



Health Help International

Edmund's Daily Report

from

India

February 2024

This is a self-financed trip by all our HHI volunteers

DAY 1 FRIDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2024

Edmund, Chris and Chris's nephew Sam have arrived safely and we're looking forward to nearly two weeks of seeing what our Indian partners are doing. Having left behind the cold, wet and miserable weather in the UK we arrived at 0430 this morning to find temperatures in the high 20s – it's now a lovely toasty 35C – about 95F in old money. And it's been wonderful meeting Tom Sutherland again. We've hit the ground running, we've changed our money, and visited the renewed leaf painting at the Neyyar Dam and bought a pile of cards to sell on when we get back. Time for supper now then an early night to get us into Indian time.



Edmund, Chris, Tom and Sam

DAY 2 SATURDAY 10TH FEBRUARY 2024



What a difference a good night's sleep makes!

We were to be the guests of honour at the birthday celebrations of Happy Valley, our special needs school in Kerala. So we arrived to a noisy welcome from the children, lots of drums and other percussion being banged and shaken. Then there were speeches, lots of items from the children and, of course, lunch. A number of the great and the good were there, so it was a great opportunity to showcase the work of the centre and network with potential supporters and influencers.

After that it was a change of pace with a number of needy people coming for help. I had been given several gifts of money to take out with me, so it was wonderful to be able to make at least a contribution to each of them. One was Abinad, a five year old boy. A botched operation at the government hospital had left him with a severe eye problem. The only solution was three further operations at a private hospital in the neighbouring state, costing about £1,000 each. His hard pressed family had borrowed the cost of the first one, but came for help with the next. Thanks to you I was able to make a significant contribution.

DAY 3 SUNDAY 11TH FEBRUARY 2024

Sunday is a day for worship so we went to Tom's church for their nearly three hour service. Even though we couldn't understand much of what was going on we could feel their enthusiasm. The children were integrated into it, and most of the people present took part, including Chris and Edmund.



Sunday worship

Then afterwards there were so many needy people, each with their tale of woe. Some could be lifted out of poverty by the gift of a goat (£85 each). Rajappan, a sufferer with Parkinson's and heart problems wanted a stall in his home village – could we pay £110 for this? Nihara, a baby had been born with a cleft lip and cleft palate; the lip had been operated on, but the family were unable to raise the £500 needed for the cleft palate. Mallika needed £5 for an x-ray. Thanks to the generosity of so many people I had money for all these and many more – almost no-one went away empty handed.

DAY 4 MONDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2024

Today we crossed the subcontinent – well, the southern tip of it anyway, across into Tamil Nadu. Things didn't go as planned and as a result, by the time we arrived, it was nearly time for the children to go home. Just time to be given the usual wonderful welcome and for Chris to give each child a gift of a teddy bear or a glove puppet.



Then they were off, and we relaxed over a cup of tea and some of Sheela's excellent paysum. A great chance to catch up and get to know the new physiotherapist.



A meal with Tom, Edmund, Chris, Sam, and Pastor Santhosh.

DAY 5 TUESDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2024

Going across the border into Tamil Nadu is like stepping back in time for a generation.

It is the India that is long past in Kerala. Cows roam the streets randomly or sleep in the middle of the road. Roads are full of potholes. The buses are even more decrepit.

We spent the day at Asha Kiran, our first special needs school in India. It was great to see the children again and how they have developed since we were there last. Others have joined and a new physiotherapist is bringing new skills to bear which are bringing great results. One of the newcomers is John who joined just last week and who is already having help for his cerebral palsy. At the moment he cannot walk; the hope is that, by the time I return next year he will be much more mobile.



John having Physiotherapy

DAY 6 WEDNESDAY 14TH FEBRUARY

Today was our final time at Asha Kiran. It was all go, with children continuing to receive life transforming physiotherapy and teaching appropriate to their abilities in small groups.



Small teaching group



Physiotherapy

Vetrivel Murugan is from a very poor family. He lives with his parents and teenage sisters in a small one roomed house. Vetrivel gets the single bed; everyone else has to sleep on the floor. He has severe cerebral palsy and dribbles continuously. Until recently he could only crawl, but under the tutelage of the new physiotherapist he is starting to walk – either with a Zimmer or with a bit of support from a helping hand.



