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REGISTERED CHARITY: 1110022

NEWSLETTER 6: December 07

Funds raised to Date: £54,000

Projects Supported: 45



Thanks to everyone for your continued support & generosity. It is through your support that the Ocean Stars Trust (OST) is able to continue making a real difference to the lives of people in Sri Lanka.

Since our last newsletter, two of our trustees, Dilanee and Janaki have been able to visit the island. The purpose of the trip in October was to review, first hand, the projects that OST is supporting and to assess the current needs of the people, especially in light of ongoing civil conflict in the country.

In this edition of the newsletter we would like to:

- 1. Share with you Janaki's personal review of the trip. This will give you an insight into what life is like today in Sri Lanka for the people we are supporting.*
- 2. Provide you with an update of the projects in the North and East as well as the established projects in the South.*
- 3. Outline the areas where support is needed.*
- 4. Encourage you to use our on-line web-shop.*

*Ranjini Ocean Stars Field Worker and Admin assistant
with Dilanee and Janaki in Batticaloa*



First visit back in 15 years to Sri Lanka

By Janaki Jayasuriya (OST Trustee)

I was visiting Sri Lanka with my sister Dilanee, after 15 years, and our trip in October took us to the East and South of the country. One of the strongest impressions I came away with is that of a country of stark contrasts. Three years after the tsunami, life in the South has moved on considerably in terms of physical redevelopment. Infrastructure and access to this region is very good, new homes and schools have been rebuilt and community livelihood schemes are well on their way. There are also some programmes in place to address the emotional and psychological traumas which will obviously have a much longer recovery period. One of the greatest barriers to economic development in this area is the decline in tourism, as, in the past, these seaside communities have depended on the thriving tourist trade for their livelihood.

Life in the East however is grim and a daily struggle. Twenty five years of war and conflict has meant no investment or development in this area resulting in a life of hardship for the ordinary people. When the tsunami struck life became unbearable, compounding their already miserable plight. Infrastructure and access to the region is extremely poor and it took us 10 hours to travel a mere 125 miles. Security is tight with the presence of police check points and other armed forces at regular intervals all along the main road. For local travellers, the checks are stringent and no one can travel without a special pass and baggage being examined thoroughly. The road itself is in an abominable condition full of pot-holes and a state of disrepair. Approaching Batticaloa, the landscape is dotted with camps mostly for the war-displaced but three years on, some tsunami camps still remain. Once in the town, NGO offices and UN vehicles are prominent but the tsunami redevelopment programme is clearly far behind the south. We spoke to many families who are still living in temporary accommodation or in crowded conditions with relations. One of the main obstacles to re-housing seems to be the allocation of suitable land 65m from the sea. The water supply in some areas is still contaminated and access to clean water remains a serious problem. Most communities do not have electricity and those that do, cannot rely on it.

We also visited a camp for the war-displaced located in a paddy-store. These refugees fled from their homes as their villages were made security zones. They told stories of having to walk for several weeks through jungle areas whilst coping with burying their sick children and elderly relatives who died on route. They have been living there for almost a year, and receive basic food and cooking supplies, but struggle to feed their families a nutritious meal. Despite their plight there was a sense of community, and we witnessed a make-shift nursery school in action with a dynamic teacher telling a traditional folk-tale, whilst the children were acting it out using leaves and stems as props for crowns and pipes. Inside the paddy-store, each family was assigned an area of approx. five square metres, which was neatly arranged in sections such as cooking utensils, clothes, bedding etc. There was no privacy as it is one large open space but we met two young mothers with new born babies who had been assigned the quieter perimeter of the store. We were told that they had access to healthcare.

The situation is desperately sad as this is one of the most beautiful parts of Sri Lanka with huge potential to have a thriving economy. Means of earning a wage to sustain a family is virtually impossible as cost of living rises almost daily. Apart from seasonal fishing and limited labouring jobs, there are no economic opportunities. Shops offer credit services which seems an acceptable means of survival. People live in fear and the absence of play and joyfulness especially amongst young children is the reality for most. One man we met told us "even though I am smiling, my heart is crying every day."



