



www.supportingdalitchildren.com Tel 07909 705125

February 2020 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

I have just returned from 10 days in India - a last-minute visit but an extremely interesting and fruitful one. There is too much to tell you in one Newsletter, so this is the first of several in the coming weeks.

A magical feeling

I flew into Hyderabad in order to meet up with 15 former students who are now working for Tata Consultancy Services (TCS Ltd). We have known these young men and women since 2007. Some of you have been sponsoring them! Over the past 13 years, collectively we have been supporting and following their progress from Primary School through to High School, Sixth Form and finally to Degree. One of the students had taken a day off work to meet me from the airport and show me the city. He took me to the offices of TCS where several former students took a quick break from their desks to meet us outside.



It was a truly magical feeling watching these young men, who I had last seen at Manvi College in 2017, walk out of their enormous office block with beaming smiles and looking so smart. For me, as a friend and supporter from afar, this moment was incredibly heart-warming; the culmination of 12 years' extremely hard work on each of these student's part.

Back in 2008, as children of 8 – 10 years old, these former students had little to look forward to in the present or future. They were not going to school then, they were working as 'cow-grazing' girls or boys, or 'bonded' (slave) labourers in the fields. Some were Devadasi children – Devadasi are temple prostitutes.

Then the founding Fathers of the Mission arrived in their villages and promised them that through a first-class education and a belief in themselves, they were capable of great things.

Shining examples

Once enrolled, the Fathers offered these former students a place at the temporary school in the Manvi campus. This small building trebled up as classrooms, living quarters for pupils

teachers and Fathers, and a kitchen and dining room. From that time on, in the humblest of beginnings, each of these students worked so hard every year, with support and encouragement from their parents, teachers, Fathers and us as sponsor parents, to ultimately complete their dream of finishing their English-medium education. They are now the shining examples to all the current students of Kapepaladi School in Pannur, and Xavier and Loyola Schools in Manvi, of what can be achieved.

An evening of sharing

Having booked a conference room in a hotel nearby, 13 of the young men and women I had come to see, met up after work finished at 8 p.m. to share their experiences of their working lives in Hyderabad.



The evening started with each of them lighting a candle on an up-turned tray, that formed a heart. They had prepared a banner and balloons, and organised supper for us all at the hotel, which they paid for collectively. Actually it was extremely touching as when I went to pay for the meal I discovered they had already paid, (but I did insist on reimbursing them!) During the evening each person present explained how much their education in Manvi had transformed their lives. They said it had taught them the

discipline of hard work, the importance of punctuality and for looking out and caring for one another. They thanked me and all the sponsor parents, for having helped them so much over the years, at which point I had to hold back my tears.

Some of the difficulties faced

The common local language in Hyderabad is not Kannada as it is in Manvi, but Telugu, and one of the girls shared how difficult it had been to learn this language quickly in order to adjust to her new working environment. This girl was initially very shy and not forthcoming at all, but she worked and worked and ended up achieving the highest marks in her Degree class. She was speaking English to me so naturally and with such confidence *and* she had just learnt another language this past year too. Amazing!

Another student told me that on the day of his final exam in Manvi for his Commerce Degree, his uncle had been badly beaten up by some people who were insisting on an interest payment on his loan. When he heard the news, he had to miss his final exam to be by his uncle's side. As devastated as he must have been to miss his final exam, this did not deter him. He left the College and I lost touch with him initially. Just over 2 years on when I saw him again face to face, he explained to me that after missing his final exam, he had found a temporary job in Bangalore in a shop. His working hours there were



from 1 to 10 p.m. every day. Every morning he got up early to study for his exam, and his earnings from the shop were used to finance the retake. This young man is an orphan, he lost both his parents to cancer by the age of 3 and was brought up by his uncle and aunt.

