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Christmas 2022 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

We have just returned from our week in India, and we are buzzing with all we have seen and experienced. I am aware it is now December 9th and we need to get this Newsletter printed and posted or emailed to you quickly, together with Christmas cards from any children you sponsor. Four sponsor parents came with me this time and it was my first trip to the Mission for almost 3 years. The changes since February 2020 were very apparent and it was wonderful to be back. Three out of the four sponsor parents who joined me have kindly written a short piece about their experiences which I hope you find very interesting and encouraging.

Siobhan's reflections



Along with 3 other sponsor parents, I accompanied Dinah on her trip to Manvi. Meeting Bheema (the 11-year-old boy I sponsor) was an absolute highlight for me. I felt we had an instant connection. He is a thoughtful and sensitive boy and conversation was easy as his English was so good. Tragically, Bheema's father died suddenly from a sudden heart attack a couple of weeks ago - he was only 36. He leaves behind his wife and 3 sons. We went to visit the family at their home and pay our respects which was incredibly moving.



The following day I joined Bheema in his lessons at Kapepaladi School. He is clearly a bright boy and he was right to be proud of the written work he showed me. Bheema normally stays in the school hostel (a boarding house) as this enables him to study with the proper facilities. He is travelling into school daily at the moment so he can support his mother but he will return to the hostel shortly. I was so reassured by Father Ashwin's commitment to check up on Bheema to ensure he is ok. After attending lessons with Bheema, I spent the rest of the morning with Sister Leena in the Health Centre learning all about the services they provide. They are available to help the community with medical needs 24/7. The main illnesses they treat are typhoid and dengue fever. Clean drinking water is essential to reduce typhoid and the charity has bought a tractor and water carrier which goes out to the villages. At the health centre I saw a little girl being given an injection of antibiotics to treat typhoid. Sister Leena mentioned they are having to contend with three "quack" doctors in the village who are not educated or medically trained. The sisters frequently have to treat villagers suffering side effects from the inappropriate and often dangerous "medicine" they have been given by the quack doctors. I was also given a guided tour of the new and well-equipped ambulance. The ambulance was purchased by the charity.



Andrew's reflections



I have just returned from my first visit to the Loyola Kapepaladi and Manvi schools, and the surrounding villages where the children live. It is hugely motivating to observe the contrast between the environment in the schools, where the children and students are provided with smart uniforms, work happily and hard in safety with wonderful caring and dedicated teachers and staff, and the harsh, often cruel reality of day-to-day life in the villages. There we find extremes of poverty, crumbling infrastructure, lack of some basic needs and opportunities, all of which continue to hold back and oppress the Dalit community.

I have visited many of these people in the villages and have been invited into their homes, where the warmth of welcome and generous, spontaneous hospitality is utterly remarkable. I have witnessed the brutally hard-working day that Dalit workers endure without respite. It is not at all unusual for women to toil all day in the fields (often picking cotton) in intense heat, and then walk miles to get home where they will fetch water, prepare food, wash clothes, and sometimes walk miles again, to obtain some necessary provision. The roads leading to the villages show no signs of much needed improvement and it would be easy to imagine these people feeling broken, embittered by neglect or exploitation, hopeless and isolated. This is emphatically not the case. In every village I met friendly, resourceful, resilient people with a strength of spirit which is quite outstanding and humbling. So often I felt that these folk who have nothing were giving me far more than I could give them. They win and deserve the deepest respect and admiration from those of us who have the privilege of meeting them.

On such a visit, one gets the chance to observe, close-up, the fruits of the work of 'Supporting Dalit Children' which has so admirably identified and prioritised vital needs. Just some examples which can be explored further on the website are: the Tailoring school and tuition centre, the clean water project which takes this vital commodity deep into the heart of the villages, the Pannur Health Centre next to Kapepaladi School, which now has a new, well-equipped ambulance to navigate the rough and rocky roads! It is impressive how the Charity, working closely with the magnificent Jesuit Fathers and Sisters, has identified where help is most needed, and acted immediately to provide practical solutions, commencing the long journey to lasting improvement. This requires positivity, patience, strength of purpose and clear vision, all of which exist in abundance. We all want to do more. It is impossible to visit these communities without being inspired, uplifted and filled with a kind of joy that is hard to express or explain.



Finally, EDUCATION, without which there would be little hope. The teaching at Loyola Kapepaladi and Manvi Schools is delivered by truly dedicated, caring staff, again, with a focus on what needs are most pressing. I leave the most memorable and overwhelming source of joy and hope until last; THE CHILDREN! Here I have met the most magnificent, beautiful, open-hearted and life affirming children I have ever met anywhere. They are eager to be kind, to be friendly. They are keen to learn and demonstrate great aptitude and potential in their studies. They are considerate, polite, and possess a confidence that is humble not hubristic. Living in extremes of poverty where good health and adequate nutrition cannot be assumed, they are high spirited, energetic, and gloriously playful. It is fun to be in their company. They are the future, and if they are given the opportunities they so richly deserve they will shine. The future for all of us will be brighter. I give any future visitor

this warning; these children will change your life, they will win your heart, and leaving them to return home will be an experience you will never forget. In wanting to improve their lives, we find that, without even trying, they have improved our lives in ways that are deeply significant and enriching.

Kate's reflections

When my dear friend Siobhan invited me to visit India to see Dinah's charity, Supporting Dalit Children, in action I knew I had to go. I was kindly given a week off work by my employer, and on 30 November 2022, with hope in my heart, I stepped off the plane in Hyderabad.

Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next. Seven unforgettable days that have changed my life forever.

