

The Venkatraman Memorial Trust

newsletter

May 2006

The Venkatraman Memorial Trust, known as the Venkat Trust, was set up in 2004 in memory of Venkat, a boy whose education was sponsored by trustee Sylvia Holder, and who sadly was killed in a road accident at the age of 27. It provides and improves educational facilities for school children in the poor fishing village of Kovalam in Tamil Nadu, south India.

Update from Sylvia Holder, Trustee

In the last issue of the newsletter, I optimistically included a rather lengthy shopping list of things we needed for the children in Kovalam. Not in my wildest dreams did I think then that by the time of my visit in April, the list would have become reality and that I'd be looking at everything *in situ* from boundary walls to flip flops, computers to ceiling fans and well covers to cooking pots.

The Venkat Tuition Centre, every penny for which – land, bricks and mortar, equipment - came from our donors, is up and running. It is already a great success and is being put to excellent use. Over two floors, there are three main rooms, all of which were individually sponsored (the fourth being an office). The recreation area has been planted with palm and coconut trees, and swings and seesaws have been erected which are a great success with the kids.



On the shopping list was also a request for more sponsors. And, not surprisingly in view of your wonderful response, we now have 30 children sponsored! The help is making a huge difference to them. And Abdul, the boy who dreams of university, is to have them realised by a generous sponsor, and we are hoping for the same for his brother Iqbal, a couple of years behind.

The sponsored children enjoying the swings at the new Venkat Tuition Centre

Being a tiny charity and less than two years old, our database by usual charity standards is small – just 265 people. But when you get a staggering 30% response to the shopping list appeal, the seemingly impossible can be achieved. And has been.

THANK YOU ALL SO VERY MUCH.

On this latest visit to Kovalam I was accompanied by another trustee, Duncan Heather. Duncan and his wife Carol were with me on the first recce in February 2004 but hadn't been back since so it was very interesting for him to see all the improvements that have taken place. Two new classrooms have gone up on the school land, the Venkat Tuition Centre (which he designed) has been built and land has been bought for the high school. The classrooms are now furnished, there are more teachers, better lunches, and the pupils are dressed in smart uniforms.



The headmaster and I join the pupils in one of the new classrooms on the school land



An English lesson in one of the sponsored rooms at the Venkat Tuition Centre....



.... and another of the sponsored rooms

The Venkat Tuition Centre is already being used for daily English lessons and more are planned. The older children – the 11, 12 and 13 year olds – all have two lessons a week with a local Indian man who has an excellent rapport with his eager to learn pupils. As from August, the younger children – the 6, 7 and 8 year olds – will be taught by Max van Kralingen, a young Englishman qualified to teach English as a foreign language. Max, who is independent but comes on a VSO-type of arrangement, is at present teaching in China and has asked for nothing more than basic accommodation, food and some pocket money, in exchange for his services. As well as daily class teaching, he will also start basic computer training. We are very much looking forward to him joining the school. We also now have some excellent teaching aids for Max in the form of a TV, DVD player and some highly recommended BBC discs, as well as more recreational DVDs like Postman Pat. I'm looking forward to being able to have conversations with the children without any translation being necessary!

JR, Venkat's brother, who works tirelessly for the Trust, has been paving the way for the high school to be built, on land we have already bought. The Indian bureaucracy is endless (I wonder where they got that from?!) but he is negotiating the minefield and hopes soon to have all the right certificates we need for the go ahead. Then it's over to the Government who has agreed to pay for and erect the buildings.



Lunch time at the Panchayat School—the Trust is providing 1000 eggs a month to provide more protein for the children's lunch twice a week