Foresight and love amidst alcoholism and violence

This young man's uncle is an alcoholic and a violent man, but I learnt that actually he himself had been educated to the age of 16. He had had the foresight to know that his orphan nephew needed to get out of the village and pursue an education, so he sent him to Pannur to the government school and paid what he could afford for him to stay in the newly built hostel. From there, this boy at the age of 8 met Father Maxim, one of the founding Fathers of the Mission, and went on to Manvi school and Degree College. On the morning that I left Hyderabad, he recorded a message of thanks for his sponsor parent which I know will be wonderful for them to hear when we meet up later this month.

Sending salaries back to their families

It is incredible to hear that most of these former students' earnings from TCS are being sent back to their families, to help repay debts and pay for day to day needs, as well as paying for medicines and hospital treatment. One young man told me that he had earned 36,000 Rs the previous month, (approx. £400), made up of his basic salary of 18,000 Rs per month (£200), plus 18,000 Rs commission from sales he had made. His work target is to make 200 phone calls per day selling insurance for TCS, and from these 200 calls he hopes for a conversion rate of 3%, i.e. that 6 calls will convert financially as the customer decides to buy the insurance he is selling. The working conditions are strict, each employee gets just one hour per day for all breaks, including comfort breaks, and each time they leave the office they clock in and out. Supervisors are constantly watching them and idle chit chat is not allowed. Going back to this particular student, out of this 36,000 Rs he earned last month, he kept 5000 Rs for his monthly hostel fees, 1000 Rs for his food for the month, and the rest he sent back to his family. His sister is Annapurna, who we visited this time



and who is pictured here with Sister Leena in Pannur. Annapurna was nursing, but at the end of 2018 she was struck down with a rare neurological disease that attacked the sheath surrounding her spinal column. She was paralysed and in hospital for months in Mangalore, hundreds of miles from home. Many of you contributed towards the medical expenses that she needed as her parents were struggling to pay for the treatment and drugs she needed then, and still needs today. I will talk more about Annapurna's health and how she is doing in a future Newsletter, but it was touching to hear that she is one of the recipients of her brother's hard-earned money from Hyderabad.

I was really taken aback to hear that all the students are doing the same with their salaries, keeping the bare minimum they need and sending the rest back to their families. They don't think twice about sending most of their salary home as their parents have also made sacrifices over the years, to pay their share of school fees for their sons' and daughters'

education. I did suggest to the students, that perhaps in a year or so's time, after their family's loan has been repaid, then perhaps they can begin to save a little, say 5000 Rs per month, for their own future needs.

In Manvi Degree College

Whilst in Manvi I talked to 3 students who are now in the final year of their Degree. They too are hoping for a job at TCS Ltd. In fact there are tens of students in their year who are currently doing a training course for TCS. Pending the outcome of their training, and the results of their final exams, they hope to get an offer of a job at TCS. One of the 3 boys asked me about taking a post-graduate Degree and how to finance it? I suggested that there are two ways to achieve this. Father Arun, the Superior of the Mission, has just started a loan scheme for certain Degree students who are particularly strong in English, to loan the tuition fees for a Master's Degree. The scheme is such that the loan is then repaid once they have completed their Master's, by returning to Loyola College in Manvi and becoming a Lecturer in the College for 3 years. I think this loan scheme is a good idea. Alternatively, having taken their Degree and got an offer to work at TCS, individuals can work for 2 or 3 years, and save up themselves for a Master's Degree. So there are options which is always good. It was really uplifting to see with my own eyes how former students who make it all the way through to Loyola College to Degree level, can get a job relatively quickly and are able to stand on their own two feet. We also met up with postgraduate students in Mangalore for a weekend, one of whom was the first to take up the offer of a loan for her course from Father Arun and is returning to Manvi College as a lecturer in May.

From the youngest of students - to the postgraduate Degree students

This is what Supporting Dalit Children has been working towards since 2007. Our future aims remain the same - to strive to support and encourage the impoverished and oppressed Dalit children to complete an excellent English-medium education



Kapepaladi school UKG students



Post Graduate students in Mangalore

I thought it appropriate to begin this series of Newsletters with sharing news about these former students. It has been a privilege to watch them on their journey through school, College and now into the work place. These young people's testimonies reinforce the whole purpose of our sponsorship!!

Thank you so much for all your support

With best wishes, Dinah