

# Action Aid Australia Ltd

**SEDS VISIT - Nov/Dec. 2007**

**Amanda Stone**

My visit to the SEDS farm was not long after a rare heavy rainfall and so the area was uncharacteristically green and water tanks and reserves were almost full. It was early winter with mild temperatures but despite this I was told that most of this stored water would have disappeared by February. I was therefore impressed, to say the least, by what has been achieved by SEDS in under 30 years in this dry, rocky and often inhospitable part of Andhra Pradesh.

On visits to projects currently funded by AAA, I could see the enormous benefits of large projects such as desilting of water tanks, provision of fish fingerlings to these same tanks, protection of existing valuable tamarind groves, and support for the activities of village organizations. More effective storage and use of water over the past two decades has made viable agriculture possible, as well as supplementary incomes from small scale projects such as oil/biofuel seeds and silk worm farming.

The small scale of each farming project, the relatively sustainable use of the land and the care of animals provided such a contrast to the large scale, environmentally devastating and often cruel treatment of animals in many of our farming practices in Australia. The environmental “message” is everywhere in rural India, strongly encouraged by SEDS in the south, and despite the difficulties in implementing it, the awareness among all age groups of what’s important was impressive.



I was particularly interested in, and spent some time in, the schools especially the SEDS school, whose students have contributed to this newsletter recently. The education system, like much of India, is full of contradictions. On one hand is a state directed curriculum and text books which are based on materials and teaching methods more at home 100 years ago –in England. On more than one occasion I visited a classroom with a large number of students “studying” in silence with their teacher sitting passively nearby. This was such a contrast to western approaches which understand that children and adolescents learn by doing and talking as well as “studying”. On the other hand, a Science Fair that I visited with the SEDS students, showcased projects, models and demonstrations by students from many schools which illustrated cutting edge awareness of local and global environmental issues and contemporary and practical solutions which could be implemented locally. There was also evidence of broader educational thinking which is on a par with current trends in Australia, Europe, the UK and the US. That combined with the enthusiasm of students for learning, was cause for optimism.

The SEDS school, established 6 years ago by Ronnie (a Belgium volunteer who has returned many times), has just under 100 students from Kindergarten to Year 10. It is facing a challenging time at present, with 7 of the 10 teachers resigning at the end of the current school year. Trained teachers are difficult to find, more so in rural areas with the attractions of well-paid non-teaching jobs in the city drawing young people away from the area. However, the school is well set-up and has a great deal of potential. It is well equipped and the building and surroundings are good, clean and well maintained. Several of the students are sponsored by AAA, although for many others, their parents make considerable financial sacrifice to provide their children with the advantage of an education conducted mostly in English. The children are enthusiastic and responded very positively to the innovative programmes being run by two young volunteer teachers from Belgium –Jyoti and Thomas –who also provided valuable training for teachers in use of computers.

The SEDS school contrasted with other local schools where most of the children sponsored by AAA attend. These schools were not as well resourced; class sizes were much larger; the buildings were not well maintained and sanitation was poor in some. Many children travel to school by foot, often walking several kilometres (children in the SEDS school are collected by jeep), and in bad weather are likely to not attend. I visited one school at lunchtime where there was not a teacher to be seen –they had all gone home for lunch and left the school full of children unsupervised! If a teacher is absent for the day, children will be sent home. It was obvious that there were many reasons not to attend school and that the implicit agreement in child sponsorship –that school attendance is essential –was a valuable incentive.

The SEDS school, by contrast, has a great deal of potential. It is faced with the challenge of finding and retaining good trained or trainable teachers, who will be supported by the regular supply of volunteers from Europe and Australia. However, it is well managed by SEDS, and there is demand for student places from the local communities.

The school was just one of many successful projects which I was able to see in action at or around SEDS. The long term success of this NGO and the personal and enduring commitment of its CEO, directors and many staff make it a most worthwhile project for Action Aid support. For me it was a wonderful and inspirational visit.



