

# Action Aid Australia Ltd

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2004-2005

**(This report is in two parts, with Dr. Brian Ryan and Ian Pickering as joint contributors.)**

2005 has seen the conclusion to an outstanding contribution by Dr. Brian Ryan. Brian has served on the Board of Directors for eight years, the past five as Honorary Chairman.

During June, Brian relocated to Western Australia on work matters. He will continue to contribute to the success of Action Aid Australia as an Honorary Specialist Advisor. We will miss his personal presence at Board meetings from now on.

Brian has prepared the following comments for inclusion in this report.

I would like to extend my greetings to the AAA and AGM membership on 14<sup>th</sup> October. I would like to thank the members of AAA for the privilege of being Honorary Chairman and I would like to pay tribute to the hardworking professional team that makes up the Board of AAA.

An AusAID review was carried out on my watch as Chair, I would like to comment on the AusAID review. It was disappointing that our accreditation with AusAID was not renewed. However, this does not reflect on the management of any projects it rather reflects on the overheads necessary to demonstrate accountability. The review was valuable in making us aware of short-comings in our systems and your Board has begun to actively address these criticisms. However, at the same time it is clear that the benchmarks do not take into account the relative risks associated with small and large NGOs.

I would want to go on the record in expressing the poor performance of AusAID in setting up the review and the unsatisfactory feedback from AusAID after the review. In my view AusAID itself has not been accountable to AAA.

However despite this set back, I am sure you will be buoyed by the achievements of all the projects over the last year and I congratulate all those that made these achievements possible.

Finally I would like to wish the incoming Board a very successful year  
Best wishes, Brian Ryan

Continuation of report by Ian Pickering :

Loss of AusAID funding has had an impact on our finances. Apart from the reduction in AusAID funding, our support from members and other donors almost matched income from the previous year (at 98%).

In Australia expenses have again been kept to a minimum, but with decreased AusAID support they reached 14.5% of total expenditure this financial year. It is worth noting that travel costs (5.2%) has been covered by special donations, leaving our actual administration costs at around 9%.

We are pleased with the continuing success of our popular Child Sponsorship programs at the All Bengal Women's Union, and at SEDS (Social Education and Development Society). The total number of children and young people that we provide sponsorship support for has grown to 189 with 125 at SEDS and 64 at ABWU; a pleasing result. Thanks go to all our sponsors for their special gift for extremely needy children.

Our project work in South India and Bangladesh continues to be the major focus of our organisation. Water conservation projects with SEDS continue to provide valuable improvements in natural resources for local communities. Community training in the management of these resources, and the elevated role of women in participating communities are essential factors of these programs.

Through our partnership with Symbiosis, we continue to support needy communities in Bangladesh. Technical Training programs, with a major focus on women's needs, provide lifelong employment skills for otherwise destitute people.

The Jamuna River project in northern Bangladesh provides education and health care programs for itinerant communities who gain their livelihood from agriculture on unstable islands of the River.

Thank you to all our members and supporters for making these life-changing projects and programs possible. Our dedicated team of Directors, Specialist Advisors and volunteers appreciate your support, which provides the impetus for the many hours of work devoted to administration.

Ian Pickering  
Hon. Chairman, from AGM October, 2005.

### **Board of Directors for 2005/2006**

#### **Executive**

Honorary Chairman – Ian Pickering  
Hon. Dep. Chairman – Dr. Roger Hughes  
Hon. Secretary – Rev. Chris Pittendrigh  
Hon. Treasurer – Andrea Pickering

#### **Honorary Directors**

Roger Griffiths  
Glenys Hughes  
Anne Marie Maltby  
Jess Fliegner  
Lyn Pickering

During the course of 2004/05 we have welcomed to the Board Anne Marie Maltby whose profile appeared in the September newsletter.

Our newest Board member is Jess Fliegner to whom we extend a warm welcome. A profile of Jess will appear in our March newsletter.

