

The Vidiyal Trust

Charity Registration No. 1113691

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Since my last visit 8 months ago, a lot has been happening! The land purchase and registration in Mavelikara, where we are to build our new complex, has been completed. Registration documents and the deeds for the land are in the name of, and possession (here in England) of our own Trust. Land and registration costs were £15,000. Our compound of 1½ acres has been surrounded by a 6 foot wall, and most important of all the cowshed already on the land has been extended and renovated so that we have been able to start our school/tuition centre. 51 children are registered, with a further 10 due to start this month. These are children from a local slum area, who were, at the most, having a few hours education a week. Now they are in full time education (they still attend a local church school for part of the day). They come to us for breakfast, lessons, then a short time at the Church of South India School, back to us for tea and snacks, more lessons, more food and home! As you will know the school has been funded by churches in the Norwich Diocese. It was good, on one of the days there, to meet many of the parents.

We should begin the work on the new Boys and Girls Education Centres/Homes by early October. A Structural Engineer has drawn up the plans and we hope to complete the buildings by late June 2008. The children will move to the area after the school year ends in April. The total cost for the 2 homes with 40 children in each, kitchen, dining hall and office unit will be about £50,000. A Norwich donor who wishes to remain anonymous has met the cost of the education centre. The kitchen and dining hall interiors have also been sponsored. We have, thank God, funds in hand for the rest of the complex. The final building will be the vocational training centre, which will use up the rest of the Diocesan funds. This centre will also help local young people, and some of the local women, as we re-develop our sewing units. We are extremely grateful to everyone for the help in fulfilling this work, it will provide facilities for 150 children, and others from outside as we develop the work further. It also gives us an opportunity to look at ways of self-funding at a later date.

As we will have vacant space for periods during the daytime we are planning to start an "Adopt a Granny" scheme! The aim will be to bring local older folk from the slum area to our centre for a few hours each day, providing a lunch. More of this later – there is certainly a need.

Our current Boys and Girls Homes continue in Trivandrum, pending the move to Mavelikara. All of the children are really looking forward to the move as most of them come from this area originally, so we will be taking them back to a familiar place. Several of our older children are now able to work, but "home" for them will also be Mavelikara. We had a delightful evening at Jacob's house, on the rooftop, with all of the children, and spent time at each home. The rented buildings have served us well but there will be much more space available for the children on our own site, and many more up to date facilities. Once again several of our older boys now in work travelled long distances to meet up with us.

We also continue our work with the Regional Cancer Centre in Trivandrum. Our link is with the palliative care team, who provide home care (and much more) for destitute cancer sufferers who cannot reach the hospital for treatment/pain relief. We have already replaced the old ambulance (long since run into the ground), and have been offered funds to purchase a second vehicle by a Rotary Club. We pay the salary for the driver and one nurse and fuel costs and will do the same for the second ambulance. None of these services are state funded. I visited one home on the ambulance, where treatment was given to a man in his late 40s, who had advanced oral cancer. He needs tube feeding three times a week. He lay on the floor of a dark, thatched shack, in oppressive heat, cared for by his elderly mother. There are an estimated 2,700 known to the palliative care team who are too ill to get to hospital and probably could not afford the bus fare if they could travel. With 2 ambulances they can

reach about 100 patients each week. This is incredible work, relieving suffering at its most extreme; certainly we plan to continue our work with them. In January we hope to lead a 2 day study seminar (Teamwork in Palliative Care), using the extensive experience of one of our sponsors.

The other area of work continues in Sri Lanka with families who have been affected by the Tsunami. This has really worked well, and Father Terence and his congregation have taken the project to heart. We are sponsoring the educational needs of 33 children now, the most recent a boy whose father, unable to fish any more after the Tsunami, was killed when driving a bus into the war zone. In the three days spent in Sri Lanka we had games on the beach for all of the sponsor children and their families with tea in the hotel. The hotel is about half a mile from the beach fishing village that is home for our children, but they had never been into a hotel before. While our visitors went to see the inland elephant orphanage, I went to some of the homes of our children with Father Terence. The Tsunami has destroyed the old way of life for these people, fishing stocks are severely depleted, and many of their employers who had funds given to them to replace boats after the Tsunami (with International funds), have not purchased new boats. Our people had, and still have, nothing. They had been living in beach shacks, which were completely washed away, and being labourers, not boat owners, were given no compensation. Tourism has also been affected, so the outlook is bleak. However, we are doing something, with, as always, the emphasis on ensuring education.

So, much has changed! There is no doubt that the "troubles" of 18 months ago are well behind us, and, although not wanting to talk about the past, we now know, and have evidence to prove, how very right it was to move away. Most importantly, we have retained our integrity.

Further information about all of the work will be available on our website which is due to be launched at the end of October. We are extremely grateful to Mrs Val Root for doing this; it has taken weeks of work – all given to us voluntarily, thanks Val! You can find it under www.vidiyaltrust.com. At the moment we have temporary information on the site but it will look a lot different when we launch the completed site; it will be superb! In future we will publish reports and photos directly onto our website and will cease sending paper copies to those of you who have Internet facilities. If you do not have access to the Internet we will continue to send you paper copies. Please let us know your email address so we can keep our records up to date, and let you know when future reports are ready to view.

