



## **KERALA PARTNERSHIP**

*Meeting People,  
Meeting Needs,  
Making a difference.  
Charity Number 1088159*

### **KERALA PARTNERSHIP—FEBRUARY 2024**

Following the last newsletter dated June 2023 many of you made special donations in light of our comments that 'things were getting tight' financially.

Thank you so much; it meant that changes we had worried would need to be introduced did not have to be made.

We arranged to visit Kerala from mid-November to early December. Before going Jane sent emails and messages to friends and relatives saying that for the first time we would not post Christmas greetings cards but instead donate the cost of cards and stamps to K.P. And purchase a goat and a sewing machine as part of the self-employment project.

Once again there was a wonderful and unexpected reaction—many messages were sent back saying this was a good idea and that a donation was on its way from them also to be used to create more employment opportunities—fantastic and, again, many thanks!

November / December 2023 visit.

We settled into our rented apartment (Indeevaram Apartments, Kovalam Junction) and started arranging dates to visit various of the projects (children's nutrition, elderly care, community welfare, employment, pension schemes).

#### **Children's nutrition:**

We can continue to support the 'egg and milk' schemes for at least the next 9 months. 10 nurseries are involved now and their approx 200 infants receive one egg plus a glass of milk twice each week. The teachers and assistants prepare everything. You will remember that these 10 schemes are real partnerships with the P.T.A. (Parent Teacher Associations) contributing money alongside the K.P. Grant to cover the cost. The K.P. Monthly grant across the 10 nurseries is £70.





Photo on page 1 and these two above shows children at the two nurseries we visited, and the teachers and assistants at one of them.

Left:

We were treated to a dance programme at each nursery and it was great to see the little ones perform so well!

### **Elderly care:**

Old Age Home, Kattakkada: - we made several visits to see Peter, the staff and the residents. The home is in good condition having been recently repainted, the residents seemed happy (and were pleased to see us), and the staff remain as committed as ever. We discussed the K.P. Grant with Peter. Even having reduced the monthly grant by approx £70 earlier in 2023 (a reduction in the number of days worked by the Community Nurse Kavitha) the Old Age Home and Community Nursing Service remains the highest monthly grant—£230. Peter and the staff work hard and provide care, love and attend to all the residents needs. There were 32 residents when we visited and 5—6 are bedridden. There is a separate ‘annex’ for bedridden residents and Nurse Reena regularly monitors them. We asked Peter why the resident number had increased from the usual total of 25 and we learned that in October (only a month or so before our visit) the Local Government Hospital had identified a large number of its inpatients who no longer needed to be there, and had notified the Local Government Welfare Office these inpatients were being discharged immediately. The Welfare Department then contacted a small number of ‘orphanages’ (Care Homes) which they know to be of good standing and informed them that a number of people were being sent to be looked after. There was no opportunity for discussion or negotiation. There would be no funding provided to go toward the cost of their on-going care.

Refusal would lead to 'consequences'.

Peter had to accept the situation and accepted the 7 residents who were sent.

Not only did Peter have to acquire 7 extra beds / mattresses etc and find space for them, but also had to cover the costs of various medical checks and prescriptions needed by these new folks.

We met the 7 and several are severely disabled, for example one lady is paralysed from a stroke and is limited to either her bed or a wheelchair, unable to feed herself or wash and so on.

No special equipment was offered by the Authorities for those with special requirements (wheelchairs , elevating bed as examples).

Peter had been finding it hard to cover the increasing costs of running the home with 25 residents and the arrival of the extra individuals was giving him even greater problems.

At the end of our stay in Kerala we offered to provide an additional £50 per month for a fixed period of 6 months to give Peter the opportunity of securing more funds/sponsorship from local business people. He manages to get £400—500 each month from local sponsors but we know this takes a lot of his time.

We will be looking at his spending returns that are sent to us to see the state of the finances over the next few months.



Jane with two of the residents—Nurse Reena also !