### **News from our recent Board meetings**

Two new Board members have been welcomed and co-opted to the Board of Directors of Action Aid Australia. In January Amanda Stone, closely followed by Dr. Graham Moore in February, joined us. The Board currently has a full complement of Honorary Directors – 12 for the year 2007-08

We look forward to Amanda's involvement with the SEDS projects.

Graham has expressed an interest in the new project currently under way in the Phillipines, which is being supported by our Honorary Advisor, Dr. Cecily Neil.

### **ENTERTAINMENT BOOKS - AVAILABLE IN MOST STATES**

The books which have proven to be popular, are available towards the end of MAY. The books are a guide to the best restaurants, hotel accommodation, attractions, sports and leisure activities - all with 25% to 50% off or two for one offers. Great value. SEE FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Cost - \$65 each - Melbourne, Sydney, Sydney North, Adelaide, Perth.**

**Cost - \$60 each - Brisbane**

**Cost - \$50 - Geelong, Tasmania, Canberra, Gold Coast,**

**Cheques to be made out to Action Aid Australia. We receive a percentage of each book sold as a donation.**

## HIVE OF ACTIVITY AT ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION KOLKATA JOY HANDLEY

Recent half-yearly reports on the three projects we are currently funding confirm that great things continue to happen at ABWU through our ongoing support with the generosity of you, our donors!

### **WEAVING PROJECT:**

This was a new project to us this financial year following my visit in March 07.

Jolly Quader who co-ordinates says with our financial assistance they have been able to purchase better quality raw materials which have resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of products. They are still awaiting delivery of new loom and have asked if we are able to continue funding this project for a further 2 years thus making it self-funding by then.

### **MACHINE KNITTING PROJECT:**

This, along with the Tailoring Project, has been funded by us for at least twelve years and the young ladies in training this year have made pullovers, cardigans, scarves, baby clothes etc. The project also provides pullovers for ABWU school children and staff and many people come to the Home to buy their garments as they are cheaper and a better quality than the markets. It is planned that the budget for this project will be much less in 2008. Excellent results have come about by three or four senior girls over the years gaining enough knowledge to act as trainers, therefore reducing costs.

### **TAILORING PROJECT:**

A total of twenty young ladies are working on this project. Four have been repatriated after completing their training and able to work and live using their training to support them. New girls are settling well and many of them are able to take orders from outsiders and friends. Some of the older girls in Children's Home take part in these projects; after school or at week end giving them another 'string to their bow'...they need all they can get!!

The Home is still trying to get better Marketing for all of their product as in 'points of sale'. I had hoped to visit in March this year with some 'thoughts' in this regard that I have had for some time; but ill health has left me sadly unable to follow this through...perhaps in 2009 I can manage it!!!



**WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING WITH ALL OUR SPONSORED GIRLS?**

All the girls are back in good health again after their bouts of Malaria in the annual Monsoon. During the Puja Holidays some girls went home and enjoyed some time with their families; however, most stayed at the Home and went out by chartered bus so see the various celebrations and decorations.

A candle making project was started and some of the girls were taught how to make wax lamps for Diwali...Festival of Lights....they sold over 6000 clay lamps willed with wax with wicks for lighting them. Everyone enjoyed experimenting with different colours so they had lamps and candles in a multitude of colours!

Since then they have been taught to make church candles, dinner candles, Christmas tree candles and floating lily candles. They all had a wonderful time and sold quite a number to members, staff and friends. They had a stall at a Fete and sold cakes and muffins from the Bakery as well as clay lamps and candles. The stall was manned by the girls, and they enjoyed the outing as well as gaining experience.

Six girls are working hard to attain good results in exams. They all need extra tuition, especially with Maths. ACH are looking for both a tutor and funds to pay the tutor. Many of the girls have joined the ABWU Band and are having a wonderful time, especially with the drums, while we all, and especially Kasturi duck for cover!