DAY 7 THURSDAY 15TH FEBRUARY

We spent the day with Pastor Wilson visiting people who we have helped recently, are helping or who are hoping that we will help them. Too many to recount here.



Leema sewing

Leema was poor but could sew. She is married with two children at school and an alcoholic husband who doesn't provide for his family. We provided half the cost of a treadle sewing machine and she borrowed the rest from a credit union (which we also fund) at a very low rate of interest. She is now making clothes to order and is on course to pay for the machine in a few months. She can now feed her family and ensure that her children go to school.



Rajendran's

About two years ago Rajendran's kidneys failed and he needs dialysis twice a week to stay alive at a cost of £16 a time. He has no income any more, so is increasing in debt. We were able to pay for two sessions and have promised to pay for more in future.



Padmardavy

A few months ago we helped Padmardavy with the cost of injections which have greatly improved her sight in her left eye. Her right eye is now falling in much the same way. The cost of an initial consultation and tests would be over £200, something beyond her means. I was able to give her £100 towards this, enough for her to go ahead. I have also promised to help with the cost of any treatment that she may need thanks to the generosity of our wonderful supporters.

DAY 8 FRIDAY 16TH FEBRUARY 2024

First port of call today was Shanti Bhavan, a home for destitute men which we support. We received the usual enthusiastic welcome. Talking to Rani and Johnny it was clear that they had a problem – the iron roof had rusted through. Replacing it was beyond their capacity. We were able to get an estimate of £600 for the work, and offered to pay half, if Rani could raise the other half. Since then someone, a UK supporter, has offered to pay Rani's half, so the work can go ahead.



Shanti Bhavan.

Then it was off to the hospital to meet Shibu's patients. He is currently looking after five people who would not be getting treatment if it were not for his dedicated work. One was ready to be discharged but needed a Zimmer before he could go, so we bought him one – plus two more for the ward – and his delight transcended the language barrier. He was immediately zipping up and down the corridor with great enthusiasm.

Whilst we were meeting these people Shibu received a phone call asking us to go to the geriatric ward where we were asked to help with an unresponsive Italian man. Sam knows some Italian, but the man remained unresponsive. He was in need of an urgent operation but his family was not known. Eventually Philip was able to contact his landlord who called the Indian foreigners office who contacted the Italian authorities.

So all will be well.

But you never know what you will meet next on these trips!



Shibu

DAY 9 SATURDAY 17TH FEBRUARY 2024

Another busy day.

The morning was spent at Happy Valley meeting some of the many people who we are helping. These include a large group of people with kidney failure. Some have had transplants and need expensive medications to prevent their bodies from rejecting the transplanted organ, whilst others need dialysis which they have to pay for. The money that you provide can literally make the difference between life and death.



Transplant patients

Others came because they need help – help that only we will give.



Soumya

Soumya has bladder cancer and is desperate. She needs four more chemotherapy sessions at £60 each. I was able to give her the money for two of them. She will probably need further treatment. Can anyone help her?

Then we visited a number of people in their own homes. All had great needs. Gidija has had a leg amputated recently as a result of diabetes; she and her aged husband are reduced to begging as their chickens were stolen whilst Gidija was in hospital. We were able to give her £40 to repair the hen coop and buy 25 young chickens, plus £10 for living expenses until the chickens start laying. She stared at each note in disbelief with tears in her eyes. Her life can be transformed – a new start for them both.

DAY 10 SUNDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2024

Today was spent at **Thanal House**, a home for destitute women who have been rescued from a life on the streets. Most of them have severe psychological problems and many have been rejected by their families. It was great to see the women so well turned out and happy.



Thanal ladies



Thanal ladies

One of the problems that Salini faces is that the women often take water from the toilets into the sleeping area and make a mess. After much discussion about building passageways and knocking holes in walls, Chris came up with a far simpler – and much cheaper – solution: chain down the buckets! Teamwork!



