

The East Sheen Chengannur Trust

Registered Charity No 293567



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Welcome to our latest newsletter which will also be available to view on our website. In this issue we'll give you updates on our projects and other news on our work plus an extra account of a recent visit by two of our supporters (hence the longer than usual read!).

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Due to recent family commitments and health issues within the family Jacob has not been able to carry out the usual number of activities for the Trust so far this year. This does mean that sponsors will not receive summer letters from their sponsored families. The task of arranging for them to be written, collecting them, translating them then sending to the UK is extremely time consuming for Jacob so we trust you will understand the situation.

SCHOOL / EDUCATION SUPPLIES HELP



April is school opening time and Jacob usually receives many requests for help with uniforms, clothing, books, umbrellas

etc as such items are usually a requirement and have to be paid for by the family. Sponsors donations are used for their families and our Education fund provides further amounts for other children who are not sponsored but come to us in need of help. Our photos show a group of children receiving their goodies and a delighted little girl with a useful umbrella along with a rather large colourful bag!



TRADITIONAL DANCE COSTUME

ANUSHA and her brother were sponsored by one of our supporters Angus. She has learnt Indian classical dance for the past 5 years under a tutor. Their mother Prema is a teacher for differently abled children and the tutor's daughter is such a child. Prema used to give the child some lessons and so in exchange the tutor did not take any dancing fees. When a child finishes learning basic dancing, it is a big ritual to have a stage function for the first time in a nearby prominent temple along with other children who have finished the same course. This event is expensive and we helped Anusha to buy her dress (as seen in picture) and to make other arrangements and the family was very happy about it.



SUPPORTERS RE-VISIT CHENGANNUR

Recently our long-time supporter Christine Higgins and her husband Dermot visited Chengannur and stayed with Jacob and his family. This is her account and some of her interesting thoughts which are well worth reading. In the photo, taken by Jacob, are his wife Deepa on the left, with Christine and Dermot surrounded by their sponsored family.



.... It's been a long time since I first visited India in the early eighties and fell in love with the country. Then in 1990s I went again a couple of times and lastly this year for 3 weeks. The country has changed over the years and I can see it is more prosperous: fewer people on the streets begging, fewer bicycles but more cars and many more motorbikes. The economy of India has changed too: fewer street sleepers and beggars or those completely and utterly stricken by poverty. What happened? There is still real poverty of course - lots of it - but something has worked and much has improved over 30 years or so; Kerala has changed. Why are there fewer, desperately thin beggars? Kerala has moved upwards and I think it's because education (where you can get one) has worked. If you can get an education there is a better chance of a job, maybe one in the Gulf states, and that is a ticket to the next level up. It's generally the middle classes who get a good education, but it also means opportunities for the rest of Kerala improve. ESCT are still choosing projects with their resources that they think will work; choosing to promote education as the best way to get a job and help an entire family and this has undoubtedly worked.

We met my sponsored family, a single Mum (her husband left years ago) called Radhamani with 6 or 7 dependants. She survives by working as a cleaner and cook, ESCT donations and the extras her dependants can bring home. She has a tiny government house of 2 rooms, a kitchen and bathroom where she houses herself and numerous dependants who rely on her. I have sponsored her for many years and wanted to meet her in person. Also my parents recently died and I wanted to see for myself if their bequest could help this lady and her family. Jacob drove us uphill to a sparsely populated section of the backwoods. It was only 20 minutes from town, but the hill is so steep it is isolated and difficult to get to but it has a wonderful view over a green valley. The further from town, the steeper the hill, the more the land is unwanted and difficult to use so it's cheap hence the government give it to the very poorest people. The family turned out to meet us: me, my husband Dermot together with Jacob and Deepa.

I mention here that I have lived in France with my husband for the last 7 years where manners are strictly followed, shaking hands every time you meet a stranger plus a friendly pressing of one's cheek either side to an acquaintance or friend; such formal greetings are absolutely normal and cannot be ignored like we Londoners do all the time. So we arrived and I automatically went forward to shake hands with Radhamani and her family. I had a fleeting moment of noticing that she was surprised, delighted and also very shy of me as were her kids. The next moment she was beaming with smiles. Was it because I had shaken hands with her? It was only momentary and perhaps I was mistaken, but she was taken by surprise that I approached her in this manner and she kept my hand in hers a wee bit longer than the French. So I shook hands with the shy kids too. Indians are shy - it's not an Indian custom to be physical.

So we had a tour of the house, a modest concrete bungalow with a recent top floor built and paid for by the government to house Radhamani's growing family. Most family houses are a mish-mash of relatives and Radhamani is no exception. Her husband left her so she houses her own 4 children and has other responsibilities. Her eldest son has just completed an expensive course in aviation - he might get employment as a ground worker, baggage handler or suchlike at the new airport in Cochin. Her twin boys of 16 years were both still both at school as is her daughter doing zoology (she hopes to train as a nurse but the fees may be beyond her budget). On top of that Radhamani's sister lives with the family so there is a mix of teenagers and girls and boys and an two adults all in need of either education or support. With such a crowd of people of age and gender, she qualified for extra space so the government built a small room on top of the bungalow, a concrete box with just a door space and no windows. It can only be accessed from the outside by a gangway across the steep hill slope. (The authorities build rooms, but no means to access it), so the family cobbled together a home-made bridge of bamboo poles and scrap wood so you can hop over the sloping land into the top room; not a safe structure when the rains come!

A couple of weeks after our visit I heard that one of Radhamani's twin boys had been killed in a motorbike accident. He was only 16. The roads cannot cope with the sheer weight of traffic so sadly accidents are common.

Radhamani would have paid something for a funeral and the obligatory rites - goodness knows how much that would be - I helped out.

I loved India from the moment I got off the plane in my 20s. I have learned a lot and I'm lucky to have reached the age of 67.....

NEW BANK DETAILS IMPORTANT / INFORMATION REGARDING DONATIONS

At the beginning of the year we had to change our bank account as Lloyds told us they were no longer providing accounts for Trusts. We now have an account with CAF Bank (Charities Aid Foundation). If you donate by standing order or bank transfer and wish to send money or continue with your payments please make sure you have altered where you send the payments. Our Lloyds account will close later this year. (We've already contacted sponsors with the details)

If you feel you can help with a donation for one of our projects please send any amount to us however big or small;

- Cheques can be sent to the address above although to avoid bank charges a bank transfer is preferable for us.**
- You can send by bank transfer direct to our Bank account – PLEASE CONTACT US FOR DETAILS IF REQUIRED**
- or you can pay by Paypal and debit or credit card by clicking on the Donations tab on our website.**

You're welcome to specify where you would like the money spent. We have Building, Education, Hungry (food aid) funds and a General & Emergency Fund. If you don't specify we'll put it in the latter.

STAMPS

Please continue to collect and send us any postage stamps that you get as any type or quantity are useful to us

EMAIL ADDRESSES

Don't forget, please let us know if you change your email address !!