

Bridge Foundation

Newsletter

January to August 2008

12th edition

Greetings

from The Bridge Foundation, to all our friends. Once again we take time to reflect on all our activities and share our news with friends who have been part of our journey to better the lives of people in Calcutta and the surrounding rural areas.

The last eight months have flown by swiftly and lot of work has been achieved in these months. Laeticia was here in the month of January, and she returned again in June and stayed till the end of July

FOOD PROGRAMME

The children in all the centres continue to be given nutritious food and dry rations. Those who are in a very bad situation at home are given intensive care in the form of weekly supply of dry rations and fresh vegetables. Right now we have five such families from Fatima Centre and Doctor Lane. In the month of March the children in each centre got rice and packet of biscuit on the occasion of Easter. In order to study well the children need good nourishment.

SETTING UP SMALL BUSINESSES

We had the opportunity to help three women to start a small business. Two of these women are our student's mothers. One of them has set up business in selling spice and the other groceries They will go from door to door to sell their stuff. The third lady is a widow and we have bought her a knitting machine to start her own business.

EDUCATION.

All the children of the four centres are working steadily. All those who sat for their final exams in December were promoted to the next class. Those who appeared for finals exams in February and April did well also.

Congratulation to Venkat Rao who passed his class ten board exams with first division. Tulsi Rao who appeared for NOS gave her first English paper and passed with 50 % marks. Both these students are from Blackburn Lane Centre. Prity Mondal passed her I.C.S.E. She is from Fatima Centre. There are now a few more children who are in class nine and ten. They are working very hard to be ready for their board exams. Two students studying in a residential school have also done well. Some students from middle school and those getting ready for board exams are going for special coaching classes to do Maths, Science and English. The children are being given all necessary help to continue their studies as well as fees for the extra tuition they go to. Right now we have ninety seven students in the four learning Centres running in urban Calcutta.

We have at present ten teachers who run these centres, They are all very committed and dedicated to the welfare of the children. In the month of April four children from Blackburn lane area were re-admitted to Government School. These children had dropped out of school due to financial difficulties. They are all promising students and doing well in school. All the children got new schoolbooks, exercise copies and stationary. Some children got school fees for the new academic year. Some pending school fees were also were also paid. Some children got new school uniforms.

THE NEW FLAT

The new flat is coming along well. Laeticia and Finbarr visited the construction site a number of times to see that the work was being done according to our plans. This will be our main centre where our children and teachers will be able to access the help they require.

Congratulations

We would like congratulate Bosco & Lynnette who got married in June and Cathal And Aveen who got married in July. Both of these couples are very good friends of Bridge Foundation and we wish them every happiness for the future.

MEDICAL PROGRAMME

Medical help continues to be extended to all those children from the centres who are suffering from various illnesses. We also reach out to certain people who need constant medical aid. Two people worth mentioning are a rickshaw puller who is being treated for worms in the brain and a child who is suffering from kidney disease. Their children are from Moulali Centre. We also helped out some students who had attacks of malaria and jaundice. They are all fine now and are back to school.. We pay for medicines, doctor's fees, blood tests, injections, spectacles etc and buy nutritious drinks and fruit for those who are convalescing

ART CLASSES

The art sessions are going very well. There are now sixteen children in the art group. Some are very talented. They have already started making greeting cards and selling them. They sold eighteen cards for Rs 6 each. Now they are learning to do fabric painting on material

CASE STUDIES

In the month of June and July Laeticia, Regina and Agnes did a lot of home visits and children's case studies were then written by Laeticia. This gave us a good insight into our children's lives and helped us to make plan for the future help these children will need to pursue their education.

CLOTHING AND GIFT ITEMS

In the month of April children in Blackburn lane got undergarments and all the children from all the centres got towels. Children also received several gift item from friends.

LOANS PAID

There were many families who in time of crisis borrowed money from money lenders. We had the opportunity to help pay these loans and relieve them from this tension.

VISITORS

We had a number of friends visiting the centres in the last six months. John and Mary Linehan, Elaine Jones, the teacher's and students of St Patrick's School, Navan and also Áine, Gwen, John & Deirdre, We thank them all for taking the time to see our centres and for spending time with our children their families and teachers.

ENTERTAINMENT

All the senior student's after their exams had an opportunity to go out and have fun. Doctor lane students had the opportunity to go with their teacher Sumita Gomes to Science City and afterwards to a restaurant to have refreshment. Laetia and Agnes took Fatima and Blackburn Lane Center to a local fair [mela]. They had great fun on different rides and games and eating different snacks and ice cream. They all had a good time and were very happy.

