



KERALA PARTNERSHIP

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

AN EVENTFUL VISIT IN JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2026

In the December 2025 newsletter we said we were visiting Kerala in January – and we just about made it!

Unfortunately, the two of us fell on the ice a week before our departure and Jane suffered a badly broken wrist. The snow had been heavy you might remember but we needed to go to the town and so set off arm in arm to 'give each other support'. We never made it!

However, after treatment Jane got permission to fly from the Hospital Consultant and the airline. (Our insurers nearly doubled the premium though when we contacted them to notify a 'change in medical condition'). We arrived in Kerala in late January with Jane suffering somewhat and she still is I'm sorry to report.



Photo showing Jane's snazzy cast – here she is with Shreelatha; there's more to read later about Shreelatha's project!

You will see in this newsletter how the routine schemes are going along and also that new grants have been made.

Soon after arrival we learned two important things: first, that the price of everyday items had increased very significantly due to world events and their impact on fuel costs. Second, although there had no doubt been initiatives to 'eliminate absolute poverty' across Kerala (the insert we included in the December newsletter referred to this) those initiatives had not reached those districts

where K.P. is active. The poverty that was there before had become worse due to inflationary pressures. To complicate matters the situation had become even worse in the weeks prior to our arrival as bottled gas was in short supply in some areas, and non-existent in others. This gas is imported with the bulk of it usually coming through the Strait of Hormuz.

Bottled gas is the common energy source for everyday cooking of the staple items.

From the outset we could see that there would be pressure on the money we had taken to fund the regular projects and schemes both old and new.

There was one positive point however concerning the currency exchange rate – due to changes in the global economy the rate had moved from roughly £1 = Rs 100 at the time of the previous visit to £1 = Rs 120 and so we were able to get a better return on your generous donations!

With all this as a background to the visit here is what we achieved in partnership with the great volunteers and scheme leaders who manage and monitor the K.P. activities

OLD AGE HOME AND COMMUNITY NURSING SERVICE

Peter and his team continue to give love, care and support to the residents and the home is in good condition. The week before our arrival a local person had paid for a new, fully equipped ambulance so that Peter would not have to keep hiring vehicles to take residents to hospital. This was great and very convenient for the comfort of the residents, and we also commented that this generous donation should reduce some of Peter's regular spending on transport. The sponsor had not made any provision however for the running / operating costs of the vehicle which had cost about £15000

Another local sponsor had donated £20000 so that a community Hall could be built on land adjacent to the Old Age Home so that residents could go there for functions, and so that the local families in the neighbourhood could use it for meetings and special functions.

These are two good developments but will put extra strains on Peter to manage them; it seemed clear to us that at present covering the running costs of the old age home was the essential matter to solve.



At the time of our April 2025 visit the number of residents in the home had increased beyond its 'registered number' of about 26 to 31 and we had said to Peter that while KP would continue with the regular monthly grant for all of 2025 we would be reducing the monthly sum in 2026.

When we visited the home there were 24 residents as Peter had been refusing to admit new people after any 'vacancy' came available – you will remember the police and Local Authorities typically were forcing admissions onto Peter.

Even with the reduced number of 24 Peter was saying he was in difficulties in meeting the running costs. We had to say that we would continue the 2025 level of monthly grant for 5 more months but that it would reduce from June 2026 initially for 6 to 9 months. We said that since the Government had introduced guaranteed pensions to elderly people pressure needed to be applied to government officials to implement policy and provide these payments either to the residents directly or to the Home. If those payments were made for the 24 residents the monthly 'income' to the home would increase by approx. Rs 30000 and the budget would be back in balance.



These were not easy discussions and we all had a real sense of disappointment that for once KP had to turn down a request for financial help from the Old Age Home.

The community Nursing Service will continue as before with the same level of funding. In total the Home and nursing service has been granted £2600 to the end of December 2026. We have said we will always keep in contact in case of any crises that might need a supplementary one-time grant.

10 PENSION SCHEMES

This project has been in place for approx. 15 years and for about half of that time the grant has been Rs 200 monthly to 100 individuals / households. During our last visit we commented that the value of Rs 200 was greatly reduced since the project started and we asked the volunteers running the 10 schemes to let everyone know KP would be stopping the schemes in 2026 and introducing a new approach. Before starting our visit and in the first few days after arrival we asked various people whom we know if individuals were receiving pensions – their answers confirmed that pensions were now being paid at a rate of Rs 1600 (January 2026), and as part of election pledges the plan would be to increase this to Rs 2000 per month by mid 2026. (Rs 1600 was about £13 at February rates). The KP sum of Rs 200 (£1.70) seemed rather small. (Note: another check made while drafting this newsletter confirmed the Rs 2000 rate is now in place).

In our meeting with the lead volunteer for the pension project we said that having indicated last year there would be a new approach in 2026, the current pensions would continue until end of April and then the total monthly sum of Rs 20000 (Rs 200 x 100 pensioners) would become a 'hardship and welfare fund'. The 10 local leads for the pension schemes could contact the project lead volunteer for 'one time' grants to help an individual in urgent need.