Sonali, Mina and Rekha are stitching outfits for the members of the Band. Some girls have been to the pictures and enjoyed the experience. Three girls are currently working on a craft project and some are taking orders for stitching and embroidery to get some pocket money.

Many and varied activities have taken place over the last few months including visits to various other Shelter Homes, St James School for All Faith prayer day. All Bengal Teacher's Assoc. held a recitation competition and Dibya Sharma recited a passage and won 1<sup>st</sup> prize!

A dance school organised a dance program and ten girls took part. Many girls visited various events during the several festivals held in this period. Nine girls went on a camp for four days and enjoyed it all.

Four girls took part in a drawing competition by "Eye Within" and two of them won prizes. All of this, once more, from over twenty three years of involvement assures me that ABWU members and staff continue to do their very very best for ALL the girls in so many different ways and having witnessed their dedication so many times.... they still leave me in awe!!

CAN YOU HELP:

- Ø We always need more sponsors especially for the older girls in After Care Home.
- Ø We hope to fund Weaving Project as well as Tailoring and Machine Knitting and need on-going donations to make this a reality.
- Ø We still want to fund "Orphans Trip" and can only continue to do so with the generosity of our donors.

In the meantime..... thank you for all your support of ABWU over the years. Many of you have been involved for over thirty years...a wonderful effort and great support for ABWU voluntary members and their wonderful staff.

## **Board Member Profile**

**Jess Fliegner** At 24 years of age I am the youngest board member of Action Aid Australia. I became involved with Action Aid after being introduced to the organisation by Roger Hughes, and joined the board in 2006.

**Education and Employment:** I just graduated last year from a Bachelor of Environmental Engineering and Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University and am working in Management Consulting.

**Hobbies:** I love to travel and have just returned from a trip to Mexico, Panama and the United States. I also enjoy spending my spare time relaxing with friends, reading and skiing.

**My role in Action Aid:** Since joining Action Aid I have mainly worked on the newsletter and website, so if you have any ideas or suggestions on either I would love to hear them! (just send an email to [admin@actionaidaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@actionaidaustralia.org.au)).

## **SPONSORED CHILDREN through SEDS in Central Southern India – Lyn Pickering.**

Thank you those who responded to my request for support for children in our December newsletter. Gowthammi, Sireesha, Navanitha, Padmavathi and Sharanya have all formally commenced on our program now with new sponsors.

### **How do I go about selecting and processing new children to our sponsorship program at SEDS?**

1. I request profiles and photos of children considered to be in need of support in the SEDS area of developmental work.
2. The children are selected in country by a SEDS staff member from the office together with the local SEDS Health Care Field worker, and must receive a recommendation from either the Women's Self Help Groups, Village Organisation or from the local teaching staff. Mrs. Manil Joshua oversees this process with excellent support from Maithe.
3. Five or more profiles are sent at any one time.
4. For the past two years, I have been commencing five children onto our program immediately, after I have checked the data. The children receive books for school, and attend the monthly visits to the SEDS farm.
5. Once the new children have gained a sponsor, they are allocated a number and so begins the process for the donor. This is the explanation as to why new sponsors who came onto our program in late December or early January, have received photos of their child with a new set of clothes, the gift from donors. Their newly sponsored child had been attending at SEDS for two months before formally commencing our program. This has proven

to be a valuable exercise to see if the children attend the monthly sessions at SEDS and also that the parents understand their child must attend school regularly. This process has worked well for 99% of selected children

In early February I requested more profiles and have since placed four more girls - Roja, Sukanya, Sarojamma and Geetha and two boys – Rajasekhar and Naveen. Two of these children have replaced children who have left the program.

Two young girls still requiring support -

B. Indraja is a seven year old girl in Grade 3. Indraja lives with her parents, three sisters, her grandfather and an uncle. Her family relies on her mother, grandfather and uncle for support when they are able to find daily work. Indraja's father is incapacitated. Her two older sisters remain at school in Year 10 and Year 6 and little sister goes to Kinder. The family require support to keep the girls at school.