EXTENDING OUR WORK IN RURAL AREAS

We have taken on a commitment to a school outside of Kolkata. The school was in a poor condition. and the three teachers hadn't been paid in three years. There were one hundred students in this primary school and they belong to a very underprivileged group. We found the teacher's very committed and inspiration. Deirdre and John from Ireland visited this school with Laetia and have undertaken help finance this school. Below is what Deirdre and John have to say about their work with Bridge Foundation

Triathlon

A Fun Triathlon took place in Kenmare, Co. Kerry on 12th July in aid of Bridge Foundation and the event was a huge success. Special thanks to the organisers, Kenmare Triathlon Club, Mr James Mulchrone of Jam along with Mickey Ned and Marian O Sullivan who are very good friends of Bridge Foundation

John & Deirdre's Experience of Bridge Foundation

Little did we know the journey we were about to embark on when entering Calcutta on 8th July 2008. We had arrived to work with the Bridge Foundation, among other projects. What resulted was the most amazing experiences of our lives, the memories of which will remain with us forever.

Our journey began with Laetia (Head of the Foundation) taking us on visits to the various centres of the Bridge Foundation, showing us the work that was being done there and the work Laetia and her team hoped to do the future. It was truly inspirational and John and I are delighted we can assist in the funding of the running of these centres for the forthcoming year. The work being done in the centres is based on education and feeding programmes. As these children as mostly first generation learners, the seemingly unending cycle of lack of education is been broken. These children will now hopefully go on to University and change the lives of themselves and their families forever.

We entered the education centres and homes of the families of the Bridge Foundation with apprehension, nervousness and excitement. What we were greeted with was the warmest welcome we could ever have expected. The kindness and love of the families was unforgettable. In meet-

ing the children of the centres we could see the pride in the work they were doing. We sat as they recited poems animatedly, read passages enthusiastically and even performed dances. John and I were truly inspired by the inner strength of those we worked with. They have such a fighting spirit. The people of Calcutta have an incredible sense of willingness to believe. Their strong faith stands to them and pulls them through the toughest times.

Other work we did involved voluntary work in Daya Dan - a home for orphans with physical and mental disabilities. Our duties involved caring for the children, feeding them and playing with them. The work was very difficult but we were happy to bring some joy into their lives, if only for a moment.

We were delighted also to help set some mothers up in business. It may only have been a candle making business or the selling of spices, but this was to lead to a secure income for their families for the future. Everyone deserves a chance but these families, in particular, were most deserving.

The next occasion was to be a milestone in our journey. We accompanied Laetia to the rural area. Here we could see the lives of the people at root level. We were met by Nandu, who brought us on a trip to various villages. We arrived at one particular school in poor condition. Here the three teachers hadn't been paid in three years. There were one hundred students in the school. The school was on the verge of clos-

ing down. We found the teachers here were very passionate and inspirational. John and I together with the Bridge Foundation decided this was a project we wanted to assist. This would entail paying teachers salaries, doing structural work on the building etc. We'll never forget the delight on the teachers faces on hearing the news delivered to them. We have decided that we will join the Bridge Foundation in taking this rural project on, on an on-going basis.

We feel this work outdid any work we have done before. We have the utmost of respect for Laetia. Her generosity and goodwill is an inspiration to us all. We feel blessed to have met with all the children, parents and teachers. Just as we have made a difference, so too have you made a difference to our lives. You taught us lessons in appreciation and value in life, how to prioritise and find happiness in the simplest of things. It was an exhilarating and exciting experience. The smiles of the children, parents and teachers of the Bridge Foundation will remain with us forever. Your welcome will always remain in our hearts. We hoped we have helped bring some of your dreams to life. If so, then so too has our dream come through. Thank you all for everything! May God bless you and guide you in your future lives!!

Love

John Joyce & Deirdre O Callaghan

LEGAL MATTERS

A decision was made in the beginning of this year to keep a retainership for legal and financial advice and they would come every month to deal with daily accounts, preparation of accounts and other legal matters.

THANKS

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the work of Bridge Foundation by visiting us or donating money to help with the work. Without the help of these people the work of Bridge Foundation would not be possible. Special thanks to Fr. Donal Neary for his ongoing support and for all his help with our accounts in Ireland.