#### Pakal Veedu (day centres) —Mulluvila:

30—35 'Mothers' meet once a month for the whole day (Wednesday) - these ladies all experience loneliness and told us how much they look forward to the 'pakal veedu' day. It is organised by a small community of Sisters who spend much of their time in the local area helping the sick, housebound and poor as much as they can. They have no funds to provide material items, apart from a very small sum from K.P. (£10) to give two food-kits to whoever is in the greatest need that month . We learned that 'food / domestic poverty' was becoming worse in this rural 'interior' area.

At the end of our stay we offered to provide an extra £50 per month for 6 months only so that an extra 10 'food/domestic items' kits could be given out to those most in need in the community (now a total of 12 therefore at least for the next little while).



In the Christmas spirit at pakal veedu at Mulluvila...we have to say their 'Father Christmas' costumes are pretty scary!  
The red suit is topped by a face mask more likely to frighten children than make them feel calm!



LEFT;  
This is the food/domestic items kit.

A food-only kit is also given out at some of the meetings—tea, rice, spices, sugar, vegetables, oil

#### Pakal Veedu—Vattavila:

The group meets two times each month for half a day—all were happy to see us again. 30/33 ladies and 2 men attend regularly to meet and openly share their feelings and problems they may be facing. They are given morning tea and snack and at the end of the morning each one receives a simple food-kit. After talking about the impact of rising costs we agreed to the request that the current monthly grant of £100 be increased to £110. So each meeting costs about £55 to support the 35 (total of approx 50 in their households).



Two of the elderly ladies especially pleased to see Jane again!

## **Improving employment opportunities:**

### **Goats, sewing machines and 'petty businesses':**

So far the newsletter has updated you on the 'regular projects' - the projects and their schemes that receive monthly grants. In this section of the newsletter it's great to report about the 'one-time' grants that enable someone to become self-employed so they can earn enough to support themselves and their family, and provide the basics of food, clothing and medicines.

In October we asked the project leaders if they had any suggestions to make about what K.P. Should fund in 2024:

.....'please keep as many of the regular projects as possible, and think if more self-employment grants might be made. So many want to earn a little money but are either too old or infirm to go and seek labouring work'.....

Your response after the last newsletter plus the reaction to the Christmas Cards plan resulted in some wonderful extra donations, as we said earlier. A portion of those extra and unexpected funds has been set aside to ensure the regular projects will be ok until at least the early months of 2025 and we felt the balance should be used on employment schemes to give immediate benefit to as many people as possible.

### **As a result of your generosity, grants have been given to purchase:**

- **5 goats**
- **9 sewing machines**
- **6 'petty business' initiatives.**

Anitha taking over from Jane and, yes, Anitha and the goat travelled to her home in a 3-wheel rickshaw.

This photo taken at the Old Age Home—see how Peter is growing herbs and small veg plants to save money.



It is wonderful what you all have made possible—20 people now gaining some independence and we think there are about 60 living in their households. For most of the 20 they have either not been getting any income, or at best were able to get irregular daily-rate work.

Concerning the 'petty businesses' we were able to offer grants for the top 6 on the 'priority list' (the volunteers asked if we could stretch to 10).

**Sunni**—widow supporting 4—renting a small shop / shed to start a tea/snack stall.

**Binu**—supporting 4—vegetable seller

**Rajam**—supporting her disabled husband—fruit sales from their home

**Bindu**—widow with 2 children—selling ready-made clothes from her home

**Viji** - widow with 2 children—stitching / garment repairs from home

**Aji**—disabled man - he and his wife have a make-shift shop and wanted a grant to increase the range of items to sell.



Left—Jane with Jalaja and her new machine; Jalaja's home is very old and dilapidated with extensive damp and mould on the walls. The machine is by the window as this is the brightest spot and least affected by mould. Jalaja was very grateful to have been given a machine .

Below—the 5 ladies who received a petty business grant; on the extreme right is Alphonsa who is the N.I.D.S. Coordinator for Women's development and empowerment and she will monitor and support the new petty business 'owners'.

