

# Friends of India

Supporting education and opportunity at the grassroots

Nyon, May 2010

Dear Friends,

Early this year I spent two months in Tamil Nadu, India, visiting the many projects that you have so generously funded. In this letter I would like to give you a few of the highlights of this wonderful and heartwarming trip and to introduce to you two new projects that we visited and are considering funding.

## **GES Multipurpose Centre and Women's Self-Help Groups, Kovalam**

Kovalam is a fishing community in the district of Kancheepuram. It is about 35 kilometers south of Chennai. In 2005, the Geneva English School raised money to build a multipurpose centre for children and women in the village. At the GES Building, as it is known, almost 200 children who are first generation learners receive after-school tuition. The building also houses meetings of women's self-help groups. The members of these groups pool their funds to help each other start businesses. Approximately 90 self-help groups have been organized in and around Kovalam.



I came to Kovalam the day I arrived in India. The women of the village had organized a gathering in honour of Narayanan and his foundation, Coastal Rural Development Trust (CRDT), which built and manages the GES building and coordinates the self-help groups. More than 300 women came to the gathering. Although I was exhausted from my 48-hour journey to India, I was very moved by the gratitude of all these women towards CRDT and FOI.

## **Richard Walsh Music School at the Amalarakkini School for the Blind**

As many of you know, the Richard Walsh Music School was established in memory of my late husband, as part of the School for the Blind in Amalarrakini. More than 100 blind students receive musical training as well as 50 sighted children from neighbouring villages.



During my visit, the Music School held a concert in honour of Richard and invited me to attend as their special guest. It was a fantastic event. An orchestra of 30 blind children performed for two and a half hours, with 2,400 children from the community attending.

## **Anbumalar II**

Anbumalar II is one of my favorite projects and is a collaborative effort of Friends of India and Don Du Choeur, a Geneva-based organization that raises funds through children's concerts. Located in the district of Tiruvallur, north of Chennai, Anbumalar II is a residential school for 75 mentally challenged children and a medical dispensary for the local rural community. Praveena Paul, Director of Friends of India's Chennai Office, identified this project on behalf of Don du Choeur. FOI played a key role, not only finding donors for classrooms but also providing financial management and project feedback. The facility includes a vocational training section, physiotherapy unit, dormitories for girls and boys, kitchen and dining hall, a chapel, a yoga and conference hall, a dairy farm and a vegetable garden.



Twenty-five of the students live at the school, and fifty are day students. They possess a wide range of mental and physical handicaps and disabilities, including Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and autism. They learn academic skills in small groups from teachers trained in the Montessori method. They also receive speech therapy, vocational training, and semi-annual psychological assessments. The medical dispensary was funded by the Merieux Foundation, a medical organisation. It provides medical check-ups to the students twice a year and treats an average of 40 people from the community per day.



A first floor was added to Anbumalar's Main Building in 2009, and Ted Talbot, FOI's Treasurer, and I came as special guests to the first floor inauguration in February of this year. Anbumalar is a handsome facility. The school has a warm atmosphere and the children are happy and well looked after.

## **Possible new projects for FOI**

### **Zamar Academy**

Zamar Academy is a private primary school located in a slum of Chennai. It has an enrolment of 137 students, aged four to eight, many of whom come from single parent families. Despite very limited resources, the school provides a high standard of education. In addition, it gives the children breakfast and lunch. As you can see in this photo, the children are thriving here.



The founders of the school would like to increase the enrolment to 350 students and to build a school to accommodate them. They have found some land, for which a donor has offered to pay. However, the land is some distance from the current location, so this project will require further study.

**Possible new projects for FOI, cont.**

**Residential school for orphans with HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS affected children face strong discrimination, even from their own relatives. Children orphaned by AIDS, particularly those who are themselves HIV positive, often end up living on the streets, where they are in danger of being exploited and abused. The southernmost district of Tamil Nadu has a large HIV/AIDS population, and the Brotherhood of the Sacred Heart, which runs the Richard Walsh Music School, would like to build a residential care centre for orphans with HIV/AIDS. The centre would provide 50 orphans with housing and medical support. In addition, they would receive formal education at a school run by the Brotherhood on the same campus.



The facility would consist of two dormitories, a treatment room, a care taker room, and a recreation hall. It would also include a vocational training centre, which would provide training in paper cup/plate making to 40 youths living with HIV/AIDS, and a production unit to manufacture and market the goods and which would provide income for the facility. We hope to go forward with this project and would like to find another sponsor that would also provide support.

I was fortunate to be able to see firsthand the impact of these and other projects, and to meet with the extraordinary people who are managing them and the equally amazing children and women who are benefiting from them. I would like to pass on to you the thanks that Friends of India received at every visit and to add my own thanks for your invaluable support.

I hope to see you at our Annual General Meeting on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> May.

Thank you and warmest wishes,

Pam Walsh, OBE  
President, Friends of India