UPDATE ON PROJECTS IN THE EAST AND NORTH

PLAYGROUPS IN BATTICALOA SUPPORTED BY OST

KALKUDAH PLAYGROUP

30 Children attend this playgroup which is situated in an isolated community about an hours drive from Batticaloa town. Ocean Stars supports this project by paying the wages of two teachers. The village where the playgroup is situated is very poor even by Sri Lankan standards. The playgroup has recently moved to a community hall. However facilities are extremely basic and the hall does not even contain a toilet.



URANI PLAYGROUP

OST's main project with this playgroup is the running of a lunch project, which provides a group of 70 children with a hot nutritious meal each day. The community is again extremely poor and without the assistance of this lunch project, these children would almost certainly go without this basic need.



OST would therefore like to thank YUMMIES children's boutique in Brighton for funding the lunch project at this nursery for the last two years. The project is being managed on the ground in SL through the voluntary efforts of Rev Ranchan, who is extremely committed to this project.



On their most recent visit, Dilanee and Jan visited the playgroup, met the cook and saw the lunch being prepared. During their time there, the pump supplying water from the well for cooking had broken so the water had to be pulled up manually from an outside well. Thankfully OST was able to help immediately and purchased a new pump, which Rev Ranchan arranged to be installed during our visit.

Dilanee and Jan also visited the family of one of the children, a visit which took place after 6pm, so consequently it was very dark. The house was home to three children, their mum and grandma. It was approximately 8 foot square, the walls were built from corrugated iron and the roof consisted of dried coconut leaves. The only source of light in the house was a small candle in a bottle. In a corner was a small wooden stove with a small pot of rice cooking. The floor of the house was sandy and the family slept on the floor at night on grass mats without any blankets. In addition the children had no toys to play with and there were very few possessions in the house.



This visit made us realise how valuable the lunch project is in giving this group of 70 children a nutritious hot meal every day. We are also very grateful to another individual donor who has come forward to fund this project for another year. However we would like to be secure with funding for the project for at least two years. Therefore we are looking for about 20 donors to donate at least £10.00 a month to secure the long term future of this very special project. If you feel you are able to assist us or know of anyone who would like to help us then please do let us know.

POONOCHIMUNAI PLAYGROUP

OST received a warm welcome from the children at this playgroup. This project is linked to St Luke's School in Brighton. We were able to see the furniture and playground equipment purchased by St Luke's school in Brighton being put to good use. It was particularly pleasing to see lots of creative pieces of craft and art work on display using natural resources such as coconut husks and leaves. In addition the teachers are very grateful to OST for funding their wages.



NAWATKUDAH PLAYGROUP

The nursery band welcomed Dilanee and Jan in style during our visit. The drums and some of the band equipment have been bought with funds via OST following a private donation from Scotland. This nursery belongs to Rev Ranchan's own church. At the moment the children's parents make a small contribution towards the teacher's wages. Rev Ranchan would like us if possible to fund the wages of 4 teachers and an assistant for the 90 children who attend this playgroup.



KURUMANVELY PLAYGROUP



30 children attend this playgroup which is managed by one very keen and enthusiastic teacher called Nilanthi. When the children met Dilanee and Jan they were very smartly dressed in their uniform. Each child bowed and curtsied to us and then introduced themselves in English to us. They also proudly sang us some songs in English which they had been practising in anticipation of our visit. Nilanthi told us that she would like a cupboard to store her resources and we are pleased to report that we were able to purchase one for the playgroup during our time there.

THURAINELWANAI PLAYGROUP

Dilanee and Jan had to travel off the beaten track to reach the 15 children and three teachers at this playgroup. In fact at one point we thought we would have to wade across a river which had formed along the road, but Bala our driver braved the water and drove his van through to get us to the other side.

The children meet in a small tin corrugated iron hut and have no resources at all. The heat was stifling during our visit. The teachers would like OST to fund some playground equipment for the children as well as play equipment like bats, balls and hoops.



MANDOOR PLAYGROUP

Dilanee and Jan were unable to meet the children at this nursery as we needed a day's travel including a ferry crossing to get there and back. The two teachers, whose wages OST pays, did however come to meet us in Batticaloa. They were extremely grateful to OST for providing their wages and a means of support to help their own families. The children come from very poor communities, do not have uniforms, and often

do not have a hot meal at home. OST would like to fund a drink and a snack for these children at a cost of £10.00 a month or £60.00 for 6 months or £120.00 for a year.