Salini's family and HHI team and Philip

There is an opportunity to improve the facilities at a reasonable cost which we will explore. But their most pressing need is regular support for feeding 26 hungry mouths. Before COVID they had reasonable local support, but this dried up during lockdown and has never recovered. At the same time the cost of food has shot up. We send £320 a month, but they really need more. We will see what we can do to help.

DAY 11 MONDAY 19TH FEBRUARY 2024

We spent another day around the Neyyar Dam. It is an idyllic spot, very beautiful, but also one that harbours much poverty.

One such person who we helped recently is Prida, who was in agony with fibroids in her uterus. The cost of an operation was way beyond anything that she could afford so we paid about half the cost; she was able to borrow the rest from a relative, the operation was successful, and she is back to living life to the full.

There were many other people in need. Sujada had a stroke 8 years ago leaving her partially paralyzed, for which she needs medicines costing £20 a month, and regular check-ups in the hospital which means paying for a car. I was able to give some immediate help, but we would like to make this regular support.



Sujada and Edmund

We currently run a very successful tailoring training programme where up to 20 women at a time learn tailoring skills. We have been asked to establish another one a few miles away. This would cost about £800 to set up and £1400 a year to run. Currently we do not have the money for this – can anyone help?

We finished the day at a self-help group/credit union. We provide admin support for 212 of these, rather overloading the two “animators”. We have agreed to employ a third, which will enable us to start some more groups. Each costs about £50 to start and allows up to 100 people to benefit directly or indirectly.



Credit Union

DAY 12 TUESDAY 20TH FEBRUARY 2024

Our last full day was spent at our second special needs school, Happy Valley. It was a wonderful time when we could meet the new children and see how the others have developed over the last year.

One newcomer is Kartu, a small six year old girl who looks a lot younger. She has very severe cerebral palsy. After about six months at Happy Valley where she has been having intensive physiotherapy she is showing significant improvements – she is now smiling a lot, recognises sounds and objects, and responds to quest and instructions – all things that, just a few months ago, well impossible for her.



Kartu

We finished the day with a visit to the Arayanad tuition group, where 17 children from kindergarten to secondary school age were being supported in their education by a young graduate who had herself benefitted from a Banyan Tree tuition group.



Arayanad tuition group

DAY 13 WEDNESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2024

Wednesday was our last day in India.

After some last minute shopping we went back to Happy Valley for a final few hours, giving us a chance to get to know some more of the children.

Annisery suffers from Cerebral Palsy. When she came to Happy Valley one side (leg and arm) was disabled, but physiotherapy has rectified this. She also needed a heart operation. She continues to suffer from autism and a low IQ. Her mother also has a low IQ, and her father ran off when she was born – sadly, a common reaction to a disabled child in India. She originally came to Happy Valley in 2016-2018, but then went to a government school which failed to cater for her needs, so she has recently returned to Happy Valley where proper special needs teaching has enabled her to learn the alphabet (no mean feat – it has several hundred symbols), basic arithmetic and the ability to understand simple words. This does illustrate so well the benefits of flexible and tailored special needs provision, something that Happy Valley does so well and government schools do much less well.



Annisery

Amina has Down's syndrome, which was compounded by a stroke last year which has left one side of her paralysed. Physiotherapy has enabled her to recover some movement in the arm and leg affected; the hope is that this will improve with further attention. She also has a dropped foot which is being corrected by means of an orthopaedic boot.



Amina

Vishnu has now learned how to feed himself – a great boon for him and his hard pressed family.



Vishnu

We rounded off our visit with a relaxing couple of hours at the beach, watching the boats launching for their evening's fishing. Then it was time for the long trek home – and the shock of a cold wet British winter that we had almost forgotten about.



All the help shown to these destitute communities are provided by donations to Health Help International.

Many thanks to all our Strathaven HHI Supporters

More information about the charity can be found at www.hhi.org.uk
And for local news www.sfhhi.org.uk

On behalf of the SFHHI Committee

Helen Baird, Willie Cooper, Ian Gow, Margery Menzies, Kath Russell and Iain Park