H. Nagamani is eleven and in Grade 6. Her father's first wife had left him with four sons. Father remarried and Nagamani is the younger of two girls to his second wife. Her mother wishes to give her girls an education, denied the older siblings and mother is a member of a local Women's Self Help Groups.

Please contact Lyn at the office if you can help, or wish to know more about this valuable program to educate children. – 03 9704 6315 or via email on [lipickering@bigpond.com](mailto:lipickering@bigpond.com) (P.O. Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, 3805 )

### **Employee Donation Schemes/Workplace or Matched Giving**

Many companies support their staff in Employee Donation Schemes (also called Workplace Giving). These schemes match employee donations, making them doubly effective.

Currently we are registered on the BHP Employee Donation Scheme. If your work has a similar scheme then consider adding Action Aid Australia to their list of charities, making your donation even more effective!

Other companies with Matched Giving programmes include Investec, Macquarie Bank, Ernst & Young and Westpac

You can ask your employer if they have this programme in place. It's a great idea.

### **D & M Walsh**

Industrial Hardware and Farm  
Supplies

257 Five Mile Road, Koo Wee Rup,  
Victoria

Call Andrew  
5997 7305  
email – [dwalsh68@optusnet.au](mailto:dwalsh68@optusnet.au)

### **M & K PRINTING**

For all of your printing requirements, talk to KEN  
at M & K Printing, Vesper Drive Narre Warren.  
Telephone – 9704 8500

### **COMPUTER INITIATIVES**

Tim Moore  
03 9707 4850  
Berwick

### **Web Page**

Please visit the web page and check out the  
information. If you have any positive comments  
which might improve our web page, please contact  
us at the office.

[www.actionaidaustralia.org.au](http://www.actionaidaustralia.org.au)

email to [admin@actionaidaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@actionaidaustralia.org.au)

### **Stop Press**

### **Helen Griffiths**

We send our condolences to Hon. Director Roger Griffiths, mother in  
law, Marion, and daughters Jane and Sarah and their families, on the  
passing of Helen

ACTION AID AUSTRALIA - REMITTANCE ADVICE

**I would like to help Action Aid's work in the following way:**

- **Make a general donation : \$\_\_\_\_\_**
  
- **Support Village Communities in project activities**
  - Bangladesh (Symbiosis) Vocational Training for Women TTIS
  - India (SEDS) – Watershed Management Project
  - India (SEDS) - Women's Self Help Groups
  - India (SEDS) – School Development
  - India (SEDS) – Medical Fund for sponsored children
  - India (ABWU) – Special projects
  - India (ABWU) – Medical Fund for sponsored children
  
- **\$25.00 Membership – 01/07/07 to 30/06/08**
  
- **Information re Bequest (Tick the box)**
  
- **Begin a Child Sponsorship in :**
  - India ( ABWU) - All Bengal Women's Union in Calcutta)**
  - India (S.E.D.S.) in Central Southern India**

**The cost to sponsor a child for :**

- |                    |                          |                      |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 month = \$20.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 months = \$110.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 months = \$55.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12 months = \$220.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Title : \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Please advise if receipt to be in a different name to the sender.  
All gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt issued)  
P.O. Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, 3805

# *B*ove *Letters*

By A.R. Gurney

By arrangement with Warner Chappell

**A fundraiser for Action Aid Australia Projects**

An evening of drama and romance  
Performed by Jennie Leslie & David Wearne



## **DETAILS**

**Saturday May 17, 2008**

**6 Bates Street, Malvern East 3145**

**Melways Reference 59 F12**

**Supper at 7:30pm, Show at 8pm**

**\$30 per ticket including supper**

**For Tickets call**

**Roger Griffiths 9770 2706**

A.R. Gurney's Pulitzer Prize nominated Play follows two members of the privileged set, over a period of 50 years from second grade through the trauma of adulthood, marriage, divorce and middle age

Wonderful supper provided  
B.Y.O. drinks

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See [www.actionaidaustralia.org.au](http://www.actionaidaustralia.org.au)