

After another successful, enjoyable and emotional trip to Madurai, we are pleased to be able to bring you some news and updates.

7 of us made the visit this time and we include contributions from some of those involved. We hope to have thoughts from others in future newsletters. The party was made up of Emma Bowyer, Sandra Davies, Elaine Gotts, Sally Letman, Lis and Stuart Lifford and Elaine Wright.

We were surprised and delighted that our transport during our stay in Madurai was to be the new bus, dedicated to the memory of Neville Cooper, our founder.



For **Rev Sally Letman** this was her first visit to Vidiyal, though not her first to India. She writes:

What a lot of excitement at the airport! I was about to meet my sponsored child for the first time. She looked thrilled to see me and presented me with flowers.



It didn't take long for us to get to know each other.

She will be ten years old in April this year and is a quiet



little girl who is obviously interested in make-up! She shows much interest in her studies and is skilled in reading and writing. She dances well too! She is very aspirational and told me she wants to be an airline pilot! Vidiyal plays an important

role in encouraging the young people to make the most of all the opportunities they are given to achieve their dreams.

My little girl's family are "untouchables" – the lowest caste category in India. Her father is an office assistant in a corporation office, and her mother works as a sanitary worker. Mother took advantage of the opportunity to learn sewing at Vidiyal's tailoring centre. This has enabled her not only to make clothes for the family, but also for her neighbours, which brings in some additional income for the family. Although both parents work hard, they find it difficult to earn enough to make ends meet. They are grateful for Vidiyal's support especially in providing their daughter with her school uniform and with medical aid when necessary.



Apart from visiting my sponsored child in her home, we went into other slums. It was a tough and very humbling experience witnessing the poverty. One slum, Ambethkar Nagar, made a real impact on me. You are struck by the rough, littered terrain and by the houses which hardly warrant the name as most of them are just shacks made of cardboard and wooden boxes covered with various pieces of tarpaulin. It's hardly surprising that they succumb to the wind and rain in the monsoon season. Once it gets dark, it is pitch black with the only light coming from cooking fires outside the shacks. However, the children were so inquisitive and happy. They can only be sponsored if they attend the school and the drop-in centres regularly, and their parents undertake to ensure this happens.



Ambethkar Nagar

A milestone has been reached this year as the first lad from this slum has embarked on a degree course and has become a volunteer at Vidiyal. This speaks volumes about the sense of pride and self esteem which the whole programme endeavours to instil in the youngsters. Here he is seen being congratulated on his achievements.



Rev Sally in Ambethkar Nagar

The Camp at Kodaikanal contributed by **Elaine Wright.**

On our visits to India we spend the first 9 days in Madurai, we celebrate the Anniversary, and then the second weekend we go away with the sponsored children, staff and helpers.

This time we went up into the hills, to Kodaikanal, which meant a 4 hour twisty bus journey for all of us. Kodaikanal is 7000 feet above sea level, a hill station, known as the Princess of Hills. It is popular as the temperature is cooler in the Indian summer. To us it was more like a summer's day, only about 24 degrees and somewhat cooler in the evenings, while Madurai had been about 34 degrees most of the time.

On Saturday morning we met the children at the beautiful Kodaikanal Lake and we all went out in boats, most of us in rowing boats with a man provided to row us. The older boys used pedalos.



The children then had the option to ride a horse or a bike, two per horse! The cyclists were allowed two circuits of the road around the lake, competing for road space with cars and horses, not a sign of a safety helmet!



We went back to their hostel for lunch where they were all keen to show us their rooms. They were mostly sleeping 5 per room, one double bed only between them all, but they were absolutely delighted with the bed and the bedding. In the afternoon we started with a visit to Coakers Walk, a kilometre walkway built on the steep mountain side. Unfortunately cloud obscured the views while we were there. The children had been advised to take jumpers, jackets and woolly hats for warmth and on arrival at Coakers Walk they were all given ear muffs! Many of the ear muffs never seemed to be removed all weekend but many of the children didn't even wear shoes!



From there we went into Bryant Park which is now a Botanical garden but with lots of space to play games. The children enjoyed cricket, ball games and the play area before leaving to go back to their hostel for some activities.



Sunday began with a visit to Pillar Rock, which is in view one moment, then covered with cloud the next. We were above the clouds so we felt like we were flying. Rev Sally, getting a reputation for buying elephants wherever we went, found yet more elephants but she couldn't buy these ones!



Most of the afternoon was spent in another park which was on a hillside great for rolling down, playing cricket, throwing and catching frisbees and blowing bubbles.



On the way to our next stop we paused for a carrot break. The Kodaikanal area is famous for its carrots and its chocolate and it's not hard to guess which treat proved most popular with the children!

All too soon it was time to say goodbye. We got into our buses and headed back to Madurai, ready for our flight the next day.



We then moved to Guna caves which are not accessible but are in an area of Shola trees which have large gnarled roots which make for a great group photo and are used for film shoots.

Sandra Davies reports on the meeting with the Alumni:

One of the most emotional occasions during the visit was the meeting with the Vidiyal alumni. This is a group formed from those children who grew up in Vidiyal, studied and employed their skills and talents and are no longer living in poverty. Some of them now visit the slums to encourage the children and also lead sessions at Vidiyal during training courses and camps. They are real role models to the children, especially as most of them still live amongst them, even if in better quality housing.



The alumni told us about their present jobs and then shared with us about the difference that Vidiyal has made to their lives, giving them opportunities, encouragement and fostering their talents. It has meant that there has always been something stable in their lives. They also talked about what their lives might have been like if they had not become involved with Vidiyal.

This became very emotional for some of them, with tears shed by them and by Jim at the words that were spoken. We had to wait for Jim's translation in most cases but then many of us finished up in tears too. Some of them had been living in very difficult circumstances and had come through with the support given personally by Jim and his team. They spoke about the difference it made to their self-esteem being able to dress well.

One young man told us how his family was completely into crime and that's the direction he would probably have taken too. Through the guiding and support of Vidiyal, he is now personal assistant to a judge.

It was wonderful to meet with these young men and women who have achieved so much in spite of the obstacles that they have encountered. It was especially thrilling for me, as I can remember many of them as young children when I first visited in 2003 and on visits since.



We may look rather dressed up for a meeting with the alumni but we were about to attend the wedding reception of another alumnus. The smile on his face when we walked in made us realise how important NewDawn is to these children and young people.

These young men and women now with families of their own have been sponsored and supported by NewDawn India and it reminds us all of the importance of sponsorship in giving encouragement to the children. An uncle of one of the young men told me that, despite his nephew being almost 30, he still keeps a small case full of all the sponsor letters, cards and postcards he has received.

The bus library

While we were taking advantage of the new bus, it was good to see the repairs and improvements in the old one in its new role as a library.



Reading and chat on the bus library



Forthcoming events:

All at Capel St Mary Methodist Church.

Spring Coffee Morning and Cake and Plant Sale:
Saturday 24th May 10am - 12 noon.

Annual Curry Evening: Saturday 18th October
7pm for 7.30pm

Trustees' News

Sally Ann Wells has stepped down as a trustee due to commitments elsewhere. We would like to thank her for her dedication to NewDawn India over many years as a trustee. We are immensely grateful that she is still happy to head up some of our fundraising activities.