



Partners in Aid

Newsletter

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Visit to SEDS, Andhra Pradesh, India

Board members Lyn Pickering, Ian Pickering and Amanda Stone have recently returned from a visit to SEDS, where they were able to see at first hand how well our child sponsorships and community projects are progressing. Their reports are on the following pages.

Lyn Pickering

After a three year break, Ian and I finally returned to SEDS for my 12th visit and his 14th. The highly anticipated month long trip certainly lived up to all our expectations.

The very noticeable changes we observed were the growth of the trees on the roadside plantations and on "The Hill", and again at the SEDS farm. We were also delighted to see the smiling faces of children who still remembered us after a long absence in their lives.



Ian Pickering, Amanda Stone and Lyn Pickering with sponsored children at a local school

Visiting a well functioning Tuition Centre was one of many highlights, although we sometimes wonder how children can cope with such long days, with tuition before school, then again after school for two hours from 4 pm to 6pm.



Some years ago, one of our sponsors, Yvonne, asked us to find out whether tuition could be made available to help children like Mamatha maintain a reasonable level of education.

At that time the Government was beginning to offer tuition in larger schools, mainly Secondary, but not in the small rural schools. Through Yvonne's initiative, the

SEDS children receiving sponsors' gifts from Lyn Pickering

Please help us spread the word about Partners in Aid by passing this newsletter on to family, friends and colleagues once you have read it.

Thank you.

school Mamatha attended had a tuition teacher for two hours every day to help ALL the children in her school who were interested.

The Tuition Centre is run by an educated person who assists the children with their homework, and other difficulties experienced during their day at school. The better tuition leaders also extend the children beyond this. We were very impressed when two Year 6 boys made a speech at a Tuition Centre about Australia. They had obviously been doing some research work prior to our visit.

Mamatha has struggled throughout her schooling. I saw her on two occasions during this visit, once at the monthly visit to the farm where the children received their new clothes, courtesy of sponsors, and the second time at her large Secondary school, where we have 26 sponsored children from Year 5 to Year 10. Eight of these children were at school that day due to local Festivals. Mamatha is not alone in this dilemma, with a number of our children facing learning challenges at school, but there are so many positive things, which are in some cases as important as the score the child receives on a report card.

One of our major problems has been children not receiving adequate nutrition as babies and young children, something that is taken for granted by most Australians. Apart from the monthly visits to the SEDS farm, all our sponsored children are monitored in their schools and villages by a Health Care worker and a SEDS Field Officer throughout the year.

The sponsorship program commenced early in 1995 after my first visit with Ian in 1994. There have been many changes during that time, and some of our long time supporters are now sponsoring a second or third child.

Focusing on the positives that mould and change children and young people, I have observed the following :

- A child is selected for sponsorship based on the economic situation of the family, and the commitment of the parent/s to support, with the added endorsement of the Village Organisation.
- A requirement of sponsorship is that the children are expected to attend the farm every month for physical and cultural activities and health care camps, of which there are two each year. (Bus fares are reimbursed).
- While not all children have the ability to gain academic success, child sponsorship gives each child the opportunity to develop his or her skills in a social and safe environment at school and not become involved in child labour or early marriage for girls. These are very significant advantages for our child sponsorship program.
- Many of our students have achieved academic success, to Year 10 standard. Very few of these children would have dreamed of this possibility when they commenced on the program.
- A small number have gone beyond this. I have already reported on two of our University students, and we met a third in January. Sravani was a sponsored girl and a resident at the SEDS hostel for underprivileged girls for eight years. She is now receiving Government support whilst she undertakes her BSc, with major studies in Computing.

Only a small percentage of children have the ability to go this far, but at least our child sponsorship program gives each child the chance to achieve his or her potential.

Amanda Stone

Christmas and New Year at SEDS is something very special. Lyn and Ian Pickering have been part of the SEDS Christmas experience many times and I was fortunate enough to share the joy this year.

We arrived shortly after Christmas to an incredible light display - strings of fairy lights and illuminated characters stretch across all the many buildings and pathways of the SEDS compound. This delights the children living at the SEDS hostel and for the fortunate children attending the SEDS school each day, and leaving at dusk. New Year's Eve was a celebration for the whole extended SEDS community where staff, children and guests enjoyed a BBQ, bonfire and fireworks.

The weekend after New Year we participated in the annual open house for Partners in Aid's sponsored children and the 200 elderly locals whom SEDS village health workers identify as being in need.

