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Spring 2023 Newsletter Part 1

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are keeping well and looking forward to the imminent arrival of Spring. We have been busy since writing at the end of 2022, and have a few updates for you as well as one or two thoughts so far (!), for 2023.

Christmas 2022 Appeal

The Christmas 2022 Appeal to buy new clothes for the Kapepaladi school children, was really successful. Thank you so much for supporting this Appeal, the children were thrilled to receive their new outfits, as can be seen from the photos below of some of the students.



Birthday celebrations



Since October last year, each month Sister Reena has been celebrating all the children's birthdays which fall into that particular month. It is fair to say that this monthly celebration is now eagerly awaited by the birthday boys and girls. Many of you have given donations towards these birthday celebrations. I can't thank you enough as each month is such a joyous

occasion, and over the course of the year every child in the school, both sponsored and un-

sponsored, will enjoy this celebration. The day begins by the children coming into school wearing their own clothes rather than their school uniform. In assembly, the children come up to the stage and gather together for the cutting of their birthday cakes and for



the rest of the school to sing happy birthday to them. Each child is then given a gift according to whatever item they are in most need of. It is not too late to contribute to these celebrations as we send money out each month for this purpose. This month's gifts included a piece of birthday cake, a new tiffin can or a new sleeping mat. The children above can be seen with their new tiffins.

Social work in the villages

Life in the Dalit communities is tough in many respects. Father Don is in charge of the social work in the villages, he can be seen in the photo below talking to us in one of the tailoring schools, when we visited in December. Fr Don recently sent me a detailed report and here is an extract from it – “Our 95 Self help groups are active in 26 villages. Training programs for self-financial maintenance goes on every month. We are grateful to Dinah and her supporters who have helped us to supply pure drinking water to various villages. The health condition of those villages has seen improvement. Dinah has helped us to start tailoring centres in the villages. Many girls have been trained under this program. Last two years were very challenging for social work, yet Fr Anil and his team have gone out of their way to reach out to the poor”. Father Don's focus is through the self-help groups (SHGs), to support the Dalit women and their young children. He also supports the teenage youths who have not had a good education in their government schools, in practical ways that will help them to find alternative employment to working as coolie workers in the fields. He has set up several new tailoring schools for the girls, and for the teenage boys he has started driving courses and basic car mechanics instruction.

Tailoring schools



To set up a new tailoring school, Fr Don needs to buy 6 sewing machines for 20 students to use on a shift type basis throughout each day. The tailoring students cannot afford to take a full-time course as they also need to work in the fields, so they work several hours a day around their work. Each tailoring apprenticeship takes 3 months to complete. If there are 1 or 2 industrial type machines, some of the students who are interested, can then apply to work in a government sewing factory where they will have full time work which pays a decent monthly salary.



Each sewing machine costs between £55 and £90 depending on the brand and the specification of the machine. Father Don is able to guarantee certain employment possibilities for these girls, and informed me that 30 tailoring students from different tailoring schools, have been chosen to go on a training course to make jute bags. This will be a 2-week course from 11th – 23rd February where the students will learn how to make these bags as well as produce large quantities of them. At the end of the course the girls will be given a government certificate. Many of these students will also be certified as tailoring teachers in the coming days which is really exciting, as in theory it means that more tailoring schools can be started.

Ideas and thinking ahead

A pressing need for Kapepaladi school is to replace one of their school buses which has well and truly seen better days, and has repair bills that are economically unviable. Alongside discussions for a new bus, is a question as to whether Fr Leo can incorporate another village called Ramathnal, into one of the existing school bus routes. Ramathnal is a remote village and enrolling children from this village would mean one bus travelling further than it presently does and the driver sleeping overnight there, and then starting the bus route back to school from there in the morning. I really hope this can be achieved as there are many children from this village that would like to come to Kapepaladi school, and who need this opportunity. Ramathnal is currently inaccessible due to the precarious unmade roads, but a new school bus with better suspension could tackle these roads. We have visited Ramathnal many times. When we visited in December, we heard the women explaining how mechanisation in the fields is replacing some of the labour they used to do. Mechanisation in the paddy fields is a new phenomenon and one that really shocked me, as for many of these women there is no alternative employment other than working in the fields. I am currently looking into ways in which we could support a new school bus, and will be in touch again, soon I hope, with more news about this.

And finally, we have had a lot of enquiries from new sponsor parents in the last couple of months, and hope to receive more as the year progresses. When chatting to the students at both Kapepaladi school and the students in the Manvi campus, it is so apparent how much more confident the sponsored children are than those who are not sponsored. I think this is because they have had more interaction with visitors over the years, and some of them have met and chatted at length to their sponsor parents who have been able to visit their schools. So, thank you to all who are sponsoring children which really is making such a tangible difference to their lives.

More news again in March!

Best wishes,

Dinah



Sitting at Fr Don's desk one afternoon, and meeting the sponsored students in Manvi was one of the highlights of my trip in December.

The conversations we had were so interesting especially as the students' English conversational abilities had improved so much. It was such a lovely afternoon having the time to listen and chat to these students!