I travelled with my friends Dinah and Siobhan, and Andrew and Dhiren who we met at the airport for the first time and got to know during the trip. We became a team, all very different but very much united in our bid to find out as much as we could about the Dalit community and how we could help.

Our welcome reception in Manvi by the students at Loyola College, the Xavier school children, the Jesuit Fathers, sisters and all the teachers was extraordinary. There was so much celebration, clapping and joy to see us, especially Dinah, who they all know has helped to create an educational lifeline for them all. The sea of smiles never stopped the entire week. From the classrooms in Manvi and the Kapepaladi village school to the after-school tuition centres and tailoring schools in the poorest villages - we were always welcome with open arms and huge hearts.



It was incredibly moving for us all to meet our sponsor children. Dinah had thoughtfully arranged for us all to visit our children in their homes on the Sunday when they were not at school. It was such a privilege for me to meet 11-year-old Pooja and her sisters in their family home. She was understandably very shy at first and spoke very little but never have the words "thank you, thank you" meant so much. And over the next few days I was able to spend precious time with Pooja in her lessons and during playtime and we got to know each other a little bit and make a connection I hope will last a lifetime. There is no doubt that the sponsorship money we give every month is helping these children have a phenomenal education and English-speaking skills

that will give each child the chance to have a childhood and their families a more secure future. But what is just as important to them all is that they know we care about them and although we live on the other side of the world we are thinking about them and that they matter. They are anything but "untouchable".



The poverty is startling, malnourishment is rife and there are so many problems to overcome, but every day we saw hope and kindness in abundance from a team of devoted people working tirelessly to find solutions and give all the children a chance in life. Nothing exemplified that more than Noble Raj who told us he went from "cow-grazing boy to schoolboy" at age 11 when he joined the Kapepaladi School in Year 6. He couldn't speak English or read or write but he worked hard and after completing his education and Degree in Manvi, he moved to Mangalore University to take his Masters' Degree in Commerce. He is now, aged 25, a lecturer in all Commerce. It was so inspiring to hear Noble Raj talk about his experience after he travelled hours across India to come and see Dinah and show his gratitude. His parents invited us all into their simple home. His mother cooked us an incredible lunch and the whole family gathered to thank us all for coming. As they kept shaking our hands and warmly embracing us, Noble Raj said: "Please keep coming back."



It was so very hard to say goodbye to this extraordinary community so rich in kindness, generosity and love. A good education is a human right and I hope to help Dinah as much as I can to achieve her mission in India and encourage others to do the same. We saw first-hand how the students who are given the chance to be educated, can flourish and grow both physically and mentally. Their laughter, beautiful smiles, spirit and determination, in spite of all the problems they face, will live long in my memory. If you have the chance to go to India and visit the places Dinah and her team are working in - go and be prepared to take hundreds of selfies! If you can't, please be assured that every pound you donate to

Supporting Dalit Children is desperately needed and never wasted. Merry Christmas to you all! Kate X

Christmas Appeal and birthday celebrations

We are over half way towards our target for the Christmas Appeal, which this year is for new outfits for all 470 students at Loyola Kapepaladi school. Thank you so much to all who have donated so far, and if anybody would still like to donate, this can be done online or else via the usual payment methods.



Thank you too to all who have given towards the monthly birthday celebrations for all students born in that month. Sister Reena is giving each child an item according to their needs, such as a school bag, pair of socks and shoes, or a water bottle. There have been great celebrations each month since we started this monthly support in October, as it is the first time all the children are being given a birthday gift regardless of whether they are sponsored or not. I always notice the socks and shoes when the children line up in assembly in class rows, and think this particular boy may be given some new shoes on his birthday!

It was my first visit to Manvi and Pannur for almost 3 years. It is hard to describe the warmth and love given to us all – and especially to me since we lost our son Patrick earlier this year. Since 2007, we have visited the Mission many times as a family with our 3 children, and have wonderful memories of them playing with the students and comparing cultures. At both schools in Manvi and Pannur the Fathers and students have created a garden in Patrick's memory, one full of fruit trees, the other full of roses. Such love they have for our family. The younger students at Kapepaladi school told me they are really taking care of the roses, watering them every day and they have packed cow dung around the roots. They told me not to worry as the roses would be looked after every day. Throughout the week whenever I felt sad, many children would gather round me, holding my hands and arms, and holding me closely, totally with me in that moment.

Thinking ahead

Over all the visit has given us so much to think about and strive towards, and there is just too much to write about in one Newsletter. I think it may be better to write to you monthly about each aspect of the support we are currently giving, as well as other thoughts and plans that are evolving as I type. These topics include the following:

- Providing drinking water to the villages - the impact on backward communities and how it is organised
- Tailoring Schools – plans to launch several new schools in 2023, interaction with tailoring students, how to market and sell tailoring students' products abroad
- Other social work in the villages - volatility of farming and impact of farm machinery on the coolie workers, child marriage, village tuition centres, provision of a new school bus, migration of family members for work, mal-nutrition
- Pannur Health Centre – general health of children and their families, provision of health care by the Sisters, impact of the new ambulance we provided in 2021
- Kapepaladi School – possible future development of infrastructure, children moving to Manvi in 9th Std, the organisation and priority of sponsorships, volunteers
- Manvi School – development of students who were former students at Kapepaladi school
- Manvi College – aspirations of current students, continuation of support beyond Degree, social media, former students now working, marriage, former students sponsoring future students
- The work of the Jesuit Fathers and St Joseph of Tarbes Sisters

We would like to wish you a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy year ahead, and I hope that the reflections in this Newsletter have reinforced how valuable the charity's support is. Thank you so much for all your donations throughout 2022, and we will be in touch again very soon.

Best wishes,

Dinah and Peter