OTHER PROJECTS IN BATTICALOA

VINCENT GIRLS SCHOOL



Ten girls receive monthly sponsorship from OST donors to assist with their education. Dilanee and Jan were able to visit Vincent's to meet the children who are sponsored by OST. On the day, 8 of the ten girls came to see us and two were away sick. They also met the new Principal Mrs Kulendrakumar in a classroom and all the children spoke clearly in good English. They are all very grateful for the extra funds they receive and have used the funds for tuition, travel and buying school books. In Sri Lanka schools usually finish around 1.30pm and it is normal practice for pupils to attend extra tuition classes.

WESLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Rev Ranchan introduced OST to Wesley High School and was keen for us to set up a link with a UK school. Calthorpe Park School in Fleet has very kindly agreed to fund raise for OST and a link with Wesley High School is now being established. The Calthorpe fund raising is ongoing and in the summer term Calthorpe held a charity sponsored day and raised funds for several charities including OST. A donation of £1000.00 was made to Wesley High School by Dilanee during her visit to SL. The funds will go towards the purchase of tables and chairs for the school library and several classrooms.



The school has 1476 students. They lost 60 students to the Tsunami in 2004. The school playground is now a camp for displaced war refugees so the children do not have any sports facilities.

KALLADAY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME



The Kalladay Sponsorship Programme is a sponsorship programme for children of hearing and speech impaired parents. Dilanee and Janaki met most of the sponsor families at a reception held by Rev Ranchan at his church. The parents were all very grateful to OST for the monthly donations which go towards helping the children with their education. It was a very interesting meeting with a three way translation from sign language to Tamil to English and then from English to Tamil to sign language. There are six more children to add on to the programme.

PLAYGROUP IN TRINCO FUNDED BY OST

VELLAIMANAL PLAYGROUP

The Bunter family were unable to visit this area in August 2006 due to the ethnic conflict. However during this trip, a day trip was deemed safe. So Janaki and Dilanee set off at 6am one morning from our base in Dambulla to make the three hour drive to the camp. We had about 6 security checks on the way which included searches of the vehicle. On the way we bought packets of chocolate milk



and biscuits for the children. Yasmin our contact in Colombo had told us to cater for about 25 children. We decided that may be 35 was a safe number. When we got the playgroup we were met by the 25 present children, their older siblings who are being sponsored by OST as well as other children so there were over 60 children in the end. Janabdeen our local contact had to dash to all the local village stores and purchase their entire stocks of chocolate milk cartons to cater for the ever increasing army of children!

An enjoyable morning was spent with the children. They sang in English and drew pictures for us. In return Janaki taught them Wind the Bobbin Up and Dilanee demonstrated the Hokey Cokey: great fun was had by all!

The mothers of the children who attend the playgroup usually gather in a separate building. Whilst the children are at playgroup, the mothers spend their time making clothes to sell at fairs and other events. We were then invited to look at their garments and buy items from 38 mothers all desperate to sell us the efforts of their hard work. This was an extremely challenging task especially being in a small room with 38 mothers their children and temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius!

OST also pays for the teachers' wages and the teachers would like to pass on their thanks for your kind generosity.

TRINCO SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME



38 children are currently being sponsored by families in the UK, France and Spain. Travel to Vellaimanal where the children live had been problematic for Yasmin, our contact, due to the civil unrest. However over the last few months Yasmin has been able to visit the children for the day to make sure the families are OK.

We are also pleased to report that Yasmin has now created an account in Colombo and will be opening accounts for the new families in January 2008. The money received for those families will now be used to benefit the children and also provide savings for the child when they are 18. We thank you our sponsors for your patience and understanding during this difficult time.

PROJECTS IN THE SOUTH

THOTEN PROJECT

OST have been involved with the THOTEN health and environmental project since January 05 following the Tsunami. The project was completed at the end of September 2007. Through our links with Dr Pandu, a key adviser of the World Health Organisation and a consultant for USAID, OST have funded the following projects:

- English classes
- Home Gardening project
- Bakery reconstruction
- Coir product expenses
- Pastry shop renovation
- Sub post office renovation

The Project has been a tremendous success and is looked upon as a model by the government for future preventive health care projects.