**Honorary Advisors for 2005/06**

Dr. Brian Ryan  
Dr. Cecily Neil  
Dr. Tom Beer  
Rev. Morris Lee  
Mrs. Joy Handley

**Country Directors**

Bangladesh – Roger Hughes  
India – Ian Pickering

**Child Sponsorship**

India – ABWU – Anne Marie Maltby/Joy Handley  
India – SEDS – Lyn Pickering

**Newsletter Editor**– Lyn Pickering

**Volunteers** – During the past year we have had several volunteers who help with the newsletter and general office work, and we would wish to thank Clare Davis, Marion Mason, Monique, Cyrielle, and other helpers for their time.

**UPDATE ON FINANCES**

**Ian Pickering**

As advised previously, our loss of AusAID accreditation in September, 2004 has had a significant effect on our budget and morale.

We are pleased to advise that, thanks to your continuing support, our donation income has grown considerably. You may be interested in the following :

2005/06	July to November	\$52,550	(donation income)
2004/05	Income for same period	\$32,965	

This increase of \$20,000 to donations compares well with previous AusAID support which was –

\$16,700	(2004/05	(full year)
\$32,856	(2003/04)	(full year)

Thank you for your continuing support of Action Aid Australia. Your support gives a great confidence boost for our hardworking volunteers, and most importantly of all, strong on-going support for communities in need in India and Bangladesh.

**POSITIVE STORIES : What Inspires People to Help Others?      Lyn Pickering**

I would like to share several short stories regarding the things which inspire people to help others. My stories will be about sponsorship which will not surprise many readers, however, these stories could also relate to Watershed Management Projects, Women's Self Help Groups, or Skills Training projects which support many village communities. I decided to concentrate on Child sponsorship, as this area of Action Aid Australia's work receives a lot of emotional support from sponsors, and the stories reflect that.

Whilst preparing my notes, I realised that the majority of the young sponsored people, in particular the girls, would subsequently end up being a member of the Women's Self Help Groups, and becoming involved in decision making in their local communities. Because of their own educational experiences, they will wish to give their own children the same opportunity to attend school regularly.

Donors upon first coming to Action Aid Australia often have one goal, and that is "To Do Good" for someone else in a needy community overseas. As they become involved and understand our programs, they will move to an area or areas which they are interested in to offer their support. For many their interest will be in one country, and for others a more general approach, based on a specific project. Support for a child or children becomes a more emotive issue for some donors. People often relate to their own children and grandchildren, and therefore wish to give other children that same opportunity of education. Whichever way you view this, a child will benefit from your support.

And so we begin....

The first story relates to SIX sisters ranging in age from 67 to a young and sprightly 84 years. I will not say who is what age.

Gwen, one of the sisters has been sponsoring Ashwini at SEDS in India for three years. Gwen rang me recently to advise that she and her sisters would like to jointly sponsor a child. They are now sponsoring Kala Bai, a girl of 11 years who has recently come to live at SEDS. Kala Bai is the oldest of three siblings, with a younger brother and sister. Her father had deserted her mother eight years ago, and the mother was recently murdered in the village where they lived. The children were taken to SEDS by their grandparents who could not look after them, and felt the children were at risk.

In her follow up note to me, Gwen wrote "We all live in Geelong or around about. We are all good mates and have a day together once a month." What an inspirational group of ladies!!..

To Gwen, Dorothy, Selina, Doreen, Hilda and Beverley, A BIG THANK YOU for your generosity in considering the needs of others, and for giving Kala Bai an opportunity to leave the trauma behind and to grow and develop the way children have a right to.

A special thank you also to all other sponsors who have looked beyond self and made a commitment to sponsor a child, or alternatively to support project work. People have told me that \$220.00 per year is not a lot of money, when you consider our weekly food and petrol bills.

