MiriamDeanFund

Winter Newsletter 2024

Dear Friends,

Sr Rani Joe – an appreciation

When we came to set up our routine video calls recently, we were surprised to find that Sister Rani Joe was no longer heading the Holy Cross Special School in Mannackanad, Kerala. She had led us to expect such a move, but she did not know when it might happen. We did, of course, have a call with Sr Bobby Paul, who has relieved Rani (see page 3).

Sister Rani arrived at the convent in Mannackanad in 2001; some local children with mental disabilities were being given help, but this needed to be put on a firmer footing. Physiotherapy, in which she is trained, is very important to give such people the greatest mobility, but Rani is a natural leader and quickly developed a vision for a properly equipped school. The Fund's part in this was covered in one of our histories (Winter 2021).

One thing Rani particularly developed for the pupils was sports; she is a volleyball coach and trained up a school team that went on to win honours in Kerala. This led to her coaching the all-India volleyball team for several Special Olympics. This involved visits to the national capital, New Delhi, requiring a three-day train journey! Possibly as big a challenge would have been persuading her superiors in the Holy Cross Order that she might wear a track suit rather than a sister's obligatory sari. Another attribute that would have helped as national coach is that Rani speaks six languages – but not, it turns out, Kannada which is the language she is having to learn now.

We did have a call with Rani; she was as cheerful as ever and obedient to her new task – which is essentially doing the same again in Maski, Karnataka, where 8 mentally challenged children in a poor rural area need improved schooling, as she did all those years ago in Mannackanad. Cheerfulness, obedience, perseverance and evident love for her pupils are the characteristics that have endeared Rani to us and made our support of Mannackanad such a joy.



Rani in 2008

An audio version of this Newsletter is on our website.

News from our Partners

Regular readers will know that since the pandemic we have made a habit of holding video calls with our partners around twice each year. These help to keep us up-to-date, but they are not a complete substitute for our visits; we are actively planning to go to southern India next year – more on this below. Here is a summary of what we discovered during this autumn's calls.

CODI

Nicholas and Agnes reported that there is still political unrest in Nairobi which spills occasionally into demonstrations and violence. The young men that CODI seeks to influence – providing education support and routes into employment – are pressured to be involved, but none have been injured. The centre from which CODI works has moved twice and is in a safer location. Despite the backdrop, more pairs of barbers have been trained and set up in businesses.

Loaves & Fishes Network

We had sent funds to Pateka, the general manager, for a series of workshops for the parents of children in the Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC). These had proved very effective; in particular they had allowed discussion of the issues around alcohol abuse which is a national problem in South Africa. Pateka was also worried about their main streams of funding, mostly of government origin, which were coming through very slowly this year.



Group at ECDC

AHM

It was good to see Renata Desai (founder) alongside Babu (co-manager) on the call. A major concern for them was running the clinic (the original offering by AHM) with only one regular doctor; it was possible but tough. The children's hostel was full because, sadly, there had been an increase in child marriage attempts and abuse. At the Training Centre they had opened a course, encouraged by government, on solar-power equipment maintenance.

DEEPAM

We spoke with Sr Hilaria about the management of their 80 after-school learning centres (over 1700 pupils), each with their own "animator". They are organised in four clusters each with a leader allowing Hilaria and the manager, Manimal, to get appropriately involved. The climate emergency had provided a theme for all the classes through the year, and the pupils had responded enthusiastically.

JJH

Our second call with Sr Stella since she had become Director and with Sr Anastasia listening in. They commented that rain had been plentiful and their bore-well, about which there had been concerns, was supplying good water. The hospice generally had 15-20 in-patients, and out-patient services were operating every day. They too were active on climate emergency issues and had received funding from the Irish Government to work on this.

RUADT

Murugan was joined by his daughter Bharani, and it emerged that she had recently stepped up to run RUADT whilst Murugan was recovering from an operation. We had sent funds this year to help fund a new school building for disabled pupils in Theni. It is already running in a small way in inadequate premises; land had been bought and fundraising was proceeding. All other programmes at RUADT were going well.



Murugan and Bharani

Holy Cross Special School, Mannackanad

Our principal interest for this call was to meet Sr Bobby Paul who is now headteacher. She had been at Mannackanad in its early days assisting Rani, so it was quite familiar, and was recently head at another regular school. She commented on the dedication of the staff and thanked us for the funds we had sent for a photocopier which was being well used.

Visit

We have decided that four trustees will visit our partners in southern India next February – a good month to go when the weather is moderate. Robert has not been in a good many years, and Jenny was last there in 2018, while Sheila and Andy visited two years ago. We will travel through Madurai to Vathalagundu where DEEPAM has its centre, stay at Jeevan Jyothi for a couple of nights, and head to Bodi where AHM and RUADT are close together. Several hours by taxi will take us over the mountains into Kerala and Mannackanad. We are excited at the prospect of seeing old friends and making new ones.