THOTAGAMUWA SCHOOL PROJECT

Through the link with the THOTEN project OST were introduced to the Thotagamuwa village school which was severely damaged by the Tsunami. When we visited the children in 2005 and 2006 they were in temporary classrooms in the local temple. There were about 20 classes in the big hall and others in make shift classrooms outside. A new school was built by the Italian government and the children moved in to the new premises in June this year.

Dr Pandu is very keen in promote the teaching of science in the school and asked OST if it could help to fund the purchase of science equipment. St Catherine's School in Guildford held a fundraising day for OST in February and has raised over £500.00 for us. These funds have been used to purchase science equipment for the school which has meant that the children are now able to enjoy hands on science lessons thanks to the kindness and generosity of St Catherine's.



The funds were used to buy microscopes, posters, biology equipment and a cupboard to keep all the equipment. This link is ongoing as the school though in a brand new building, has very few resources for the children.

PASTRY SHOP PROJECT



Indrani had a small wooden bakery which was completely destroyed by the Tsunami. She is now in the process of rebuilding the pastry shop. She would like OST to help her purchase a display case and tables and chairs for a small café in the shop.

LINKS ESTABLISHED BY OST

St Luke's Primary School, Brighton	Poonochimunai Playgroup in Batticaloa Thuraineelawanai Playgroup in the east
Buttercups Day Nursery , Fleet	Vellaimanal Playgroup
Heatherside Infant School, Fleet	Grace Children's Home, Vavuniya
The Connaught School, Aldershot	Komari School, Komari
Calthorpe Park School, Fleet	Wesley High School, Batticaloa
St Catherine's Guildford	Thotagamuwa Village School

We are always looking to establish cultural and educational links with schools, Infant, Junior and Senior in England with similar schools in Sri Lanka. If anyone has contact with a school in the UK and would like to establish a link and fund raise please do not hesitate to contact us.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Cost of a school uniform for a nursery child= £1.50. Cost of providing a playgroup of 30 children with school uniforms= £45.00. We have been asked if we could help 5 playgroups provide uniform for their children. A uniform gives a poor child a sense of pride and belonging, and creates a sense of equality amongst a group of 30 poor children.
2. Cost of paying a playgroup teachers wages for 1 month= £15.00 or £180.00 per annum. We already pay for 20 teachers but as each playgroup has two members of staff as well as a helper some staff work for no pay. We would like to fund 8 more teachers' wages.
3. Cost of a bike= £40.00. Some of our playgroups are in very isolated communities. The teachers at Nilawani playgroup would like OST to provide them with a bike so that they can visit the local shops and families instead of having to walk for an hour in order to do so. Three bikes needed.
4. Sewing machine= £85.00 Seven machines needed for community sewing project for Tsunami widows.
5. £10.00 a month helps a family with food and education supplies for their children. We need 18 more families to add to our already successful Trinco, Vincent's and Kalladay sponsorship programmes. We also need 20 donors to commit to £10.00 a month to secure our Urani lunch project for another year.
6. Drink Bottle= £0.25p x 30 children= £7.50. Three playgroups requested bottles for their children.
7. Two playgroups have requested a cupboard for putting their resources in. A large cupboard costs £30.00 and OST need to find the funds for two.
8. £100.00 needed to buy merry go round and other play equipment for these children who have no access to toys or play equipment.
9. £25.00 X 2 needed to fund two teachers from Kalkudah playgroup who would like to follow a nursery teacher's course at the Eastern University, Batticaloa.
10. Drink and snack for 15 children at Mandoor playgroup= £10.00 a month or £120.00 per annum.
11. Any donation however small will go towards making a difference to the lives of children that we at OST are committed to working with.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

1. Organise your own fund raising event for OST. A coffee morning, a sponsored event a cake sale are some ideas to get you started! We have a presentation on an USB stick which we could send you as well as laminated pictures, OHP acetates and maps to help you with your event.
2. A craft group in Lancashire kindly donated 500 knitted teddies to OST. During our last 3 visits these teddies have brought a lot of happiness to the children OST are involved with. Our teddy supply has now run out so if you belong to a craft group and would like to take on the task of knitting teddies for Sri Lanka we will be very pleased.
3. We welcome any craft, artistic contributions, greeting cards etc for OST to sell at local fairs as a means of raising funds.

