

## THE NEEM TREE TRUST NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER 2020

Thank you very much for the support you have given us in raising funds for the Boys' Home in Tirunelveli and St Luke's Leprosy Hospital, Peikulam, south India.

### FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

During the financial year 2019/2020 The Neem Tree Trust was represented at the following events:

Christina Cornish's Open Gardens, Byde Mill, Corsham  
John Kendall's stall at Rowde School Fete  
June Gerson's Cream Tea at Keynsham  
John Kendall's stall at Rowde  
Mike & Alison's Coffee Morning, Winsley  
John Kendall's Christmas stall, Seend  
Pat Kinzett's Christmas shop, Dilton Marsh



The above generated £7,007 and £70 came from other miscellaneous sales.

Kathy gave talks on the work of The Neem Tree Trust to:

St John's Mothers Union, Keynsham  
Pharmaceutical Students at Bath University  
Upper Seagry Womens Institute

These talks generated £286.00

The following organisations generously made donations to The Neem Tree Trust amounting to £2771.00.

Steeple Ashton Women's Institute  
Prior Park Garden Centre, Bath  
Winsley PCC  
Christchurch Wives Group, Bradford on Avon  
Ashton Mill Services, Melksham  
Colerne PCC



We claimed Gift Aid of £2746.00 from the Inland Revenue on donations from UK taxpayers.

In October 2019 we sent out our annual newsletter to supporters giving them an update on the children's progress and inviting them to make a donation to The Neem Tree Trust for the benefit of the children at the boys' home and the patients and children at the Leprosy Hospital. Donations from individuals and organisations for both the Boys' Home and St Luke's, including regular standing orders, amounted to £19,715

The Neem Tree Trust deposits funds as they are raised into a CAF Gold account. In the financial year 2019/2020 bank interest amounted to £59.00.

## **SCHT BOYS HOME**

During the financial year 2019/2020 the Trust provided a grant of £21,916 to the SCHAT Boys' Home to pay for the general day to day running of the home as well as:

- Assistance with welfare and rehabilitation when the boys return to their villages after leaving the home.
- Assistance for boys who are studying further education at college.
- Improvements to the buildings and facilities on the campus.



I stayed at the Boys' Home for two weeks in November 2019. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my first visit in 1999 and was extra special as the children entertained us with a celebratory programme of music and dance.

During my stay I couldn't help reflecting on my very first visit to India all those years ago and how back then I could never have imagined how that visit was to change my life. I thought of the amazing people I have met in India and also, through the charity we set up in 2003, the number of friends I have made back home - people I wouldn't have met if my lovely husband, Ken, and my family had not supported and encouraged me to take that first trip.

Hundreds of boys have passed through the home during those years - all fun-loving with smiling faces and bundles of energy. Some of the first boys I met, most of whom had been affected by polio, are now married with children of their own. All of them were given a chance to shine in spite of their circumstances. Dr Chelliah, the founder of the home and an inspiration to both the boys and myself, would tell them to "look up to the stars and not down at your feet".



In 2019 Laura Kinzett, the lovely daughter of my dear friend and fellow trustee, Patricia, had taken a sabbatical from work and was travelling around India. I was overjoyed when Laura said she wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps and visit the Boys' Home and St Luke's and I made arrangements for her visit to coincide with my own visit in November. This is her very moving account of her experience:

*The train pulled into Tirunelveli earlier than expected. It was 07:05, I thought we arrived at 07:25. A quick exchange with my lower bunk buddy confirmed I had indeed arrived at Tirunelveli; I grabbed my bags, fearful the train would start leaving any second, and tumbled off the train into Dr John - a doctor at St Luke's - who was on the platform ready to meet me. After stopping for a no-frills, delicious breakfast we set off to St Luke's Leprosarium, my home for the next 2 weeks.*

*I didn't know what to expect from my time with the two organisations supported by The Neem Tree Trust. I knew very little about Leprosy, save what I recall from Sunday School lessons as a kid. Nor did I know much about the hardship afforded to children with polio or born with other disabilities in southern India.*



*I'm not here to tell you of the horrors of either; you're involved with this incredible charity so I've assumed you know enough; if you don't I hope this might prompt you to learn a little more. Instead I wanted to share with you some of the things St Luke's and The Boys Home taught me. Which I hope might give you a further glimpse into the amazing work of The Neem Tree Trust.*

*The things I learnt.....*

*I learnt that not speaking the same language is inconsequential when you have the universal languages of smiles, gestures, singing, dancing, touch and food. They are by far a more powerful way of building relationships and showing kindness.*



*I learnt that the stigma attached to Leprosy hasn't changed much in 2000 years. And whilst it's awful to have Leprosy, in India it's devastating to be a woman with Leprosy. Their husbands invariably divorce them and they are often ostracised by their families. As a result, for many of the women I met, St Luke's is their home.*

