

FRIENDS OF METTUPALAYAM TRUST

Registered charity No 1054673

Newsletter February 2007

c/o Francis & Rosie Muncaster
The Rowans
Exelby
BEDALE
DL8 2HF

Tel 01677 425961
e-mail fmuncaster@hotmail.com
www.irdt.info



Last year was a year of solid progress for IRDT, as Venkat, Gomathi and the team have consolidated on the project's expansion in 2005. It is a pleasure to report on our work in education, nutrition, healthcare and disability which now touches on the lives of up to 20,000 people in our project areas of Mettupalayam and Palayanadukuppam! As I often say, I only wish that I could transport you there, if only for a few minutes. So as usual, I will pick out a few examples of how your support has improved individual lives in this challenging part of the world. Positive changes are very evident when looking at the occupation of the villagers; older men in Mettupalayam are all either goat or cattle herders. Younger men in the 18-30 age range however show a varied career path, being skilled manual workers i.e. metal workers, textile workers, drivers etc, and with some having completed full time education at degree level and becoming professionals. Many of these of course have moved away from the village, but they can now support their parents which was not previously possible. Equally importantly, the younger women now have career opportunities, not just expected to marry, raise a family and work in the fields!

Snapshot of Selviammal and her family.

Every family has a story to tell, all the people are very poor. Within any family one or two girls are accepted but due to the dowry system, any more is seen as a real problem. Selvi's husband has never been supportive and has periodically left them to fend for themselves. Reduced to begging and shunned by the other villagers, we started to support the family some years ago, finding them accommodation and part-time work. The two older



girls have been through our primary school and are attending the local secondary school. Nadhia, the oldest is second ranked in a class of 70, and her younger sister, Ponnai is ranked first out of a similar class size! The two middle children attend our primary school and the two youngest will follow. All this thanks to the generosity of one Friend who donates £50 each year for this purpose.

Disability. Our three disability workers have now returned from their 14 months specialist training with APD in Bangalore (www.apd-india.org) Working in conjunction with another Indian based charity, we are now providing support to around 210 disabled villagers around Mettupalayam, and a smaller but still significant number at our Nambikki project on the coast.

Early results are fantastic to see, and it was particularly poignant to meet again with the little boy, Franklin and his mother. When we first met Franklin in December 2005, he was unable to sit up or move, having suffered from cerebral palsy from birth. It was distressing to see a 30 month old child either lying motionless on the floor, or being carried by his mother. APD's technician designed and manufactured a special table and chair for him, and his mother was shown how to give physiotherapy. Franklin can now stand up, is moving around on all fours, and should soon be able to walk. His future now looks much brighter! There are many such stories that could be told, and many individuals being helped in a similar way. Salaries for the three girls amount to around £75 each month, and initial equipment will cost some £2200! It is interesting to note that whilst Franklin is from a Christian family, the inclusion of all religious and ethnic backgrounds in our work on an equitable basis is very important.



Another benefit of our link with APD is the ability to send people to Bangalore for operations. Whilst visiting our new project on the coast, we met Kokila, an 18 year old girl. Just over 2 weeks previously, she had had an operation to release her knee from the effects of polio. This will enable her to learn to walk with callipers, initially using a walking frame. Your funds will pay for this equipment, around £70 and £18 respectively. The operation, paid for by APD cost £82! Again, it is difficult to appreciate the long term opportunities that this young lady now has. During our last week at Mettupalayam, whilst buying necklaces to bring back to England to sell, we met with an 18 year old disabled gypsy boy called Munivannan. He also suffered from polio as a child and we are to arrange with APD for him to have the same operation as Kokila. He is also keen to attend the primary school, having missed out on education so far. In return for schooling, he wishes to teach the village children some traditional gypsy crafts!



Nambikki School. The first school building is now complete and Venkat is awaiting official government recognition- always a slow but necessary process. Whilst we are unable to expand the classes to other villages at present, once our licence has been received, hopefully by June we should see the numbers attending school jump to around 70, in three year groups plus the minus group. Eventually we expect that around 150 children will attend and we will look to support those that wish to further their education at secondary school. As with Mettupalayam, we expect to be able to give these children the opportunity to have varied career paths, and not just become fishermen like their parents. Meantime, it was very exciting to find that fish from our village is now being sold in Utherimerur, the nearest town to Mettupalayam, and as this is around 40 miles from the sea, the fishermen are obtaining premium prices. Once our ice factory is up and running, many more will have this opportunity.

Healthcare

Another very exciting development has grown out of Venkat's link with the Lions Club International in Utherimerur. Having been introduced to the president, and after jointly organising a health camp, Venkat has been made an honorary member, and given a very prestigious achievement award. This has led to a Lions doctor voluntarily running a weekly surgery in Mettupalayam, free to all. We make a small charge for prescription medicines (waived for those who cannot afford to pay!) and this will make significant long term improvements to the health of the community. However, sometimes we seem to take two steps forward and another back- during our visit we were shocked when a 24 year old Mettupalayam man died of TB, leaving a 20 year old wife and two children. This was despite having been diagnosed as suffering from TB along with 11 others at our health camp some months earlier. Medicines for treatment of TB are provided free by the government, but these have to be taken meticulously for 6 months and despite our best efforts, this young man refused to complete the course. Needless to say, along with the community, we will be helping his young widow and her children over the next few, difficult months and years.

Health education therefore is a major part of our work, and overcoming superstitions and prejudices is sometimes difficult. At an eye camp at the school, sponsored by the Rainbow Free Eye Hospital and a new link with the Rajan Eye Care Hospital in Chennai (www.rajaneyecare.com) around 150 villagers received a full eye check-up. 53 villagers received new glasses (at a cost to us of £2.35 per pair!) and 15 were diagnosed as needing a cataract operation. Despite our best efforts, only 8 agreed to go for the operation, the others being too frightened to go. We will of course follow this up, and hope that we can persuade the rest to go once they see the difference the operation makes to their neighbours.



Social development.

Venkat is always looking for ways to improve both working conditions and rewards for his staff, and this year we are introducing a staff welfare scheme whereby all staff will receive a full annual health check. Also, following the annual inflation salary increase (5% this year) he is to introduce a compulsory staff savings scheme, where a deposit of 5% of their monthly salary, matched by ourselves, will be placed in a savings account to be repaid to the staff member when they leave. This will particularly benefit the women giving them some independence and financial security.

UK News

Our circle of Friends continues to grow, aided by the fantastic support we receive from N Yorks Education Department and many schools throughout the area. Rosie and I are always happy to visit schools to talk about life in India and also share with David and Adele the joy of giving our slideshow talks to many groups and organisations. We are always very moved by our reception and the encouragement and support that we receive. This aspect of our work is in itself very rewarding and please do contact me if you would like an update or talk.

The financial support that we receive also continues to grow, aided by our commitment to ensuring that every penny you donate is received in India. Friends continue to be amazed at the difference even a small monthly donation can make. Many supporters have held fund-raising events for us over the last year and although we try to thank you at the time, from all of the villagers and children in both the Mettupalayam and Palayanadukuppam project areas, many thanks indeed. You continue to make a very significant difference to the lives and expectations of many people.

Finally, for those of you with a computer, can I introduce you to www.everyclick.com. This is a charity website, and by using it as your home page and registering to support Friends of Mettupalayam, you will generate income to support our work. So far, we have two supporters registered (myself being the first!) and in two months we have generated some £5 additional income at no cost to either our charity or your time. Please do have a look and register for a trial.

Francis and Rosie Muncaster, Hon Treasurer and Trustees
18th February 2007

STOP PRESS Open day at Rosie and Francis' house 18th March, please come if you can.