This is the final article in our series providing brief histories of our relationships with partners; in this issue we cover JJH.

Jeevan Jyothi Hospice

Looking back at our newsletters around the turn of the millennium, they contain several stories about the terrible effect that HIV/AIDS was having in southern India where trustees had been visiting. In the Winter Newsletter of 2002, a meeting is mentioned between the trustees and Sr Anastasia (and Sr Rani!); the introductions, as ever, having been made by Br James Kimpton. Sr Anastasia, a nurse by profession, was living outside the convent in the slums of Theni, and she had the vision to found an HIV/AIDS hospice for the district. £45k was promised by the Fund, and so Jeevan Jyothi (place of light and life) was conceived; a year later, the Newsletter records the building completed and admissions having started in the September – fast work. Additional capital costs were met and annual running costs supported.

And so it has pretty much continued for the past 20-plus years. It was quickly realised that the hospice was working equally well as a hospital and sending patients home. An outpatients' facility was constructed with space for a pharmacy and accommodation for occasional visits (including of the Fund's trustees). Very quickly Jeevan Jyothi was winning awards for its work and training others how to provide treatment. A Training Hall was the next building that we helped to fund, and this allows the staff to host education events for young people, a key part of the mission which in total is: end-of-life care, treatment, rehabilitation, on-going support and prevention.

Sr Anastasia has been retired for some years but still lives within the JJH campus; several sisters have succeeded her as Directors of the hospice. Better awareness means that new cases of HIV/AIDS are fewer, and the development of medication has made treatment more successful, but the whole mission of Jeevan Jyothi is still much in demand. We have been privileged to share in Sr Anatasia's vision and help to provide over 20-years of care.



Sr Anastasia with young patient in 2010

Snippets

Very many thanks to those who helped out at our coffee morning in October. There was a nice buzz for a couple of hours around St Nicolas Church Hall in Newbury. Drinks and great homemade cakes sold well; tombola prizes attracted many to try for them and bric-a-brac went briskly, although with quite a bit left for next time! It was super to see former trustees Trevor, Christine and Brian and many faithful supporters. We raised £321.39 which is a good result.

With the cost of postage having increased so dramatically over recent times, we have made the difficult decision to stop sending 'thank you' letters for cheques received through the post for less than £100. We of course continue to be very grateful for all donations received however large or small and we hope that you will support this decision as a means of restricting the Fund's outgoings. Where we have an email address we will continue to send acknowledgements as before.

Barely a Newsletter goes by without mention of connection with Reaching the Unreached (RTU) and the seeds sown by Br James Kimpton for that organisation and several of our partners. The connection continues at home since Andy is also a trustee of RTU(UK). Most trustees' meetings start with a video call with Fr Antony Paulsamy, who is the Director in India, and we receive their monthly newsletters. RTU continues to thrive both in India and here.

Small print: We are sending you this newsletter because you have indicated your consent, or you have previously donated to us. You can change your consent by contacting us. We promise to keep your details securely and will never pass them to a third party.

MiriamDeanFund

Trustees:
Jenny & Robert Buchanan, Sheila & Andy Moore, Laura Buchanan,
Miriam Dean Refugee Trust Fund Charity No: 269655

Hidden House, 3 Ladwell Close,
Newbury RG14 6PJ
Telephone: 0300 102 3064
Email: trustees@miriamdeanfund.org.uk

About the Fund

We are a small charity, founded in the late 1940s, when it operated out of Miriam Dean's home.

We reach overseas to some of the world's poorest people in partnership with established local groups, providing financial resources to turn their ideas into a positive reality. Our partners work in: physical & mental disability; education & training; health and the elderly. We are in touch with them regularly.

At home, we aim to maintain personal contact with our supporters, hoping to make the Fund feel like an extended family.

We do all this voluntarily. We have no staff or premises and minimal expenses (covered by income from funds awaiting allocation), so that we can send overseas every penny given to us in donations. This year that will be around £130k.

Miriam wrote in the early days of her recognition that she could "lift only tiny corners of human suffering". We accept that today but still feel motivated to follow where she led.

Postscript

It is always wonderful to speak to our partners in India and Africa by Zoom, and although it is no substitute for visiting, it has now become a twice-yearly event for us. Each partner is truly inspirational with their unfailing passion for the caring outreach that fills their daily lives, whether that is for sick elderlies, the severely handicapped, or early-stage education for the poorest of children.

Climate change and planetary awareness are topics of concern the world over and are marked by rising temperatures in both sub-Saharan Africa and southern India. Our partners' response is truly inspiring – their unalloyed positivity in instigating programmes for educating the youngest in society. They teach them to be custodians of the planet through energy use and a deep respect for nature, and through this learning, to become ambassadors of change for the generations that are to come. Of course, we all must also play our part if their futures are to be secure.