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Supporting elders in a slum community with a lunch club, caring for street elders in our purpose built home, running a slum tuition centre for over 100 children. Caring for children with cancer, running 2 palliative care ambulances, supporting a leprosy colony, providing food bags for rural elders. Registered in the UK and India for 29 years.

(front cover : leprosy friends and children, Pat and Karupayee, slum, some friends from the leprosy colony)

This is a delayed trip (because of family illness) beginning as always in Kerala where the recent floods have subsided, although they have not affected a Trivandrum my usual starting point. Trivandrum has seen considerable change since my first visit almost 29 years ago, when the streets terrified me. Then there were people living and working on the roadside with a catosthik of noise, smells and chaos. Now the difference is incredible. Roads and the general infrastructure have improved considerably. Traffic that consisted of autorickshaws and big old Ambassador cars has been replaced by sleek modern cars, lots of motorbikes but still many auto rickshaws. My driver pointed out that Trivandrum is becoming the IT centre of southern India and the Technopark on the outskirts of the city qualifies this with amazing buildings. However, slums, albeit small, still exist, alongside other manifestations of real poverty - if you want to see them, many here don't. But this is the city, and our work has always been in the surrounding rural areas, where serious poverty still reigns, much of what we do and have done concentrates on these areas, with our work linked to the Regional Cancer Centre, the main Cancer Centre in this southern part of India. This continues as each day as our ambulances visit some city, but mainly rural areas to take palliative care to those with advanced cancer who are too sick to reach hospital, even if they were able to afford the bus fare.

This has been the mainstay of our work in this area, we have funded the ambulances, running costs and drivers salaries for 16 years now, nurses being provided by the hospital, with retired doctors volunteering help via local churches. This also links to our work with children with cancer who attend the Centre but live over the border in Tamil Nadu, more of which later.

This work continues, supplemented now by a welfare section which, for one example, will provide air beds for those lying on the floor or on beds without mattresses, not good if you have advanced bone cancer. Much of this is funded by local donations, we are helping with this too, which should not detract from the scale of local donations. No-one in this charity wing from the hospital is paid (with the exception of our drivers), which answers a question I am often asked " what do they do to help themselves".

So now I am in **Madurai** after a tedious train journey lasting 8 hours - very hard seats, thank goodness for my iPad and several downloaded episodes of Escape to the Country!

Here there has been a massive change. After 12 years without proper rainfall there has been a full monsoon and two typhoons one of which just left before I arrived. The monsoon plus the need for Kerala to release water via the dam after the floods has transformed the drought area here. The river still has dry areas, but there should be enough stored water now to see the city through next summer. However, lots of damage has been caused by the floods and rain, with 300+ people being killed just north of here in the past days.. As in Kerala several thousand have lost their homes. Thankfully our buildings are secure but we have a little damage at the farm to fencing and a couple of trees. But we have water!. Of course there has to be a downside and I have arrived in a city that has a lot of dengue fever and swine flue. There have been deaths, one being Karupayee from our



shelter home whom I have been sponsoring. I arrived 3 days too late. Very upsetting. She had been with us for almost 3 years, a sweet gentle soul with a beautiful smile. Her story, typical of many of our elders, is at the back of this report. As least she died in some comfort instead of on the streets that had been her home for several years..... Everything here progresses well. The farm is developing and the move towards a level of self sufficiency continues. Chickens are providing meat and eggs, with the cows producing good levels of milk. The rain will mean that our bore well will now be really productive- so excellent news for us. However, we need to be careful, no one expected the serious period of drought (13 years) that we have just experienced. The other issue I've noticed in moving around the city is that there are now many areas of stagnant water - this will see the return of malarial mosquitoes.

Our projects continue to develop well. The **CHILDRENS CENTRE** attracts over one hundred children with several of our older children successfully moving on to vocational and higher education training. This is so rewarding, some are even going on to do MBA,s. All are so called Dahlits from our slum. The children's centre is a hub of noise, exhuberance and energy. Children keep asking me " how is (name of sponsor", then "convey my regards". Another big lesson really in seeing what it means when someone really cares for you. They feel that. As the older children move on , though many will continue to come as volunteers, others take their place the newest boy being just 5 years old. We have over 20 regular volunteers, mostly "old" children which is so gratifying. **We have made a 3 minute "Christmas" video featuring the children, if you have email and would like to see it please let me know.**



As the government is providing a good lunch now, as well as uniforms, books and school essentials we have been able to keep our sponsorship costs very low. What we are doing now is saving £1 each month in a bank account for each child so that when they leave us they will have a lump sum to help with higher education or apprenticeships. It is 9 years since we re-registered the Trust here in Madurai, as a result a batch of older children are coming to the end of training, we will be writing (as will they) to those sponsoring these children. Without doubt none of them would have finished schooling and certainly would not have gone to higher or vocational education. They are a real testimony and credit to and for for our sponsors and staff.