Sponsorship continues to be our mainstay. For the Boys and Girls Home children all will remain the same after the move. For the Mavelikara school children (who are not living with us) we will be using the pattern that has worked so well in Sri Lanka. The £10 sponsorship money will pay for uniforms, books, satchels, 2 sets of leisure clothes, and daily food, plus any medical care needed. We will also bank £1 per month for each child, to be given when they complete their education. Our grateful thanks to those of you who have been prepared to sponsor the block of children as we ensured that they were going to settle with us. We will send you details of individual children shortly. Letters from Sri Lanka have been coming at quite a rate, but perhaps less so from Jacob's end as he has been travelling a lot to oversee the move. I have suggested that all of our sponsor children write 4 times a year, this will regularise the sending out this end, and cut the pressure on those translating in India and Sri Lanka. As we have 150 children sponsored it will help to follow a pattern!

As always our sponsors have a concern about gifts, particularly as Christmas approaches. It is expensive to send gifts to India and corruption affects the postal system, so we are continuing with our gift scheme.

To remind everyone, or give the information if you have recently started sponsoring, this is what we can do if you are happy to be part of the scheme!

For **all** of the **Indian** children (Boys Home, Girls Home and Mavelikara), we ask you to send us £10 plus 2 gift tags, signed by you, saying "Happy Birthday" and "Happy Christmas" (or whatever you want to write). We then buy the gifts in India, wrap them and attach your tags at birthday and Christmas time. It has worked extremely well to date and of course the money goes a long way out there.

For the **Sri Lankan** children we have been asked by Father Terence NOT to provide gifts (but birthday/Christmas cards are of course welcome). This is because the sponsored children make up a small percentage of those he cares for and he does not want them to be singled out in this way. What they know is that £1 monthly goes into their bank (from your sponsorship money), which they will eventually receive.

I hope that is clear, if you are unsure please contact Suzy or myself. You can send the £10 and 2 tags to 32 Berryfields, Brundall, Norwich, Norfolk, NR13 5QE. We will need your tags no later than **Thursday 6th December**, as the last postal date to send items to India in time for Christmas is 7th December.

So, it was a good visit. I was accompanied by 6 visitors, particular thanks to Brian Tubby for taking all the photos; it took a lot of pressure from me! The weather was bad; the Kovalom beach area where we normally stay was virtually inaccessible because of high seas. The heat was oppressive because of high humidity, but I think everyone enjoyed the trip. Health was a worry as there was an outbreak of Viral Fever (which Jessie, Jacob's wife was recovering from), and a new disease Chikengunya, which has reached epidemic proportions in South India, so we needed to be careful.

Taking people on the trips to India (and Sri Lanka) is becoming the norm now, and is increasingly possible, as the development work becomes less, and the projects establish. However, it does mean that I become a tour operator! Obviously I need to be free to continue to cultivate relationships, and monitor progress and plan development of our work. Next July, over 20 people have indicated a wish to come! This is a good time, as it should herald the opening of the new complex. If you would be interested in coming on the trip next July please let us know as soon as possible as places are limited, we already have a large group wanting to come so will only be able to offer places to a few.

What I plan to do is take half a dozen with me who "know the ropes" for the first 10 days, then meet the larger group of first time visitors when I will be able to arrange visits to the projects, and also a backwater trip, spice fields, elephant orphanage and so on. I am happy to do this but you will understand that the work must come first. After the July visit the plan is to take a group visit every 18 months, thus enabling me to make a necessary solo visit in between.

So we move onwards! It is so good to have our work linked into local churches. In Sri Lanka and India we now have a lot of voluntary help. Not only is this cost effective it also ensures transparency. Whole communities know what we are doing, and in Mavelikara particularly we have become the talk of the town! Our new trustees in that area have worked tirelessly to bring the project to where it is now, we are very grateful to them. It also ensures our future. We want to continue our work for many years to come so we are placing a structure in place to eventually hand the work over to the churches. This is the right way, and it also negates any possibility of the problems we faced before.

My next visit, as we continue to build, will be in January. Our thanks again to all of you for your support and understanding, particularly through the difficult times – breaking news will fully explain much of what was behind those difficulties, but most important of all **we** move onwards, secure and certain that we are fulfilling our calling to help the poorest.

We do have one more piece of work that is really exciting, it involves a level of research into the lives of a slum community that we will aim to publish. It will also be used as a tool to help us and other charities in the future. From this research – back in Tamil Nadu, we will probably develop a small medical unit in the slum in question, but at this stage we are trying to concentrate our efforts on the research itself. We are well aware of the major factors that lead to extreme poverty in slums, drought, caste, lack of education, poor health and much more, but this research will be valuable, and will improve our understanding, and, I think, the fact that we are in a position now to do it is an indicator of how much we have moved on and learnt through the years. Costs are minimal, and our researcher has a depth of compassion and understanding as well as being analytical. More information after my next trip when I hope to spend some time there.

Admin matters

Our Trust telephone number will be changing! Suzy and her husband have sold their flat and are living in temporary accommodation until their new house is ready to move into, hopefully in the next few weeks. She will then have a second phone line installed to provide the charity with a new telephone number. During this transition period you won't be able to contact us by phone, please do not call the old telephone number as it has now been disconnected. We will advertise the new telephone number on our website when it is up and running. As we expect to be sending letters from the children in December, we will also enclose the new number then, hopefully this will get the details to most of you. There will also be a further report early in the New Year. Any post sent to Suzy's old address will be redirected for at least a year.

Thank you all very much for your tremendous support, concern and prayers. We now have 3 very secure and transparent projects, working with the poorest, and very much with local Christian communities. Doors have opened to enable us to move so quickly, and the future is full of hope. We have been very blessed.

With love and thanks to you all, from us, Jacob and Jessie, Father Terence, our Mavelikara trustees, and of course, the children.

Pat Atkinson
October 2007