

In our last newsletter, we promised you news from other travellers on the 2025 trip to Vidiyal.

**Stuart writes:**

“As a first time visitor to Vidiyal, I learned so much during my 2 weeks there - here are a few of so many recollections.

Being a retired engineer, I think I cheered when, in an evening Q & A session about their future profession, one child said ‘ I want to be an engineer!’ - all the others aspired to being teachers, joining the police or the army.

As cycling is my hobby, one highlight for me was cycling round the lovely lake in Kodaikanal, when we took some of the children for a weekend camp. My bike seemed to be missing the optional brakes!! but no-one crashed, and there was just lots of laughter.



The farewell party at the end of our visit was riotous! - children entertaining us with fantastic dancing, drumming, displays and games - it was wonderful.



As a cyclist, I was chosen to present 2 smart new mountain bikes, perfect for travelling the dirt roads between the drop in centres, to 2 volunteers who help run the activities and homework clubs.



At the end of the evening, it was impossible to count the number of children who climbed in and on a single tuk tuk to go home!”

**Lis writes:**

“In 2007 I made my first visit to Vidiyal and while there I met our sponsor child - a shy young teenager, who giggled with friends at our attempts to communicate and laughed uncontrollably when I was unexpectedly drenched by an overhead downpour at the Water Park!



Fast forward 17 years ( and several sponsor children) to our visit in January 2025.

I was amazed to meet a confident young woman - a ‘tour de force’ who appeared, as if by magic, to organise us whenever we arrived to visit a project - slum drop-ins, sewing centre, lunch for the elderly, presentation ceremonies etc.

She is now part of the Vidiyal team and the transformation is incredible.

She explained that Jim had asked her father to allow her to continue her education, in place of early marriage. Her father agreed and she graduated with BSc in Economics.

In her own words - 'I would have been a child bride, but now I am a bold woman'

I could not have anticipated the joy and pride I felt in seeing this 'bold woman' in action, contributing so much to life at Vidiyal and their mission to change lives. It was almost like having a 3rd daughter! - such is the link of sponsorship - a personal, sustained (if long distance) relationship.

To me she is remarkable - her life and that of her children is unrecognisable, compared with the future allotted to her by the caste system - rag picking on rubbish tips, panning the sewers etc. But for Vidiyal, it is what is expected/hoped - it is their 'raison d'être' - a transforming love in action, changing the lives of 100s of children and their future generations forever.

Being a very small part of this, by sponsoring some of the children, is an indescribable privilege."



Lis and Stuart with their former sponsor girl and her family

### Elaine G. writes:

### Life in Melavasal – specks of gold

When I began writing this report, I checked my spelling of Melavasal using Google – top of the search list was an article from the "The Times of India" from 2023 with the headline 'Melavasal's Sorrow: Stinking, Littered Residential Complex' which went on to report that around 2,500 residents of the 'housing board facility' are forced to live amongst various waste and rubbish.



On our 2025 visit we took the opportunity to walk through Melavasal to the 'river' that runs through it, full of waste and litter. There we met a woman panning for gold and heard how families buy bags of sand from jewellers' workshops and sift through it to recover the tiny specks of gold that have fallen to the workshop floor. These fragments are returned to the jeweller and exchanged for cash – hopefully more than the cost of the bag of sand. This woman was working diligently, searching for some small treasure.



Two years ago we saw a water tower under construction to serve the Melavasal community. By 2025, families could pump water directly from pipes in the ground to supply water for washing etc but not for drinking. There has been little progress with this project over two years and similarly little progress with reducing the amount of garbage on the streets, because the people living in this area are not a priority for those in authority.

2023



2025



In stark contrast they are the priority for Jim and the team at Vidiyal. Young lives are valued far above the specks of gold sifted from the sand and are nurtured and polished so that in turn they can shine into their communities. Despite the conditions outside of the buildings, the individual homes we visited in Melavasal and other similar areas were beautifully clean and tidy, as were the drop in centres where children gather after school to do homework and join in activities led by the Vidiyal volunteers.

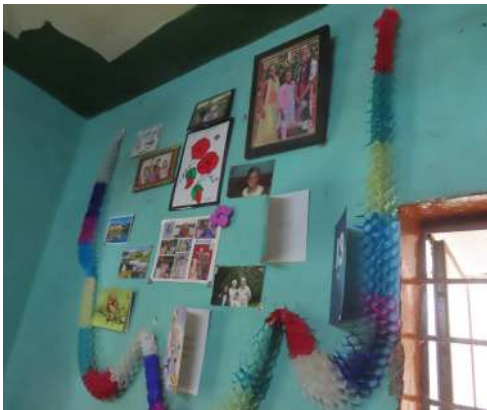
The commitment of the volunteers is phenomenal. These are young people who have grown up with the support of Vidiyal and want to give back. Mostly first and second-year undergraduates, they pledge between 15 and 24 hours every week to work for Vidiyal. They are in the best position to empathise with and inspire the children in their care. In turn they receive training and their leadership skills are developed so that they are equipped to take their rightful place in society. Valued more than the specks of gold and not washed into the river like sand as many would expect of young people from this area.