4. OST are looking for a laptop to use for admin purposes and to take on trips to Sri Lanka. If anyone knows of someone who might be willing to donate a laptop, then please do let us know.

HOW OCEAN STARS OPERATES

Ocean Stars is a small UK registered charity and comprises of 5 trustees,

Dilanee Bunter - Founder
John Bunter – Chairperson
Shona Holroyd – Treasurer
Jo Barton – Secretary
Janaki Jayasuriya – Trustee

We are regulated by the UK Charities Commission to whom we are required to submit an annual return, accounts (which have been independently reviewed) and trustee annual reports.

Our trustees participate in the charity on an entirely voluntary basis and receive no remuneration for their services. However we do reimburse agreed expenses incurred in carrying out duties on behalf of the charity.

We believe that our key strength as a charity is our transparency. We aim to ensure that all income received is spent on the beneficiaries we have identified and that our donors know where their money has been spent. We communicate to our donors via direct contact, newsletters and through our website.

The trustees hold a formal meeting at least every two months where we discuss funding requests, finance, annual plans and future visits amongst other things. We also hold an AGM once per year.

If any of our donors would like to organise a fund-raising event for OST then please do not hesitate to contact us.

If you are a new donor please contact us about receiving a Gift Aid form, as if you are a tax payer, we are able to claim tax back on your donation.

Gift aid is an extremely important form of finance to OST. As a charity we use the money refunded to us by the UK government to contribute towards our overheads and visits to Sri Lanka. In addition it should be noted that if you are a higher rate tax payer, you may be able to obtain further relief on your gift aid donation in your tax return.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter. We hope you continue to support our work in making a difference to the lives of the people of Sri Lanka.

Donations made payable to “Ocean Stars Trust” can be sent to us at the above address. We will continue to keep you updated with our work.

May God Bless you. Budhu Saranay.

Dilanee Shona Janaki Jo John

Trustees of the Ocean Stars Trust, Registered Charity 1110022



Vellaimanal Playgroup
Trinco Sponsorship
Programme

Grace Children's Home Vavuniya

Thotagamuwa Village School
THOTEN Project
Pastry Shop

BATTICALOA PLAYGROUPS

- Kalkudah
- Urani
- Poonochimunai
- Nawatkudah
- Kurumanvely
- Thuraineelwanai
- Mandoor
- **Kalladay Sponsorship Programme**

AND FINALLY...

Don't forget about our on-line web-shop, www.buy.at/Oceanstars when doing your Xmas shopping this year! OST receives commission on any purchases you make without any further cost to yourself. It's easy so here is how it works.

All you have to do is log on to our web shop at www.buy.at/Oceanstars

You then select the retailer that you would like to shop from and you will then be directed to the normal on-line web shop of your choice.

Any purchases you make from the retailers will generate commission for Ocean Stars -at no additional cost to yourself.

Many of the big name on-line retailers feature on the web shop e.g. Amazon, Marks & Spencer, John Lewis etc and many have **free postage**.

The commission the retailers pay is passed on to Ocean Stars and is in effect reward for promoting their retailer.

SPECIAL THANKS AS ALWAYS TO OUR MOST RECENT MAJOR FUND RAISERS

- Fleet Methodist Church
- St Lukas Infant School, Brighton
- North Camp Methodist Church
 - 2nd Fleet Boys Brigade
 - 2nd Fleet Girls Brigade
- Heatherside Infant School
- St Catherine's School, Guildford
- YUMMIES Children's Boutique, Brighton
 - Calthorpe Park School Fleet
 - The OST Variety Show
- All individual donors and child sponsors

Thanks to your kindness Ocean Stars continues to shine on in the lives of the children of Sri Lanka.



For all your local needs we are happy to help you

- Groceries
- Confectionery
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Newspapers
- Greetings cards
- Sri Lankan spices and food

You can find us next to the Methodist Church on Reading Road, Fleet, Hampshire.



Heatherside Stores

For all your local needs we are happy to help you

- Groceries
- Confectionary
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
 - Newspapers
 - Greetings cards
- Sri Lankan spices and food

*You can find us next to the Methodist Church on Reading Road,
Fleet, Hampshire.*