MiriamDeanFund

Summer Newsletter 2025

Dear Friends,

India Visit – an overview and asides

Another June and another opportunity to update you on our activities and events!

We, Sheila and Andy, travelled to Southern India in February to visit our five partners there and to assess current needs that both challenge and inspire them to find new ways of caring for the poor and disadvantaged.

This newsletter has details about the trip in subsequent pages. Here, we would like to say something about how such a visit works practically and to share some of the surprises that we experienced.

It is always exciting to return to familiar places and, having visited many times we can see how things have moved on; new people to meet and new aspirations to discuss. We flew in and out via Mumbai with internal flights to Madurai in Tamil Nadu, returning home via Kochi in Kerala. Our wonderful partners care for our needs when visiting; transport, accommodation and meals. Welcomed as friends, we stayed in all the same rooms as our previous trip! Typically, there is one full day with each partner but this is supplemented with evenings, conversations over meals and other events; the whole visit was 13 days.

Sister Hilaria of DEEPAM is also the Head of the Department of Applied Research at the Gandhigram Institute which she invited us to visit. We toured the excellent museum of Gandhi's life, and somewhat unexpectedly, did a guest lecture, introduced by the Vice-Chancellor. We also met with Jesuit fathers and two members of the Dutch NGO Mensen met een Missie (Men with a mission). Such meetings are so encouraging since they are with like-minded people who are also trying to help humanity. Similarly at RUADT we met Heike Haier an occupational therapist helping the physiotherapists; her visit was sponsored by a German Government funded organisation which provides expert advice on a wide range of topics.

So much packed into a few days! We returned very reassured about our partners and their work, exhilarated by all our experiences and a bit tired!



Learning about Climate Change

An audio version of this Newsletter is on our website.

Southern India Visit – DEEPAM

Based in Vathalagundu, DEEPAM's outreach to 84 disadvantaged communities to provide after-school classes has had our long-term support. Sister Hilaria and the team ensured that we had a "royal" welcome and drew many staff and youngsters together to entertain and brief us on what they had been doing. We later went to see three groups, two meeting in their teachers' houses and the third in a covered space beside the village temple. It was good to see more boys engaged this time, especially in one instance in a drama on father/son relationships. The theme for the year across all groups had been the climate emergency and that came through in all sorts of ways. Smart phones are now modestly priced and many families have one which the youngsters get to use . A future theme will seek to introduce the benefits to be had from the devices whilst teaching about the dangers from social media which we hear much about.



Drama on Father/Son relationships

Jeevan Jyothi



Sister Stella

It was good to meet Sister Stella in person (after previous video calls) and learn more of her journey to become the Director at the Jeevan Jyothi HIV/AIDS Hospice. She had worked there in its early days and had kept in touch. The small convent community is providing care for Sr Anastasia who is quite frail. There were more in-patients than on our last visit, including a young boy using a frame to be as active as possible, and we were encouraged by our engagement with them. A man with part Irish heritage thanked us profusely in good English for all that the Fund had enabled the Hospice to achieve. Outreach continues, and we visited a nearby community and saw the beginning of plastic collection for recycling.

AHM

We spent some quality time with Renata Desai, the co-founder of AHM in Bodinayakanur, which began as a clinic but now includes much more. In the training centre, students were working for public service entry exams for highly sought posts. We visited an after-school class in a school yard which featured some fearsome stick-whirling. Babu, co-director, made sure we saw the items we had sent funds for last year, but we declined to road-test the mopeds! It was good to meet up again with Bruce and Tamar DeJong, he at work in the clinic and she still running Blue Mango (fair-traded clothes etc.) which we had helped to establish 20-years previously. On the leafy campus, the residents of the hostels for elderly women and men, children and short-stay youngsters were the audience for AHM's staff celebrating the Annual Day with games, song and dance.