We commented that the Rs 20000 did not need to be allocated in full each month if there was not a call on it and the funds could potentially accumulate and be available if there was a bigger initiative (e.g. a building repair).

Once again a departure from what has been in place for some time but we felt this new approach would focus on helping those in real need. We are aware that although pensions are now reaching many eligible individuals not everyone receives this benefit.

NUTRITION / 'EGG AND MILK' PROJECT



19 nurseries are now part of the project and we managed to visit 5! It was great to meet the teachers, some of the parents and of course the children. We were treated to dancing and singing performances and were coaxed into joining in at times!

The cost of buying the eggs and milk has increased and so we offered to raise the current MONTHLY grant of Rs 500 (£4.20) to Rs 600 (£5) for each of the 20 nurseries. You will remember that these schemes are funded by KP and money donated by the teachers themselves plus

some of the parents who are able to give something. The small increase was much appreciated.

Before our visit we asked if any of the nurseries needed any furniture or equipment – we had noticed on the photos and videos we receive regularly from many of the teachers that the nursery rooms seemed a little 'bare'. On arrival the lead volunteer for the project handed us a long list of items submitted by 6 nurseries – well, we did ask! It was interesting that while there are a few requests for clothes lockers, chairs and desks, all 6 asked for playground equipment (see-saw, slide,

roundabout etc). The teachers told us that 'play' is as important as 'desk work' in the day. We agreed to see what sum could be allocated for the project leader to distribute according to their priorities.



PAKAL VEEDU – VATTAVILA AND MULLUVILA



We visited both; at Mulluvila we met with all the ladies and were treated to a show of traditional village dances and yes were persuaded to join in! (Photo left)

At Vattavila the Pakal Veedu members had delayed their Christmas Party so that we could join them in the celebration. This was a tough one as however much we politely declined there was a 'requirement for us to perform; we ad-libbed two rousing verses and choruses of 'Jingle Bells' in both song and actions!

All the group members and organisers in both places told us how much they look forward to these days – meeting others, talking, sharing problems, having food and refreshments.

We have increased the monthly grants due to price increases:



Mulluvila: (photo left) - £100 per month for the gatherings plus food kits for all

Vattavila: £110 per month for the gatherings plus 10 food kits for housebound elderly people living nearby.

EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES – two of the 'petty business' schemes

All the schemes we reported in the December newsletter are going well. We visited Sreelatha (hand-loom weaving) and Usha (doll and toy making). Usha lives near a large Hindu Temple where many Festivals are held and she sells many toys (cuddly birds, giraffes, parrots, dogs) to families attending – she is allowed to set up a roadside stall near the Temple. Sadly however she had been served a Court order to quit her home only a few days before our visit and so it was both upsetting for her and uncertain about where she would be living. We asked the volunteers if KP could offer any assistance but a few days later it was clear that nothing practical was possible.



Photo on left shows Usha with some of her toys. Photo on the right shows part of a Procession taking place at the Temple near to Usha's house – yes, that is an ornamental steel spear piercing both cheeks of the devotee.



Shreelatha has her loom on the roof of her home which is set in a woodland. At the time of our visit she was working on a contract to

provide the local Police Department with cotton sheeting that is then made into uniform shirts. It is a good contract and she earns £13 per week (brilliant!) Shreelatha had worked previously in commercial weaving mills and is skilled and knowledgeable in weaving techniques; she is thrilled to be self-employed and earning enough to support her family. Her grant, like that for Usha and most others for starting a 'petty business' was £50.



Photo on the right shows Jane and Shreelatha, Bethan and (left of photo) next to Bethan is Lalitha who is the N.I.D.S. Women's Empowerment Officer and who is also a member of the local Panchayath (Local Government Body).

We have received a new list of 'petty business' applications and will be agreeing small grants soon for a number of these.

Co-Operative Employment Projects.

The Women's Cooperative – Karunyam – also shown in the last newsletter is now well established and doing well.

We were asked if funds for another Women's Cooperative could be provided and so a meeting was arranged for us and the 8 ladies so they could explain their idea. These ladies had been working on the Government's '100 days employment' scheme which guarantees 100 days work in a year undertaking public work such as litter collecting, clearing ditches etc. The 100 days are not given as

known / planned dates so the women cannot plan child care cover for example. Therefore the women may not have the chance to work the 100 days. The daily wage is about £2.50 to £3.



The ladies had found a shop to rent which we went



to see – a good location on a main road. They had decided on the range of goods to sell and had settled who would carry out the different jobs such as bulk buying, packaging, staffing the shop, door-to-door selling. It looked to be a good plan and the scheme would be supervised by the lead volunteer for the KP employment project (Alphonsa – N.I.D.S. member of staff). We agreed a £500 grant for the scheme to be established. This has now happened and the pictures above, recently received from them, show the project in progress. It is called Kandanthitta.

