

# SUPPORTING DALIT CHILDREN

BY KATE STEWART

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. In November last year, 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 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. We became a team 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, whose charity has helped give them all an educational lifeline.

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 to meet our sponsor 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.

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. I know the £20 sponsorship money I give Supporting Dalit Children every month helps Pooja have a phenomenal education and English-speaking skills that will give her the chance to have a childhood, get a job and give her family a more secure future. All the children get a real boost knowing that 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 Nobleraj 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 in Manvi, he moved to Mangalore University to take his Master's Degree in Commerce. He is now, at 25, a lecturer in all Commerce.

It was so inspiring to hear Nobleraj 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



Kate meets Pooja for the first time at her home.

home. His mother cooked us an incredible lunch and the whole family gathered to thank us all for coming to India. As they kept shaking our hands and warmly embracing us, Nobleraj said: “Please keep coming back.”

It was 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, if Dalit children are given the chance to be educated, they 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.

Please consider supporting one of these incredible children and be assured that every pound you donate is desperately needed and never wasted. For more information visit [supportingdalitchildren.com](http://supportingdalitchildren.com) or email Dinah [info@supportingdalitchildren.com](mailto:info@supportingdalitchildren.com) or call her on 07909705125 or email me [office@infocusmagazines.co.uk](mailto:office@infocusmagazines.co.uk)



Pooja (above) third from the left at school with her classmates.

Dinah (left) arrives at the school and everyone wants to see her.