Each year, sponsored children come to SEDS to receive a gift of new clothes (paid for by our sponsors), have their photos taken, their details confirmed, and participate in a day of fun and educational activities. A large lunch is also provided before children are taken home. At the same time, 200 elderly locals, many of whom live on the streets, are brought to SEDS for a bathe, a shave, a manicure, new clothes and a good meal.

This day was special for us as we met with our sponsored children, reviewed their progress, confirmed their details for sponsors, and shared in the excitement of the day. More details can be seen on the SEDS blog: <http://sedsngo.blogspot.com/>

This trip brought many pleasant surprises. SEDS has been working at key projects in watershed management and community development for 30 years. This year it was very clear that the years of work are bearing fruit.

The tank desilting work funded by Partners in Aid has continued with 3 tanks completed in the past financial year.



Lyn Pickering with plaque recording tank desilting

Tanks are like huge dams which collect and supply irrigation water for up to 3 local villages. Many are centuries old and with deforestation, a harsh climate and rocky surfaces, they have filled with top soil washed off during infrequent but heavy rains. SEDS has been working at reforestation, protecting new growth (we subsidise the salary of watchers in the field), various treatments such as bunding (barriers to prevent leakage), channels and small check dams to slow water run-off, and finally increasing the storage capacity of the huge tanks by desilting. All these measures have improved the water table slowly so that over the 30 years, water has returned to the bores which provide the daily water supply for villages in the region. Partners in Aid also funds the supply of fish fingerlings to these tanks and SEDS reports that many more fish are being harvested by villagers than they thought.

While Partners in Aid provides funds for the machinery needed to complete the desilting, each tank is chosen on the basis of the willingness of the local village to work together and agree to contribute about half of the funds. The village contribution, number of villagers involved and the amount of silt removed are recorded on a stone plaque which is in a visible spot on a major road.

SEDS continues with the necessary community development work to back up the watershed management. We were delighted to meet with a local Village Organisation, made up of the village women (with a male minute taker!), and to see the level of their organisation, focus and commitment, and to hear from them how they made effective use of microcredit in a co-operative arrangement.

Also impressive was our meeting with a Farmers Field School, where a collective of farmers shared their farming practices, comparing conventional and sustainable practices in terms of inputs and outputs. Selected local farmers are taking the lead and acting as models for others in trialling farming without artificial pesticides and fertilisers. We visited the site of one farmer who had planted a control and experimental plot side by side. The results of the yield will be known in about 3 months but it is expected that the sustainable method will result in higher yield for less input. (More details in a future newsletter.)

The future focus at SEDS is very much on sustainable use of the land and making use of opportunities provided by present and future schemes where a reduced carbon footprint can be sold, to advantage villages in their region. The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM –part of the Kyoto protocol) which will produce biogas units for cooking and remove the need to cut down trees for fuel will be approved shortly. SEDS is also investigating Low Carbon Farming which involves farmers reducing their carbon footprint through changing their farming practices. The carbon reductions can be placed on the market to benefit these farmers.

It was exciting to see local people taking up these opportunities to work together to improve their livelihoods in sustainable ways so that there is a future for their children. By staying at the forefront of developments in their field, Manil and Rajen Joshua and their staff at SEDS are providing the environment, the support and the leadership to make that happen.



Farmers Field School at SEDS



Farmers next to experimental and control crops

All Bengal Women's Union, Kolkata Project Co-ordinator - Anne-Marie Maltby

Anne-Marie Maltby and Joy Handley will be visiting ABWU in the next few weeks. We will include a full visit report (and photos) in the June newsletter. In the meantime, here are some case histories of girls requiring sponsors.

BANDANA SARDAR:

Bandana is 16 years old and is in Class VIII. She is a quiet well behaved child, active in Girl Guides, loves music and reading detective novels.

She is a bright girl, achieving 73 out of 100 for all her exams last June. Bandana has been sponsored since 2007 and unfortunately her sponsor passed away recently. As she is doing so well we would love to get a new sponsor for her!

SARASWATI HALDAR:

Saraswati is 9 years old and has been in ABWU since 2008. She attends Bridging classes as she has no formal education and is a first generation learner.

Her father is a casual labourer and her mother is a domestic helper earning Rs.1000 (approx AU\$25) per month. The whole family live in a rented room which costs Rs.600 per month.

It has a cement floor and bamboo walls. Electricity and water are available at an extra cost. Five families use one toilet and bathroom.

MEGA DAS:

Mega is 7 years old. Both her parents tested HIV Positive when her brother was born and are unable to look after their children (who do not have HIV).

She is a quiet child who is adjusting to her new surroundings and is in the Bridging class. She also has counselling sessions and Dance Therapy.