HOUSE BUILDING

In earlier newsletters we have shown photos of Aji – a disabled man who lives with his wife and family in a small dilapidated house. Aji received a petty business grant to help with running a shop that students had built for him. The students study in the Emmanuel College (Vazhichal) situated next to Aji's house and roadside shop. In the newsletter we explained that one of the student 'community groups' was raising funds to build a new home for the family, and at that time we committed to raise some funds as a contribution. Since that time we have been receiving updates on how the student activities have been going and indeed they had raised about half of the contract sum (approx. £10000) and therefore sufficient for the old house to be demolished and the foundations laid for a new and larger home – an architect had drawn plans free of charge and the contractor had accepted the job at a fair price. Work had started only a week before our arrival in Kerala so we were able to see the foundation work underway when we visited the College and Aji.



The College senior management Group had made available another property for Aji to live in during the building work. With other charity events planned and arranged by the Students and College staff KP gave Aji a grant of £1750 (a further 17% to



add to the student's 50%). Aji immediately handed the funds to the Contractor so that the next stage of building the walls could follow on once the foundations were finished. The new home is going to be a big boost for Aji and family.

We had arranged to meet the College Director and the College Principal together with some of the Student Group members. The Group is affiliated to the National Service Scheme (NSS) – this is an India-wide scheme introduced for university and college students to engage in voluntary community service. NSS Groups are well organised and aim to develop the ‘personality and character’ of students through helping others.

Emmanuel College has 2 NSS Groups and for 2026 they have a programme of activities, including the construction of the home for Aji. We asked to be kept updated not only about the house but also another of the emerging schemes which will centre on the village of Puravimala which is home to a poor and deprived Dalit community. The Dalit people of India have faced extreme social exclusion and prejudice in the past and were considered to be the ‘lowest level of the caste hierarchy’ in India. The College NSS Group have gained the confidence of the village residents and are planning to help the women into self-employment through practical training programmes. We asked to be kept informed if the Group felt there were opportunities for partnership working with KP.

It was good to learn that the NSS motto is ‘not me but you’, and the College ethos is expressed by their phrase ‘train to live and serve’,

‘COASTAL BRAINS’ – fishing village of Adimalathura

We met with Joy during our last visit and we reported in the last newsletter on issues of pollution affecting this village and of the impact on the lives of the traditional shore-fishermen arising from the new Vizhinjam International ‘trans-shipment’ port. We have kept in touch with Joy and had a good meeting with him at the tourist resort of Kovalam. He has personally developed a great presence and range of educational and social-care projects in Adimalathura as part of the ‘Coastal Brains’ charity. Joy is from a fishing family and has seen fishing go into gradual decline and so he has been encouraging and enabling young people in the village to gain skills and qualifications and not simply assume they will have to follow in their parents footsteps and work in the fishing and allied trades; he has a well respected school and has a number of ‘god parents’ who sponsor individual students as well as fund raising he carries out himself.

Joy is making superb progress and has a significant number of his school students succeeding in the primary and secondary level education exams, then attaining places at university and getting professional jobs – he told me that 3 of the older students I helped with ‘communicative English’ lessons nearly 10 years ago have recently graduated: 2 as Medical Doctors and one as a Dentist.

While such progress is clear for these students who engage with school poverty remains a big problem – there was no connection of the Kerala ‘elimination of extreme poverty’ initiative with any family in Adimalathura. As a small contribution we offered to trial a small-scale monthly ‘food kit’ scheme for 25 households. This started in April and is being managed by a number of the senior students at the Coastal Brains School, under Joy’s supervision. Once the scheme has settled down and assessed we will discuss with Joy and the students the benefits of increasing the grant to provide kits to more families.

Initial trial cost is £75 per month; see photos on next page (these are substantial kits)



Concerning the pollution by 'noodles' I met with a Kovalam based marine conservation specialist who explained that daily early morning clean-up teams were still operating along the coastline especially on the stretches of public beaches, collecting the plastic waste (beads / 'noodles') that were released from the sunken tanker in 2025 off the Kerala coast in the Arabian Sea. Commercial contracts had been let for this clean-up work and I believe the waste is then being sold back to the manufacturers / suppliers! We saw this waste as we walked on the beaches.



The international Port continues to expand and the infrastructure work is having a big impact on the surrounding area as new highways and freight rail lines are under construction that will provide routes for the shipping containers to travel north into India, and beyond. We were unable to take any photos of the port and the immediate area as intensive security is in place along the perimeter fencing and we were warned to look only briefly and then move on.

Photo shows how just these few of the container cranes tower over the traditional fishing boats

..... the visit was successful and we enjoyed seeing our friends and partners and visiting the village areas where your donations continue to make real changes and deliver improvements to the lives of individuals and families. We had to make changes to what has been an established pattern of spending and as we have said that lead to some disappointments. But we need to apply your donations carefully and try to give the most benefit to those in need bearing in mind future sustainability

As always, we say a big thank you for your continuing support.

David and Jane.

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