

# **FRIENDS OF METTUPALAYAM TRUST**

**Registered charity No 1054673**

## **Mid-Year Report August 2007**

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It seems incredible that we are now half way through the year, and nearly 7 months after the last visit by trustees to the project. As usual, I will try to cover some of the more recent developments whilst assuring Friends that work continues apace at both Mettupalayam and Palayanadukuppam.



### **EDUCATION.**

At our two primary schools, the new school year has just begun, with numbers maintained at Mettupalayam (24 children moving on to the Government Secondary School replaced by 25 new little ones!) and increased numbers again at Nambikki (now around 60 children in 3 classes each with a teacher). Delays in receiving the official school certificate for Nambikki mean that we cannot yet take in all the children from surrounding villages who wish to come, but this should be achieved later this year. Apparently we have just renewed the certificate for Mettupalayam School and this involved over 30 different pieces of paper, all needing to be signed by one official or another! Thanks to a bursary set up following fundraising from one of our local secondary schools, we are able to give financial support to 10 children enabling them to start or continue their studies at High School. Although education is free in India, there are still some fees to pay, books and uniforms to buy etc, and some families would not be able to afford them. Mettupalayam School headteacher, Ganasoundari, together with Kaliyammal, have returned from completing a B.Ed degree and are now busy bringing their increased expertise to bear. All the children have been given free books and school uniforms, and the school meals programme continues to provide a good balanced, nutritious diet.

### **FARMING.**

Drought has again been a problem, affecting not just the farm, but also our building programme. Venkat reports that the monsoons last year only brought around 50% of the normal rainfall in

the Mettupalayam area (I think that we could spare some of ours!) Whilst the farm's income has been affected, with foresight, Venkat planted more groundnuts than normal, and we have been able to sell more than 5 tonnes at a very good price. However, building work has either had to be suspended, or not started as there has been insufficient water to make bricks or cement. This is only a postponement and we have taken the opportunity of dry wells to both deepen and enlarge these where possible to collect more water later this year. The communal quarry continues to thrive and we have increased our piece rate to the Irula tribal people whilst continuing to provide other work and support as appropriate. The farm building is still incomplete but funds have been allocated and this should be completed later in the year.

### **DISABILITY**

Following the establishment of our link with APD in Bangalore, the first recipient of a specially designed wheelchair in Mettupalayam was Dharani, (pictured left). This young woman had previously been totally dependant on others to be carried from place to place. We have constructed a latrine for her, widened the doorway to her house, and she is now having special exercises to help with her weight before going to APD for vocational training. From having no ambitions or expectations, Dharani's future now seems so much brighter and it is difficult to convey the difference this has made to her life. There are literally many hundreds of people with disability like Dharani in Mettupalayam and Nambikki areas, and our four disability workers continue to make a huge difference. I am often asked about various individuals who have been mentioned before in newsletters, and it is very exciting to be able to bring you an update on Munivannan, the 18 year old gypsy boy who has been making necklaces for us. We had arranged for him to go the Bangalore for an operation to free up his left knee, which had been badly affected by polio. However, his parents and indeed Munivannan, were too frightened to go, and so the operation was postponed. This is unsurprising given that these tribal people have no experience of modern medicines or hospitals. Following much discussion and assurances, he has now had the operation and is home waiting to be fitted with the appropriate equipment to enable him to learn to walk. APD have paid for the operation and we will fund the callipers, walking frame etc as required.



### **HEALTHCARE**

We are now employing a qualified nurse, Chitra, to oversee our health programme and to support the weekly doctor's surgery. Health education continues with regular eye check up camps, blood pressure and blood sugar monitoring etc. These are now so routine that Venkat frequently forgets to tell us about what he has organised! This also applies to the many other activities which go



on day by day, such as the old people's meals scheme, the encouragement and organisation of immunisation programmes etc.

## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Working in conjunction with the Block Development Officer (a sort of Council Officer) and UNICEF, Venkat has been organising an individual house latrine programme. In Mettupalayam this was instigated by IRDT and now every house has its own outside toilet. This programme is being extended to all 469 families in the Karani Panchyat (District Council) before extending to neighbouring areas. As you can imagine, this will have a significant effect on public health!

Also working in partnership with the Indian Bank, IRDT has been chosen to spearhead an innovative approach to community banking. Traditionally, poor, rural families have received little or no support from the banking network. This hinders their ability to borrow or save money, and has been a major barrier to small enterprise generation. Venkat has drawn up an action plan following an intensive local survey which included social, economic, infrastructure, skill training, health education, economic development and many other aspects of rural life. Initially, with our help, the Indian Bank has set up a doorstep banking system in the Karani Panchyat, and once this has been proven, the system will be rolled out across the state!

## **UK NEWS**

In my last newsletter, I introduced Friends to [www.everyclick.com](http://www.everyclick.com). I would like to thank those of you who are now using this as your home page. Last month alone raised over £7 and this will pay for a month's education and nutrition for one of the children at our schools.

There have been many successful fund-raising events held over the last few months- too many to list- but thank you to all the individuals, schools and organisations who have supported our work. The number of monthly standing order donations continues to increase, and we are often asked to talk and show pictures of our work. Please continue to ask!

On behalf of all the villagers and children in our two project areas, thank you for your support. Our communities, working together, are breaking down barriers, supporting and learning from each other, irrespective of race, religion, creed or colour, and are continuing to make significant progress.

## **STOP PRESS**

We are planning for Venkat to visit the UK in October for 2 or 3 weeks. We will be arranging our usual open day and also arranging some school visits. Please let us know if your school would like Venkat to visit either the week before or the week after October half term. We will of course include as many visits as possible in the restricted time that he will be here.