*I learnt that happiness doesn't cost a penny.*

*I learnt that it's highly likely Leprosy will have a resurgence. Less and less doctors know how to diagnose it as the government pulls funding in a bid to be seen as 'progressive' on the world stage. (Leprosy is seen as a disease of the poor and vulnerable.)*

*I learnt that you don't need privilege, cool clothes or the latest tech to give you confidence. The children all have fantastic confidence - they are bold, open, gregarious, brave and loving. The 'Program' (small show) I was lucky enough to watch saw them fearlessly get up on stage to sing, dance and act in a way that made me feel incredibly pathetic when, after being asked to say a few words at the end, I felt my nerves rising.*

*I learnt how to effectively eat with my right hand. And that Dr Haebus & Princess were right - food really does taste better that way - and off a banana leaf.*

*I learnt that like love, kindness can be unconditional too.*

*I learnt that the work Kathy does with The Neem Tree Trust is remarkable. The work the charity has done and continues to do to support these two organisations is life making - it affords people, who Indian society would ordinarily overlook, a home and instils in them a sense of worth. Invaluable. The love and respect between Kathy, the children, patients and staff is palpable. Thank you, Kathy, and everyone at St Luke's and the Boys Home for enabling me to have such an incredible, heart-warming and life impacting experience.*



## ST LUKE'S LEPROSY HOSPITAL

Through the Trust, a number of supporters of St Luke's have made donations towards the feeding programme set up at the hospital for the benefit of the in-patients and children as well as sponsoring individual children. During the financial year 2019/2020 the Trust provided a grant of £15,000 to St Luke's Leprosy Hospital.

St.Luke's is a referral centre for leprosy patients suffering from complications, which cannot be managed by the general practitioners or other hospitals. To meet the needs of such patients requiring hospitalisation, there are three wards, two for men, and one for women, with 33 beds in each. The in-patients receive not only free treatment, but also food, shelter, and clothing free of cost.

There is also a Mercy Home at St Luke's with 8 beds. Sometimes, leprosy can cause blindness. The plight of a blind leprosy patient is pitiable. Normally, a blind person can manage to feel their way around with the help of their sensitive hands and feet. But a leprosy patient has already lost sensitivity in their hands and feet. Such patients come to St Luke's begging for refuge. St. Luke's offers permanent shelter to such desperate patients. They are looked after for life and are never sent away.

### Basket Weaving

At St Luke's many patients, especially women, are taught the art of basket weaving. These bags are sold and the income is directly given to patients enabling them to buy more raw materials and the cycle continues.

Laura - making a basket with Aatchiammal, who is a widow with no children and one of the Leprosy patients at St Luke's who is working as a ward attendant. She is 70 years old, has suffered a great deal of sorrow in her life, has no family to support her but now has a permanent home at the hospital.



Jeyamaari is 29 years old and was born with Spina bifida. As a result of spinal cord surgery undertaken when she was 11 years old, she lost sensation in her lower limbs and developed ulcers which were not healing. She married but sadly lost two babies soon after they were born and her husband deserted her. Nobody was supporting her and she was brought to St Luke's for treatment. She has learnt to make the woven baskets and St Luke's employ her in the office as part of her rehabilitation.



*Message from Mrs Princess, SCHAT Boys Home:*

*We would like to inform you that all our home boys have been sent to their houses, as the Government declared a lockdown from 24th March 2020. However, we came to know that the boys who are studying 10th to 12th Standard are simply sitting in their houses. As such we decided to call the boys who are studying 10th Standard to 12th Standard back to our home. At present there are 21 boys at our home including 4 boys who are studying ITI courses. Our wardens are teaching lessons to our boys at our home. The ITI students are attending classes at their institution.*

*Due to Covid-19 lockdown, all schools and colleges remain closed. Once they re-open our boys will once again attend their schools and colleges.*

*Daily myself, Board Members and Wardens are upholding you and your dear family members and Neem Tree Trust supporters in our daily prayers, and hope God will give you all good health, long life now and evermore.*

*Message from Dr Haebus, Medical Superintendent at St Luke's:*

*We are all safe here. But the pandemic did change the perspective of health care.*

*Our hospital functioned as usual but we had to shuffle the timings for all our staff to reduce the contact time.*

*We had regular outpatients as well as inpatients coming to our hospital even in the lockdown period. We ran separate fever clinics and triage.*

*Our work load increased, both for out-patients and in-patients, as most of the hospitals closed during this lockdown.*

*Fear was there, but it made us wiser.*

*We had to adapt, improvise and survive. There was no way around it.*

*We have begun to appreciate even the simplest of things in our lives which we had taken for granted earlier.*

*Things are improving now and hopefully we will get back to our normal lives soon.*

*But our donations have decreased during this lockdown period as most of the donors and well-wishers were unable to visit us. Their regular contributions were very helpful in the smooth functioning of our hospital.*

*Thank you once again for all your care and concern for our cause.*