JAYA GOSWAMI:

Jaya is 16 years old. Her father died in 2006 after being ill for some years.

She is an energetic girl, enjoying classical dance and singing. She is learning to use a computer and is in Girl Guides. She is studious and would like to become a teacher.

If you would like to become the sponsor for one of these girls, please complete the form at the back of this newsletter, add the name of the child and return it to us with your payment.

Bangladeshi Projects Update

Project Co-ordinator - Roger Hughes

Technical Training and Low Skills Jobs Training Program (TTIS)

The TTIS project provides training mainly to women of little economic means in sewing, embroidery, hairdressing and beauty treatment. The program admits some full fee paying students who subsidise the majority of the students who are of lower economic means. The courses are run at various centres spread across areas around Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Gazipur, Tangail and surrounding areas in the north of Bangladesh.

Eva is a young woman who works in TTIS Mymensingh.

Just over 3 years ago she was married off to a young man by her parents. Her father had come to Mymensingh for work. But soon after marriage the husband demanded a dowry of about \$1500 (Bangladesh equivalent). When the dowry was not forthcoming, he left his young wife. By this time she was pregnant. Subsequently she gave birth to twin boys (probably identical), and has had to live with her parents. The father of the children has never seen them and will not take any responsibility for the two boys named Rizbi and Ifti. They are now about 2 and a half years old.

In Mymensingh she began to learn sewing with the local TTIS project. She now works in the project and is able to provide some support for her young boys and relieve the financial burden on her father and mother.

In the December newsletter we reported on the visit to Melbourne of staff from Symbiosis Bangladesh, and the stunning embroidered red bedcover which they brought over. It will take a month for one woman to produce one bedcover with this level of detail, or a week for 5 women to produce it (around 200 hours).



The training centre in Jamalpur has recently provided training to a disabled girl who is unable to speak. She is now working well and earning a living in her community.

**Trainee in TTIS sewing project,
Jamalpur**

Symbiosis has recently received the very good news that the Australian High Commission is awarding a grant for training which includes two heavy duty sewing machines to enable the TTIS project to sew heavier materials. This will give greater scope for the production of a wider range of items. The High Commission will also give some money for simple kits for traditional birth attendants and also for training of women in hairdressing and beauty treatment.

Jamuna River Development Project (JRDP)

In the Sandbar project (JRDP) in the last quarter of 2009, a government recognized exam was held for the Class Five children. The teachers have been encouraged by the children's' performance, despite the fact that the facilities are very basic. Thirty-four Class Five students passed the exam and they are now in three high schools (or middle schools as we would call them), the closest being five kilometers and the furthest ten kilometers away. Without our little school these children would never have had this opportunity.

World Food Day – Bayles Dinner

Our World Food Day Dinner (postponed from November) will be held on **Saturday 6 March 2010** at Bayles (near Pakenham).

The food is all donated and home cooked, and the meat is home grown on the farm at Bayles.

6.00pm for starters, main meal to commence serving at 7.00pm

Menu : finger food starters, roast meats, baked potatoes, salads, vegetarian options available, variety of delicious desserts.

Drinks : Soft Drinks provided, BYO alcohol

\$35.00 per person/donation for kids (tax deductible receipt issued)

If you would like a night out in a friendly, relaxed environment, we would love to see you. Come on your own or bring a group of friends – all welcome (including kids).

RSVP : Monday 1 March 2010

For more information or to book in, please contact the office on 9704 6315 or admin@partnersinaid.org.au (a map will be provided for those that require one).

M & K Printing

For all your printing requirements
talk to Ken at M&K Printing
Vesper Drive, Narre Warren
Ph: 9704 8500

Computer Initiatives

Tim Moore
Berwick
9707 4850

Partners in Aid Donation Form



Partners in Aid

General Donation

I would like to make a general donation to Partners in Aid
(If you would like to specify an area, please circle: SEDS/ABWU/
Bangladesh/Philippines)

Child Sponsorship Donation

I would like to begin/continue (please circle) to sponsor a child at ABWU/
SEDS (Please circle and note in the box number of children you would like
to sponsor)

Please tick the appropriate payment box:

3 months = \$60

6 months = \$120

12 months = \$240

**Total Amount enclosed
(general donations and child sponsorship)**

If paying by EFT please email admin@partnersinaid.org.au for bank account details. If paying by cheque make it out to Partners in Aid and send to PO Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, VIC 3805

Name for receipt: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Phone Number: _____

Email (for internal use and occasional updates): _____

Gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt issued)

Thank you for your support