

FRIENDS OF METTUPALAYAM TRUST

REGISTERED CHARITY NO 1054673

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Dear Friends,

How quickly time passes-once more, the regular visitor season ends as the school year draws to a close. It also seems such a short time since our last newsletter was produced in November, however, so much has been happening and we are never short of new information, stories and updates.



School News

As always, there has been some wonderful help given to our teaching staff, not least by **trustees'** son, Lee on his first visit to Mettupalayam, pictured **above** introducing some different maths techniques to the top two classes. There have also been some surprises- including finding myself teaching English, Maths and Natural Science in the absence of the two teachers who decided to get married during the same week, and taking their fortnights honeymoon. Most of our school staff have been with us now for over two years, and we are sorry that one of the newly married teachers has decided not to return- our best wishes go to Sandihya, along with thanks for her service. It is important to remember that all of our teachers could increase their salary considerably in Government schools, or indeed by taking factory work, so they really are dedicated to our Crakehall School and the pupils.



Our project director Venkat and his daughter, Ramya, both contribute tremendously to the school. Venkat just loves to resume his teaching role whenever possible, and Ramya's excellent English and artistic flair provides a broad range of art and craft activities, something that Government Schools are unable to do. On our regular visits, we are always loaded down with materials and donated supplies which help in this. We also look to keep equipment up to date and had great fun with the children using a new play parachute. The children and staff also had great fun at the sports day, organised by Karen and Ray at the end of their

visit. Everyone is so competitive and even the teachers have to be carefully watched as they "encourage" their teams. English chocolates are always much appreciated and Karen very cleverly made some chocolate coins **as medals for the winning team**. She was also very happy to learn that the local secondary school rate our students very highly, and they shine brightly in comparison to their peers!

Visitors can contribute in so many ways, and Ray works flat out during his visits, repairing maintaining and improving the buildings' fabric and equipment. It is so difficult in India, finding qualified and effective workmen, and Ray's hard work, help and advice is much appreciated and commented upon, even by the children. Our **Nambikki** School also prospers although pupil numbers have reduced over the last few years, in line with that seen at Mettupalayam. **This may be influenced by** Government efforts to reduce the population growth and the continued movement of people from rural to urban areas. It is understandable that people wish to move for better work opportunities, and our education efforts at least mean that they have the skills to compete.

Flood report

Work is now well underway repairing and rebuilding those houses most badly damaged in last year's floods. Perversely, water shortages are now hampering this work, but steady progress is being made. More remains to be done and further contributions to our appeal would be most welcome. Please do contact us if you feel you can help!

General News

Our weekly health clinic, run by Dr Paramasivam and his nurse, Sundhari, generally sees around 60 consultations, not including the children who self refer, mostly for colds and fever, and also for minor cuts and ailments. Many of the patients are elderly and come for blood pressure and blood sugar checks and for pain relief from arthritis. However, we also see some more serious cases. Recently Ranganai, from the local Kuruvi village, came complaining of cold and fever. We noticed that Kalivani, her daughter, is showing classic signs of malnutrition, with very brown hair. It seems that she is mainly being breastfed with little additional nutrition. We

have therefore arranged for a supply of vegetables to be given to her mother each week, to supplement and improve the family's nutrition. Venkat will monitor the situation and also provided some Boost, a concentrated nutrition supplement provided by the Government. Venkat also acts as a referral point, and recently was asked to review a pregnancy scan from the local hospital, given to a young couple from Mettupalayam village. Communication by the hospital staff is often very poor, and Venkat was able to arrange for the couple to see the local Government Medical adviser who will interpret the findings for them. Venkat did say that everything looked ok, so that was good news. We also visited the local small but developing Irula community village, a



collection of around 10 houses, all mud wall and palm leaf roofed, where some of the former debt slaves now live. Those of you who are long term supporters will recall that some years ago, we were instrumental in freeing around 45 people from slavery, paying off their debts with funds donated here, and helping them to establish better lives. We were delighted to meet Pachayammal again, with her two week old daughter. However, we also noticed that the baby has an umbilical hernia which will need careful monitoring. Yet another job for Venkat and Dr P!

Farm Development news

Last year's monsoon was again very poor, meaning that we have been unable to grow much rice, and also there is likely to be water scarcity again later in the year. Fortunately our well near the village should be able to supply our school and the village when necessary. However, on the farm,

after consultation, Venkat has decided we need to both change our agricultural practices and improve water management. After consultation with a local agricultural college representative, and our Indian sister charity, he has developed a scheme to achieve both aims. We are to turn several acres of land over to growing fruit trees, including coconut, mango, guava and lemon trees. These will require much less water than short term crops but whilst establishing, the young trees will need protecting from free grazing livestock. By surrounding this land with ditches and banks, we can stop animal incursion and also by regular breaks in the ditches, water will be retained during the monsoon and will sink down to replenish and improve our aquifer instead of running away into the large seasonal lake nearby. We have also planted an acre or so of watermelon, chilli, okra and tomato plants and these should crop well over the coming 3 months. Around 60 coconut trees have already been planted, replacing some damaged in the severe cyclone seen late last year, and also some damaged by lightning.



Thank you all for your help and encouragement; it is much appreciated by Venkat, Ramya and all our staff. With the weakness in sterling and allowing for Indian inflation, our running costs will increase by around 20% this year, so if you can help with fundraising, by holding coffee mornings, sponsored events or in any other way, please let us know and we will do what we can to support you.

Thanks again and don't forget to like our Facebook page for regular news stories and updates!