*The induction of a new set of volunteers*

Time spent with our individual sponsored children in their family homes remains a highlight for me from our visits. This time, a picture of our visit in 2023 was on display. For the older of my sponsored children our visit coincided with him preparing to fly from Madurai to Bopal to represent Vidiyal at a National event – something way beyond the expectations of those living in Melavasal.

To everyone who supports NewDawn India, especially those who sponsor, I would like to say - be encouraged! You are making a real difference to the lives of the young people you support, and they are bringing positive change to their communities. The cards and letters that you send are treasured possessions. They are a tangible reminder to the youngsters that they are valued by people living thousands of miles away.



*A home decorated with some of the sponsor correspondence*

### **Pictures of activity days at Vidiyal**

Meanwhile all the activities and celebrations at Vidiyal continue as normal, bringing variety, skills and a wider knowledge to the children.

### **The Magic of Colours Day**



### **Celebration Day of the Girl Child**



### **Celebration Day for those recently achieving degrees.**

This takes place within Melavasal slum itself so that the graduates can serve as role models in the community. It is held every four years and the day begins with alumni organising games for the children before the formal ceremony later in the day.



In 2007 we visited a designated educational site where Vidiyal had bought some land and was building a school.



2007



2025

Unfortunately the government then took over the land and the school was never completed. It took a good many years for the compensation to come through but the dream of offering good quality education to the marginal communities did not die.

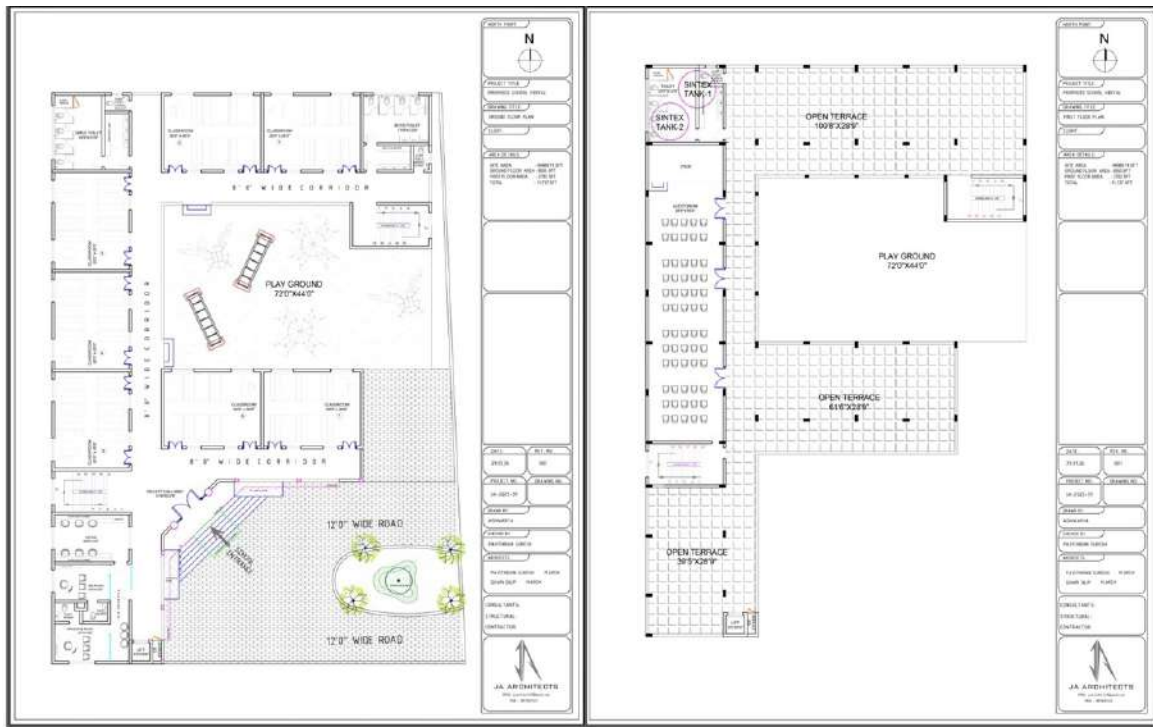
Jim and Sharmila's son Jesley has joined Vidiyal with the priority of finding a site for the school and leading things forward. With his expertise, Jess has been able to find a site outside Madurai and a new school project has begun.

Any funds raised for the original school have been kept in a protected fund so will now go towards this school, along with the compensation. However there is still a long way to go in raising the money to build and run the school.



It is an exciting project which will really benefit the marginalised communities in the area and will better equip the young people for competing for higher education places or skills-based opportunities.

If you know of any individuals or companies who might be interested in supporting this project, please contact us.



Plan of the school

**Upcoming events:**

**Cake and Plant Sale and Coffee Morning - Saturday 9th May 10am -12 noon at Capel St Mary Methodist Church**

5th April **HAPPY EASTER!** Time to send your gift for the Lent Appeal