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April 26 2005

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Dear Friends,

This is a newsletter to update you with my initial visit to Sri Lanka with the Ocean Stars Trust. Before I start I would like to say a warm and sincere thank you to you all for your kindness, support and generosity during my initial fundraising phase. When I left for Sri Lanka I had collected just over £10,000.00. I hope to launch an Ocean Stars website soon. The address is.... This website is in the process of being set up so do keep checking. The reason for the change of name from Ocean stars project to Ocean Stars Trust is that we have now applied for charitable status. The next two years will need lots of funding to help the local communities to get back on their feet.

The trust has three objectives.

1. Immediate Tsunami relief
2. Funding of long term projects to rebuild shattered lives.
3. Trauma counselling

I was able to make inroads into all 3 objectives during this initial visit.

Through Sonali Moonesinghe, my cousin and Ocean Stars Rep in Sri Lanka, I was introduced to Dr Pandu Wijeyratne who has set up a project called THOTEN. In order to carry out this project he has recruited after an interview process 12 local young adults as his recruitment team. When I first met them the team looked smart in their uniforms and are a genuine, friendly, hardworking and dedicated group of people.

One day I went round to the home of one of the team members. I was speechless. His former home was a pile of rubble. He lives in a temporary home next to the pile of rubble. I then realised how remarkable this project was in giving hope for young people who would otherwise have had despair and hopelessness in front of them. Most of this team of 12 have suffered and been affected by the Tsunami. The force of the second wave reached speeds of up to 1000mph. The Ocean Stars Trust has pledged to pay the wages of the team for the next two years, a sum of £250.00 a month. This will be transferred electronically to the THOTEN bank account. The total

operational costs are £700.00 a month but I felt with my current funds this would be a safe sum to commit to. If anyone would like to contribute to this project, which offers hope and employment to young people, then please let me know.

The initial phase of this project involved interviewing families in 8 Grama Sevaka areas (village communities). I spent a lot of time going round with the teams and meeting village people in their homes and hearing their stories. Mothers who lost children, children who lost one or both parents, fathers who lost their wives and children, grandparents, aunts and uncles all lost.....the level of emotional devastation was beyond comprehension. The Tsunami did not discriminate.

On my field visits with the THOTEN project I was able to identify families who would benefit from immediate Tsunami aid. Here are examples of aid provided by the Ocean Stars Trust:

- Gas Cooker: £18.00
- Gas Cylinder: £18.00
- Pump and Connecting Valve: £2.00
- Single Mattress: £15.00
- Double Mattress: £20.00-£25.00
- Pots and Pans: £5.00

Champika is able to smile again as she now has a cooker to boil water for her baby and cook meals for her family.



The Ocean Trust Project bought 85 pairs of school shoes for children at one school. Some of the children had lost their possessions in the Tsunami, others too poor to afford a pair of shoes. Some families live on an income of less than £20.00 a month. The monthly cost of buying rice, coconuts, lentils, flour, milk, and vegetables is about £12.00. That leaves about £2.00 a week for other expenses. Shoes at a cost of between £3.00-£6.50 a pair is low on a family's list of essentials. The Ocean Stars Trust made a difference to 85 children's lives. They now no longer have to come to school bare foot or with slippers ("flip-flops").



Heatherside Infant School in Fleet donated a large holdall of stationary items, which I took round with me and donated to schools and homes. The mere fact of having paper and felt tip pens and crayons to draw with was a dream come true for some children. I did art therapy work with children identified by teachers as suffering from trauma.



90% of the children drew Tsunami related pictures reflecting their inner troubled worlds.

In the North, an area devastated by war and the Tsunami, I was fortunate and privileged to visit the interior, especially Mullaitivu. The devastation and

destruction of Mullaitivu was catastrophic. The beaches are as they were 4 months ago. The Ocean Stars team were left speechless.

We visited the remains of the Senthalar Children's home where 130 orphans perished. We saw the temporary home where 70 children are being re-housed at the moment. Their belongings are kept in a tent. Children have the equivalent of one Tesco carrier bag, which contains their life's possessions. These children had no toys to play with. The Ocean Stars Trust provided some tennis balls and organised a few games for the children. Suddenly the air was filled with squeals of laughter. A powerful moment.



The tent where the children's belongings are



Playing catch with a tennis ball

When I was out in Sri Lanka I had several requests from village people for help with rebuilding their homes. I asked one of them to give me a detailed list of the costs involved. The cost of rebuilding a home is £1300.00. People have the skills to build but no funds to buy the materials. A lot of families I met have saved the rubble from their previous homes for their new homes. Oceans Stars would like to fund the rebuilding of 10 homes over the next year. If any would like to fund-raise for this on our behalf we would be happy to talk to you.

The Ocean Stars Trust believes in working on the ground with local people. The projects we have identified are run by local Sri Lankans who are giving their time voluntarily to oversee the projects. All the funds go directly to the person on the ground. During my visit I also identified a group of people also devastated by the Tsunami but who would not ask for help. They too lost all their possessions and insurance policies do not cover natural disasters. The headmaster at the school in Unawatuna lost his motorbike when the Tsunami struck. He still has 18 months left to pay on the hire purchase. He has no means of transport and now has to take a bus to get to work. This means his working day has to start much earlier. The cost of a motorbike is about £350.00. The Ocean Stars Trust would also like to help people like this headmaster to get back on their feet.



Enjoying drawing pictures. 70 children huddled on the floor of a hall, which is where they live, eat and sleep. There is no electricity. They do their homework by candle and lamplight.

Finally I would like to share with you the story of Rosita and her husband Mohan. They are a very poor couple that suffered a catastrophic loss in the Tsunami, their 16day-old baby girl Grace. Rosita is severely traumatized. I was asked to go and see

her because she was thought to have become insane and needed help. Using my counselling skills I was able to identify that Rosita was in fact suffering from severe trauma. The way Grace died, no mother should have to experience in her lifetime. I visited Rosita 4 times while I was there and her progress in that time was remarkable. From not being able to leave the house she was able to walk to her friend's house. Their dream was to build a memorial for Grace but they had no funds. I felt that in funding the memorial Ocean Stars would be helping a desperate couple move on with their grieving process. When I told Rosita and Mohan that we would fund this project and that it would help them with their healing process their eyes filled with tears. I had an e-mail two weeks after my return to say that Rosita and Mark have started to buy the resources needed to build the memorial. On our follow-up visit we will officially bless the memorial to Grace.

On behalf of the Ocean Stars Trust I would like to thank you all for your support so far. We hope you would like to continue supporting our work which as you can see truly makes a difference to people's lives. We have now opened up an Ocean Stars Account. Cheques can be made payable to the Ocean Stars Trust and sent to me at the above address.

Thank you.
Budhusaranay. (Buddhist Blessing)

Dilanee.