**The difference to a child in India however is most significant.**

Photos - sponsored children at SEDS, and Anjali

We have three children under 13 whose mother commenced them on our program when her children each commenced Prep (first year of school in Victoria). Ainsley sponsors Gayathri, Caemin sponsors Rupesh and Finlae sponsors Pavithra. The Australian children and their partners in India are the same age. Ainsley has prepared a talk for her class on her involvement. Her grandparents have also become sponsors.

Two groups from a small Victorian Church community have been sponsoring two children for over a year. Recently a phone call advised that they have some extra funding which came about because of their “bring and buy” stall after Church. Members had been contributing vegetables from their own gardens, jams and other homemade produce. They now have sufficient to fund another child. This Church community is very small, but again inspirational.

There are long term sponsors from Western Australia who sponsor a number of our children, and during the time of their sponsorship, we have watched children come onto the program as very shy, deprived young children. The support given to these young people has allowed a number of them to achieve a Year 10 pass. This Year 10 pass is a high achievement in India for village children, and is similar to the acceptance of a Year 10 pass, fifty years ago in Australia.

Recently I have placed seven more children, both boys and girls. Four of the children selected came about because of a contact whose friend had a daughter going to India to work as a volunteer for three months after her University exams. We wish Rebecca well during her time in India, and hope to be able to make contact with her when we are in country in January. The extra special part of this story is that Rebecca's parents have chosen to sponsor four children, and this will make up part of their Christmas present to their own four children this year.

There are many stories to tell, and it would take many pages. To **all** our sponsors – again, THANK YOU. You are giving these children and young people opportunities previously denied to them. I am looking forward to seeing the children and young people in January, and meeting up with newly sponsored children. Kirra, our 12 year old grand-daughter, will meet for the second time, Aswathamma (also 12), who she has been supporting with our help, since they were both 6. I have asked Kirra to write a story for our March newsletter next year on her impressions of her visit.

The newspapers bring us constant stories with large headlines, but so much negativity. It would make a very pleasant change if they could direct their headlines to some of the very positive things people do. It might just inspire many to understand that when you hold out the hand of friendship and offer support, it can make a positive change to someone's life. This is a means of encouraging and developing a very real opportunity for world peace and understanding amongst all the people of OUR world.

### **WORLD FOOD DAY DINNER AT BAYLES –**

**Andrea Pickering**

The annual World Food Day Dinner at Bayles was held on November 12, and was again a wonderful success. The evening resulted in over \$2,100 being raised for Action Aid Australia, and this money will be put towards supporting our ongoing projects. It was lovely to have some new guests join us, and to catch up with old friends who regularly support the dinner. It was especially nice to meet with guests who have been supporters of AAA for many years and allow us to put faces to names. Judging by the empty plates and the noise levels, it would seem that all who attended had a very enjoyable evening. We would like to thank those who came along to support the dinner, and hope to see you all again next year.

From the editor – Many thanks from the Board and friends to Geoff and Andrea for again opening their home in Bayles for this dinner. Thanks also to Odelia for that wonderful salad, and to Peter for the donation of salad vegetables.

The Board acknowledged thanks also to Ian and Lyn, and Geoff and Andrea for donating the food for the dinner, and to Ian for his plant donations.

Early last year, work was carried out on refurbishing several rooms and bathrooms at The All Bengal Women's Union Home in Calcutta. The work was sponsored by an anonymous donor.

The work carried out included the following

- Painting of many surfaces including halls, dormitories and stairs.
- Passageway and stair case area – Plaster repairs and paint
- Glass – replaced on windows
- Windows repaired and painted
- Bathrooms had major work including new pipes to bathrooms on several floors.
- Exhaust fans

The recipients at the home were delighted with the work done, and it offers them a cheerful and clean environment.

Photos : A dormitory where the girls sleep, and the bright passageway.

P.S. Photos of the toilets were sent, however not as clear, but certainly clean and bright.