On the next page you will see Sanjo (the disabled fellow who has a small shop he and his wife run)



**Aji and wife;** their home is in very poor condition and is located next to a large College. Some time ago the students built the shop / shed so that Sanjo could have some income selling sweets etc after his accident that left him disabled and unable to continue with manual labouring. Sanjo wanted to increase the range of items on sale particularly expanding the stationery items that are in demand from the students. Alphonsa lives in the College and so helps Sanjo ...now she is trying to raise funds to rebuild his home.



**Above—Rajam ; fruit stall!**  
**Right—Bindu and the 'ready-mades'**

These photos have been sent to us in January after Alphonsa had worked with all the 6 recipients to set up their new businesses.



One of the sewing machine ladies: **Sheeja**—carries out repairs and stitches blouses for local ladies. It was interesting to see she also keeps ducks to use / sell the eggs. The ducks were nervously waddling round her home huddled together as we left!

### Revisiting employment projects featured in previous newsletters (January 2022 and June 2023):

We revisited some of these previous projects to see if they were still working ok; here is a short summary:

**Sunitha** has been stitching for nearly a year having received a grant for a new sewing-machine from K.P. (See last page of June 2023 newsletter). She is now earning between £2 and £3 per day and employs another seamstress when her order book is busy! Sunitha can comfortably pay the rent for the home/work room, and provide for her and her son's everyday needs including his education fees. She has achieved this from hard work and from that initial grant of approx £80 for the (first) machine



**'Rainbow' Women's Cooperative (Edibles):** the ladies continue to make snack items and earn about 70p to £1 per day each;

**Women's Cooperative—Candle making at Vidhura:** all going well and they are keen to expand the business so that more ladies can join the cooperative. Their work and storeroom is provided rent free at present but the ladies have been told the space needs to be vacated. However they are in discussion to take on a small plot right on the roadside where there is a lot of passing trade (Candles are in demand). If successful they will need to build a simple 'shed' which will not be costly.

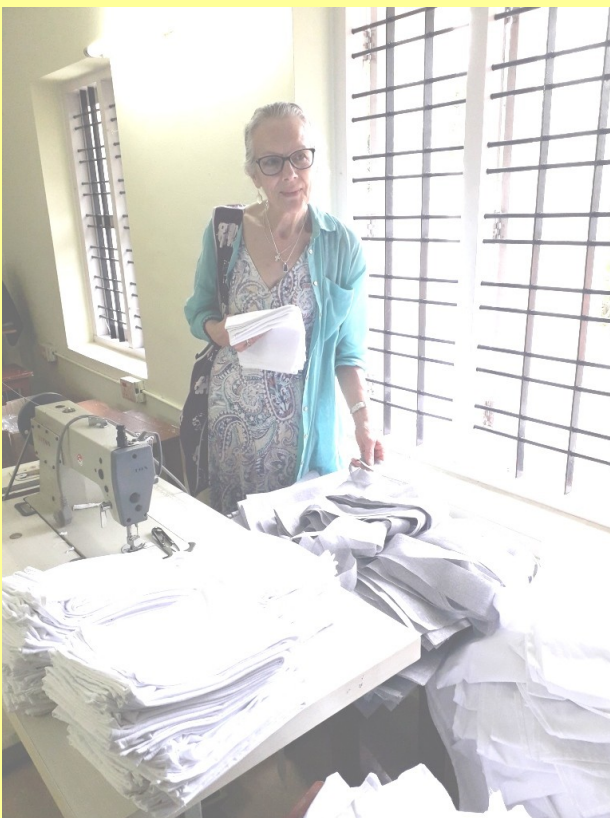


**Women's Cooperative: Candle making, soaps, lotions and cleaning fluids at Punnakkunnu:** also wanting to increase the number of coop members. They were very keen to show us their latest venture of cultivating mushrooms! A trial run was underway with the hope that they could 'grow' the market.



