



TRIBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE, SITTINGI

Newsletter 2007-'08

Warmest Greetings to all our friends from all of us at Sittilingi

Our best wishes to you and your family for a happy healthy 2008, and our thanks for helping the team here in Sittilingi in our work towards the health and happiness of our tribal community. Without you we could not do it.



Minister for Commerce, Shri Jairam Ramesh inaugurates shirts made in organic cotton from Sittilingi

Health news

In the base hospital we are making good use of all our new buildings and equipment as Inpatient and Outpatient consultations continue to increase. Donations from the Japanese government bought an ultrasound machine and a blood analyser for the lab. We are now experienced at producing high quality X Rays from our on site machine. The new Out patient building is nearly complete.



Ultrasound scan facilities have made treatment more effective

A new industrial washing machine has simplified cleaning the theatre drapes and suits on operating days. Our **Health workers** continue confidently to manage health education, admissions, deliveries, and many minor ailments and wounds un-

aided. This year we delivered 350 babies, an increase of 100 on the 2006 total, including to our happy surprise, **4 sets of twins**.

In the office more of the day to day management and accounting is being taken over by the junior team members. Ongoing training is enabling them to take more responsibility so that the team is becoming independent. We have also employed 5 new staff from the surrounding villages for administration and laboratory work.

Self sufficiency is now a realisable goal for the Tribal Health Initiative.

We will always be grateful for financial help with capital projects such as building work or equipment, but now we hope that within 5 years we will be able to cover the day-to-day running costs from consultation and in-patient fees alone. This puts us in a much more secure position long term, and means that all the money and support given to us over the years has helped us move steadily towards independence.

Expansion plans

Self sufficiency in the base hospital also means we can look towards helping the tribal communities in the surrounding hill villages. 10,000 Sittilingi valley residents now have improved health and economic prospects after 15 years of THI's existence.

About 40,000 more in the surrounding Kalrayan Hills area still suffer maternal deaths in childbirth, infections, infant deaths and malnutrition. Some do come to THI but it can take totally up to 8 hours of travelling on foot and by several buses to reach us. We are not yet sure exactly how we will approach the huge problems, but initial survey and evaluation is already under way, and we have started to discuss options with the communities involved. One thing is certain, we will be needing funds for training and new employees, as well as equipment, rent and materials.

Life saving surgery for Selvaraj

Selvaraj arrived at the hospital at 5 am. The 25 year old tribal farmer was woken in the early hours by severe bellyache. Luckily Regi had just arrived back from a trip away. He diagnosed a likely burst ulcer. X-Ray confirmed this and Selvaraj was operated on the same afternoon. Regi repaired a 1/2cm hole in his intestine. There were no complaints about his long scar. "I already did two Caesarean operations for his wife!" observed Regi.

3 years ago when Regi was away for a weekend another young man came in with the same problem. Against medical advice to go for immediate surgery in town, he went home and then died, leaving a wife and 2 children.

Selvaraj went home this week fit and well, and promising never to touch alcohol again.

Comings and goings:

Dr Lalit Narayan joined us in July 2007. Newly qualified from St John's in Bangalore, he is learning fast, and now has full medical responsibility as well as managing the *Friends of Sittilingi Facebook* group and regular news blog!

The crèche is keeping busy. Congratulations to **Junior Dhanam**, **Senior Madhesh** and **Vijaya**: new little sister and brothers for Rajesh, Swetha and Ajay. We are happy to announce the marriages of **Jaya** and **Sangeetha**.

Ramesh our office manager has finished his post-graduate supplementary studies and returned from university at Gandhigram near Madurai. He was sorely missed but welcomed back all the more warmly with his new wife **Saratha**. Office **Ravi** is taking a break from full time work, after helping THI since inception.

3 families are now settled happily in the new Staff Quarters.

Visitors: we have welcomed many visitors and students from India, America and Europe. In particular the Government Secretary for Tribal Welfare, **Mr C Muthukumaraswamy**.

Dr Nick Bateson from FOS UK visited for a month in January 2007 and January 2008, to discuss budgets and future plans. **Ian Carter-Brown** from *Fair Grounds* trading company also visited to clinch a marketing agreement for the **Porgai** embroidery products.

Friends of Sittilingi (FOS) As usual we have had loyal and invaluable help from all our *Friends* in India and Europe. Our sincere thanks to individual *Friends* in Salem for our superb new washing machine, and to the **State Bank of India** for generously funding a smart new computer server, printer and photocopier as well as solar powered lighting for the hospital, and new OT lights. **BCF**, **CIKS**, **FOS-UK** and **AID** provide partial support for some health and farming programs. **MMKCT** has helped build the new OP block. **TANSACS** helps us with the HIV program.



The gleaming new washing machine reduces our workload

Funding is always difficult to find, and we intend that our community should continue to improve rather than slide back for want of support. Our work needs reliable ongoing financial backing now that the initial framework has been evolved. We are proud of our steady progress and our teamwork - both of which would be impossible without **YOU**.

Happy faces as Fairgrounds UK signs an agreement with the Porgai Craft group in Thanda



Organic farming and craft booming...

3 years ago when the THI organic farming project started in the valley most farmers were rather dubious, and felt maybe turmeric and cotton could be grown organically, but never believed it would work for other crops. Now the regular farmers' meetings are lively discussions ready to try new cultivation methods and marketing strategies.

"What can't we grow? Nothing - we can try anything" said one of the farmers last month. 21 villages are trying organic crops now including new kinds of rice with techniques using less seed, less water and home made fertiliser., Sticks posted at intervals in the crop provide perches for birds who eat the insects and pests. Costs are enormously reduced, and yield is good.

We have found regular buyers for our organic cotton (last year it was made into shirts and sold in Chennai by **Co-Optex**), for **turmeric**, **jaggery** (raw sugar), **grains**, **pulses** and **rice**. Prices are good, and now 80 farmers have joined in the cotton project.

There are now 10 farmers' groups, of which 6 groups are women farmers. One group has bought machines for breaking pulses and grinding ragi, which will make it easier and save some costs to householders. Each group now has its own bank account. No wonder Kotapatti bank is going digital this year.

The two next big issues are **organic certification**, which will take 2 years, and the acquisition of **community certificates** proving tribal status - THI is very actively helping in both processes.

Thulir Education project continues to support the studies of local children with educational problems, and has expanded into practical projects for the teenagers. They have now become an independent Trust. see www.thulir.org

Donations benefit Income Tax exemption u/s 80G of the IT Act. Donations can be accepted by cheque/DD in the name of "**Tribal Health Initiative**"

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