home in the village. We were delighted to see how well Jaya Marie and Sophia were but found that new problems faced the family. The roof of their home has a bad infestation of termites. The wood is rotten with

parts of it falling down. The rain pours in during the wet season and now there's black mould growing up the walls which is a health hazard especially with two small children. After discussion with a local builder we've decided to replace the roof for them. Jaya Marie's husband will assist with the labour work to cut down the cost. We will also construct proper shelving in the house and create a new cooking area. The inside and outside of the house will be repainted.

A toilet for Pavithra and her family: Pavithra is one of the girls who has been on our English

Education Programme at Montfort School since kindergarten and she's now in 8th standard. Her father works as a ward boy in a hospital and her mother has a job at a car show room sweeping the outside forecourt. Pavithra lives in the neighbourhood area in a small traditional one roomed bamboo roofed house with her parents and two older brothers. As their house has no running water or toilet facilities the family were having to use some scrub area as a toilet. The scrub area is owned by the Military and with a big development going on at the Military Base the area has now had a high wall erected around it and it's been closed off. The toileting options left for Pavithra's family were to either climb the high wall, walk a very long way down the hill to a public toilet or use the open drains. The problem was such that Pavithra's mother was waiting until she got to her work to use their toilet. With Pavithra having reached puberty this was a problem too. Both her parents are on a very low wage and are unable to finance the building of a toilet. On hearing of this undignified situation I decided to help by erecting a small toilet at their house. This has greatly enhanced their living conditions. Their toilet is shared with her uncle's family who live in the house next door.



Pavithra & mother at the new toilet.

Cyril moves to a new school: Cyril is on our English Education Programme. He previously studied at the Montfort school in Chennai while living at the St. Joseph Centre. Cyril has now been rehabilitated back with his mother in his home village. He did very well in his 10th Standard Government exams gaining a pass mark of 431/500. Our thanks go to his former Head Mistress and teachers who gave their time after school hours to help Cyril with his studies. The Indian Government have recently introduced new 11th Standard exams as well as the 12th Standard final exams. As you can imagine Cyril and his fellow students are finding this all quite stressful. With his previous village school only catering for students up to 10th Standard Cyril will now complete his final two years at the Don Bosco school in Tirupattur. My sister and I took a thirteen hour round trip to him at his new school and meet with his Principal. We will provide private tuition evening classes to help Cyril with his Physics and Maths. As well as Cyril this Project supports the education fees for twenty four other children at English Schools in South India.



Cyril at the gates of Don Bosco School.

What this Project covers: This Project funds the school fees for 25 children from the St. Joseph's

Centre and the poor neighbourhood area to be educated at English medium Schools. It funds all the Hostel Care needs for 30 orphaned and semi-orphaned children of the St. Joseph's Social Service Centre. School uniforms are provided for approx 50 children and uniforms for 65 crèche children. We employ three teachers to assist with homework, and a driver to transport the children to school. College fees are funded for seven older children of the St. Joseph Centre. A Health Programme is funded for 65 crèche children who live in the poor neighbourhood area and medical care is provided for all the children living in the St. Joseph's Centre. Christmas gifts, a Sponsors Day Party, Annual Day Out, and many other treats are provided for all the children and staff. The complete renovation of the building has been funded to bring the St. Joseph Centre up to a suitable living standard. Support is also given to various other Projects in Southern India including The Koodu Trust, GVC, CHES Home & Prema Vasam.



Smiles at snack time.



Health & Dental checks at the Medical Camp.

Medical Camp at St. Joseph Centre: During the month of February a Medical Camp was once again held at the Centre. Dr Mandiganan along with two of his colleagues and three Dentists from Sri Ramachandra hospital attended. They kindly gave up their Sunday morning to conduct the camp. Around sixty children attended from the Centre and the neighbourhood. Dr Mandiganan noted a marked improvement in the health of the children since his previous visit. However it was noted that a number of children were deficient in iron. Advice was given on how to improve their diet and medicines were provided free. The dental treatment required will be provided at a later date.

Continued support for other Projects: A meeting was conducted with Pastor Manoharan of the Grace Vision Centre. This was to update us on the development of the six after school Centres they run for children in the Durmapuri area. This provides a very valuable service for the less fortunate children of the villages. We will provide 160 sets of school uniforms & sandals for the children who attend the after school classes as well as necessary study materials. I have been associated with the CHES home that caters for around 90 HIV children for the last five years. Although I was unable to visit the Home we will provide new sports kits for all the children and we will continue to provide gifts for all at Christmas. Two years ago I visited the Prema Vasam Home in Chennai. This is a Home for over 200 children of which over half are physically and mentally challenged. We continue to give support and provided gifts for the children at Christmas. It was planned that my sister Ruth and I would make a return visit to the Nilgiris Hill area to one of our favourite Projects. This is where The Koodu Trust conducts various projects for the tribal people and Dalit farmers. We provide funding for 5 teachers to conduct after school classes for the village children. Monthly updates are provided by The Koodu Trust showing the results of the classes. There has been a marked improvement in the children's learning abilities since the after school classes started.



Children from Prema Vasam in their new Christmas outfits.



Smiling faces from the Montfort school children.

Thank you to all our supporters: I would like to thank all who have donated to this Project and the Sponsors who have committed to supporting children on the English Education Programme. Without your generosity and support we would not have been able to improve the health, education, welfare and living conditions for all the children. I thank Sister Jayaseeli & staff of St Joseph's Social Service Centre, the 'Little Drops Charity Trust' in the UK, our 'Little Drops Charity Trust' Director in Chennai and all at Montfort School. My thanks also go to the Doctors from Punch Charity and the Dentists from Sri Ramachandra hospital.