

Bringing Joy to the world

■ Bright woman's 20 year mission

By EBONY D'ARCY

JOY Handley has been the saving grace for underprivileged Indian girls for more than 20 years.

Not only does the Bright resident personally sponsor a blind girl, but she is also the driving force behind raising thousands of dollars to help improve the lives of women in Kolkata.

After spending 10 years working as an office manager for Partners in Aid, Ms Handley turned her full attention to supporting the All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU), a centre dedicated to housing and educating women who would otherwise be swallowed up by the city's streets.

"When Partners in Aid reverted back to being a voluntary organisation, I felt the ABWU would be the first to go into the too hard basket," she said.

"The complex was built by the Indian government 75 years ago and is divided up into a children's home and an area for girls over 18.

"Some of the children housed there are 'pavement children', picked up by the railway police when they get off the trains looking for a better life in the city."

Ms Handley said the children and young girls who slipped through the cracks faced a life of extreme hardship on the streets.

"The ABWU houses around 200 children, and when they turn 18 they become 'after care girls' and move into the adult dorms, where they learn skills they can use to support themselves," she said.

"Some of these girls may live there for their whole lives, while others will be able to move out and make a life for themselves."

The women are given a basic education and taught valuable skills such as tailoring, weaving, cooking and knitting.

"The funds we raise go toward funding the different vocational projects," Ms Handley said.

"What they produce is sold and that money goes back into the ABWU."

The most recent donation, sent to India in June, included around \$8000 for initiatives including a cooking teacher's salary, remedial tutor and medical fund.

Sponsorship funds of \$8640 were also included, making a total of more than \$16,000.

Ms Handley has sponsored 22-year-old Mita since she was eight years old, and said it was heart warming to see her flourish.

"She was born blind and dumped as a baby," she said.

"If she hadn't been taken in by ABWU, she would have died on the streets.

"She loves music and is studying vocal



LABOR OF LOVE: Bright's Joy Handley is the driving force behind raising funds for a women's union in India.

music at the University of Fine Arts.

"I'm very proud of her."

Ms Handley travels to India every three or four years and in March will visit for the first time since 2006.

"I love going," she said.

"When I was in Kolkata in 1996 I met Mother Theresa, just 18 months before she died.

"I was very lucky."

The Alpine Women's Group's annual ABWU fundraiser will be held at Bright RSL, Camp Street, on Monday, November 16.

With pasta provided by Simone's Restaurant chef Patrizia Simone, the Italian luncheon has proved a popular event for nine years.

Contact Joy Handley on 5755 1344 for more information or to book tickets.

In brief...

Amnesty nets firearms and grenade

THE police firearms amnesty netted six long arm rifles and an inert World War 2 "pineapple" type hand grenade from the local area.

Acting Sergeant Short of Mansfield police said the hand grenade was brought to the police station in pieces.

The grenade, and firearms ranging from shotguns to large calibre rifles, will be destroyed.

"The firearms were all in operating condition when handed in," Acting Sgt Short said.

Grenade detonated at property

TWO hand grenades were discovered in a shed on a Carboor property last week.

Army specialists were called to the property where one of the grenades was detonated and the other was taken away to Latchford Army Barracks.

A pest exterminator came across the grenades, which were said to be over 50 years old, in the shed.