We are looking at setting up a small workshop now for the children to make cards and similar and to give the children an opportunity to earn a small amount, more news as this develops.

We are planning a small facility in the leprosy colony for children and grandchildren of leprosy patients. There is a tendency for them to be isolated because of their family circumstances, this will just be a weekly meeting for games and social interaction and it would be good to include these children in our camps and special events.

Leprosy Colony

The leprosy colony continues to be a place of delight. These beautiful people never complain, are so welcoming and are



extremely grateful for the support we are able to give them. I have never lost the sense of sheer joy of being with them. Some of the colony are living periodically in the nearby government leprosy home as they receive treatment but we have had a special meeting when we can all be together. I hadn't seen a particular friend Krishna for almost eighteen

months, but now we have met up again, when we hugged I could feel all of the bones in his body and his leprosy has definitely worsened- but still no complaints. What a lot these wonderful people can teach us. I helped to distribute the monthly food and medical care bags on one of my visits.



Toilets

Strange thing to be writing about in this report, but actually very important. Several toilets - well small concrete blocks, have been put in our slum, the problem being that they are not connected! So 600 and more people have no facility. The government now is saying that it is essential that this issue is addressed, and they quote in the India Times that **1000 children under 5. die every day** because of water contaminated by human waste, not a misprint, 1000. Not only that women and young girls tend to go out just before dawn for their ablutions, and thousands die every year from snake and scorpion bites. The other obvious problem is cholera and typhoid, typhoid particularly being common. So there are big plans to make toilet facilities available for everyone within 3 years. It relies on water being available too, here in the south there has been such severe drought that sewage works could not function anyway. Incredible IF the Government can do it; because of the sheer scale of sewage works and so on that will be needed, There is also the social element, even though we have excellent (biocompostable) toilets in our home a couple of our ladies go out to the fields just before dawn every day. So many have spent the whole of their lives without the facility we consider essential.

Rural Elders. We continue to support a very poor village by providing food bags to about 20 elders who otherwise would be at risk of family abandonment or worse. This project has undoubtedly saved lives and is monitored for us by a small mission hospital



Elders. I have spent some time in our home and in the slum as lunch is served there, these wonderful ladies are so very thankful for what they are given and apart from the food we try to give and show love. I've had more hugs than I can count over the past days, thank you to all who sponsor these dear people. I wish you could experience the real change in their lives. Inevitably because of their backgrounds and age some may not be with us for long periods, though a few can count their time in years, but at least they will not die alone. The government now is taking action over street elders in particular.

Many community halls are being turned in to elders homes and the dictate is that no elder is to be found living on the streets. This will affect us in the longer term, definitely it

makes our street contact work obsolete. In the past couple of weeks the Social Welfare department have brought a street elder to us whilst they try to find her a place in a government home. It will be interesting to see what does happen in the longer term. For the slum elders it is different. Most remain in the slum mainly in awful conditions rather than move away from children and/or grandchildren. This is why we run our lunch facility as virtually all of our lunch elders are living OUTSIDE family shacks, often not receiving food. For most the lunch we provide is their only meal, and even then they secrete some of the food for their grandchildren.

I think we are on a cusp of change, it will be interesting to see what happens.

Children with cancer, ambulance project.

This work continues. Each child registered with us, living in Tamil Nadu but under the care of the Regional Cancer Centre in Trivandrum (which may be up to 300 miles away) has a bank account set up and £8 monthly is paid in to this account to be used for fares / supplementary food and occasionally additional medication. We also take a Christmas gift from our sponsors. Our staff visit the children (currently 35) on a regular basis, with the families who are often in very isolated rural villages really appreciating the emotional support. These children are usually from the Dahlit community. Our ambulance is also available as needed. I know from the Cancer Centre staff that this has made a tremendous difference, they particularly mention the emotional support that the home visit gives. I will repeat the fact mentioned in the last report that up to 4000 children who are diagnosed at the Centre who will not return for treatment every year. The nearest specialist centre from Trivandrum is in Chennai- even more unreachable. On my last day I had lunch with the wonderful volunteers who run Care Plus, they value the 16 years we have spent together mentioning often that we have been there with them since the inception of their work, as such have been vital in development. Our ambulance project being an integral part of what they do. Well over 500,000 clinic and home Care visits have been made in that time to those who are terminally ill, but living in very poor conditions, I have made several trips on the ambulance and have seen first hand the relief And it is the only relief available, that can be given. Care Plus Friends at the lunch asked me to pass on their sincere thanks.

So a shorter than normal visit, but one that has shown steps that we can take towards the level of self sufficiency that will always be our aim. Thank you all very much for your support.

Karupayee story In her own words.

The Trust continues to support our projects in Madurai and areas in Kerala firm in the commitment to send ALL donated funds to our work. Our very limited overheads are covered by some of the gift aid we are able to claim. We have children available for sponsorship (£10 monthly on an individual basis) . We are also grateful for general donations or donations for specific projects. Thank you.