We have had recent correspondence from Mrs. Manil Joshua advising that the rains have continued on for some months. Watershed areas are completely full. The advantage of this wonderful rain is the recharging of underground water facilities. Monsoon rain is looked for from June onwards, and this year they arrived early, and rains have continued over the past five months.

The Watershed Management projects in targetted villages, which have been carried out over recent years, will see many improvements to areas where previously top soil was washed away. The small rock walls, gully checks and check dams have allowed the water to gather and filter through, thus raising the water table for the area. The excavated tanks (of small dams) within the larger tank area, will see water remaining in the tanks for a longer period than for many years.

This year the problems are different, with mosquitos being more prevalent. A concentrated campaign to spray where necessary to try and control the problem will help the situation. Guppies have been bred for many years now and are released into waterways to eat the larvae.

It makes a nice change to be able to advise that the area has received excellent rain, and we hope that this will be a bonus for many struggling farmers, and local village people who rely on daily agricultural labour to feed their families. The village communities who have taken part in our project work, would now be reaping the benefits of their earlier work. Increased water supplies will help all people in the area.

**WORLD FOOD DAY LUNCH IN BRIGHT –****Joy Handley**

Once again a great crowd turned out to lunch in Bright, provided by Simone's Restaurant for the fifth year. Sixty seven people had a terrific time and approximately \$1,600 was raised to assist with projects at All Bengal Womens' Union.

Anne-Marie Maltby, one of our new Directors was the Guest Speaker and gave a presentation on her trip to Tibet last year where she headed a team of Dentists and Dental Nurses setting up Dental Health Camps. It was a very informative and amusing presentation.

Anne-Marie also spoke on her visit to ABWU two years ago, and how impressed she and Michael were.

Thanks to Simone and her staff for this wonderful lunch and for her generosity.

The Board extends its thanks to Joy Handley for arranging this function in Bright.

At this time of year the countryside of Bangladesh is beautiful. The flooding of the monsoon season has passed and life returns to normal.

Our Technical Training support program in various villages scattered around Bangladesh moves into its second year (of the three-year plan) in September. This project is a multi-faceted project. Readers will know of the training in a variety of aspects, from garment industry training to hair-dressing and beauty treatment training. However, the project is not just about training, but also about providing infrastructure and organisational support.

A little discussed, but important aspect of this project, is the formation of two co-operatives this coming year following the formation of one pilot co-operative last year. Graduating group members pool their resources in order to provide marketable quantities of garments in a cost-effective manner. By sharing the profits they are able to earn more than they could individually.

Once established each of these co-operatives will be registered with the relevant Department of the Bangladeshi Government.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ‘Keep Our Town Clean’** **Lyn Pickering**

Rajen Joshua and his team at SEDS completed a “Keep Our Town Clean” campaign during our last visit. Over many weeks, children from the local schools prepared banners and posters, and speakers visited schools to discuss environmental issues. Large concrete bins were painted with SEDS logos and placed around the large central town with the local administration giving their support. The school children, supported by staff had a rally with key people talking on the issues. The children marched through the town with their banners and loud speakers. One bin was for rubbish, the second for plastics and recyclable material. .

Photos – School children getting ready to march through their town with the banners, and prepared banners.

## COMPUTER INITIATIVES

Tim Moore  
03 9707 4850  
Berwick, 3806

A special thank you to Tim and his staff for upgrading the Action Aid Computers at no cost. This generous support was most

## M & K PRINTING

For all of your printing requirements, talk to KEN at M & K Printing, Vesper Drive Narre Warren.

Telephone – 9704 8500

Thanks to Ken and his staff over many years for their support

## Christmas Message



The Board of Directors, together with family and friends wish you a peaceful and happy Christmas period.



Please continue to communicate with everyone in our communities worldwide, hold out your hand in friendship, and help bring about a better understanding of peace and goodwill toward one another. If everyone does their bit, we can achieve great things.