6 of the ladies with Jane and next to her is Alphonsa

**Women's Cooperative: tailoring school and workshop at Vattavila:**



this scheme is in the same building where the Pakal veedu takes place. There are 6 or 7 regular women attending to produce items that are on contract order—cloth shopping bags (for one of the large Supermarkets in Kovalam Junction; hand cloths and linen towels for a Hotel Group based in the north of the State. The income from this work keeps the centre open and provides each of the women with an income based on how many pieces they make—we checked and it is a 'fair wage'. At present there is no sewing teacher/instructor as the previous lady left but a replacement is being actively sought. If any of the women, having received basic training (possible even without an Instructor present) wish to work at home to do local stitching work then we have put in place a scheme to provide a sewing machine and threads, needles, accessories to the most deserving cases.

The 4 Women's Cooperatives are all now in their 3rd year of working—it is good that they are continuing.

We asked each of them what they saw as their next potential step to expand and grow. Both of the candle making projects said there was a high demand not only for the types and size of candles they each sell, but also much larger ornate ones as the different religious communities celebrate various Feasts and Festivals and community members want these candles. When K.P. Provided the grants to each project they both used part of the grant to purchase wax moulds for small, simple candles for use in the home. So their ideas for expansion were being hampered.

Given the success of the two projects (that are not close to each other and so there is no market rivalry) we made a one-time additional grant of £200 to each of them for the purchase of suitable moulds plus wax supplies.

The understanding we made was that such an increase in trade would mean that more women could join the Cooperatives and so start to receive a basic income; there is just not enough income and profit at present to allow more to join the cooperative membership.

We will wait for reports on how this plan develops.

The Tailoring centre want to secure the services of an instructor as there are several young women who want to attend and be trained—as we have commented earlier once trained the person can either work at the centre using its machines and stitch the contract items, or can chose to work at home either by taking a loan to buy a machine or by putting their case and a request to have a K.P. Sponsored machine.

## **Pensions:**

We met with one group of 'pensioners' and we were keen to find out how the small sum given each month helps them. You may remember our comments in earlier newsletters that the sum of £2 per person per month has been in place for many years and we have asked the volunteers about its 'value' given the huge increases in the cost of daily items over recent years. Most explained to the volunteers that the pension helped with the cost of regular medicines but did not cover the full cost.

Later, we asked the volunteers for their thoughts on reducing the number of pensioners (100 at present) and giving more per month to those remaining. Their advice was that, although small all 100 valued the Rs200 and would feel some difference if were withdrawn.

At the end of our visit, when we have a final discussion with the volunteers, we said we would maintain the pensions but suggested that when an individual dies, another elderly person is not offered a pension in their place. As the number of pensioners reduce then it will be possible to increase the monthly sum to the remaining number in that particular pension scheme.

We will wait and see.

Some extra photos for your general interest!.....



Peter (Danam) who is devoted to helping the elderly and those in need in his local community. (In case of doubt—that's me!)

#### Petty Business:

Aji with his wife and children. The Local Authority have approved a grant of approx £4000 toward the cost of rebuilding their home but only if Aji initially provides £2000 for the 'first works' to be carried out. Alphonsa is trying to find sponsors. We were invited to look in the house—it is in very poor condition...



#### Petty Business:

Here is **Sunni** with her new tea and snacks shop!



Well, this was a surprise!

One morning around breakfast time we heard some noise outside the rear balcony—our rooms were on the first floor. ....and then we saw this chap free-climbing to cut off some of the coconuts; we bought one off him. You really could not get a shorter time 'from the tree onto your plate'!



Above—The ladies at Vidhura Cooperative.



Ladies Cooperative in action!



'Edibles' shop on the village high street.

**We hope you have found this newsletter of interest and please be assured your donations have made real differences for so many. We thank you and we thank the volunteers who make sure the K.P projects and their schemes run smoothly.**

**We send our good wishes to all,  
David and Jane.**

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