RUADT

Murugan, the initiator of the RUADT organisation for the disabled, and our long-term friend, had major surgery around a year ago and is still not as active as before. His daughter Bahrani (just 23), whom we met on the last visit, had taken on running things when her father was recuperating, and continues to be much involved. She commented on the challenges, noting that many of the senior staff had known her since birth. A new bus was being inspected – it is to replace one that is older than Bahrani - we will help with funding the new vehicle as we had with its predecessor. RUADT now manages five schools for mentally challenged pupils; we had a valuable discussion with Sandhi, the headteacher of the Balamurugan School (on the main campus), about the issues she manages in providing education to those with widely differing needs.

Holy Cross Special School, Mannackanad

Sister Bobby-Paul, accompanied by Sister Mary-Frances, whom we had met on the last visit, made the journey to Bodinayakanur to travel with us back to Mannackanad in Kerala. This enabled us to talk about her route to becoming the headteacher of the Special School, replacing Sr Rani, with whom she had worked in its early days.



Assembling a Christmas Star

The following morning we greeted the pupils arriving on the school buses, and it was particularly good to find Bindu (first met as a pupil 15-years ago) now as a member of staff despite her deafness. We saw newly-introduced goats and chickens, promising to help in increasing their numbers, and pupils making Christmas decorations for sale locally. In common with all such schools, government now pays the teaching staff for pupils 18 and under; this is a minority of Mannackanad's complement of 95. We joined in a celebration which the pupils had clearly enjoyed preparing for; some fine dancing and recitals.

Whilst our focus had been the India trip, we kept in touch with our partners in Kenya and South Africa by video calls in mid-March. It is still planned to visit both of them later this year.

CODI

We spoke with Agnes and Nicholas. CODI maintains its programmes for young men in Nairobi despite a difficult political and economic background. The removal of US AID funding by the new Washington administration was causing uncertainty and political parties were deeply unpopular. Nevertheless, two new pairs of barbers will be ready to set up in business this year, and we have agreed, as previously, to help with their start-up costs. We have also helped before with providing text books for the education support that CODI delivers, but there remains indecision on the curriculum which makes it inappropriate to help in this way for the moment.

Loaves & Fishes Network

The call with Pateka, the general manager of this NGO which assist pre-schools around the city of East London, was relatively brief. She had been in touch in February about a cash-flow crisis caused because other grants had not arrived when expected. We were able to advance our regular funding (and supplement it) and arranged for that to be sent quickly. Pateka was grateful, but commented that uncertainties remain. One possible source of future funds was the Liquor Board! It is charged with encouraging responsible use, and believes that the parents' workshops (we had funded these previously) which had addressed alcohol abuse might be beneficial in their campaign.

Snippets

A snippet last time was about the connection with RTU both in the UK and India. There was just enough time during the visit to stop by at the main RTU site in G. Kallupatti and say hello to Fr Antony Paulsamy, Director. We were taken to see a recent innovation; laptop computers carried by van, complete with tables, chairs and power, to local schools to provide lessons (we saw some 8th standard girls at work) which wouldn't otherwise be possible.

A further incident from the visit: for the first time we rode on an elephant! Sister Mary-Frances from Mannackanad is very taken with them and suggested it as a break during our long journey into Kerala. Rather like being on a boat in a choppy but slowly-moving sea and quite stretching on the wide saddle!

As regular readers will know, the Fund works by sending money, that our faithful supporters have donated, to our partners overseas. We generally make decisions and start the transfer of funds in the early spring. There is an anxious wait while these make their way through the international banking system, and there have often been delays, particularly en-route to India. We are very happy to report that this year everything went very smoothly and rather faster than before.

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

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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 over £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 said that money makes the world go round, but (leaving aside the questionable physics) how? The answer we would suggest is to allow and support relationships. Our latest visit to India reminds us that in our work with the Miriam Dean Fund we see both sides of the world: where money is plentiful and where there is a lack, and we are privileged to be able to help change peoples' lives for the better.

Of course it is all done through a chain of relationships, each one personal and many forming a network much wider than that. Hidden connections link you with a street boy making a new start running a barber shop; or an orphaned child, no longer alone but cared for in a safe and loving environment.

In many cases there are no more than four links in the chain, and God bless you, it all starts with you!