

JACOB'S NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2010

Another August; another trip to India. How quickly the years are flying by since Jacob's was opened. Old friends who have been with Jacob's since the beginning were there to greet us, as well as new residents who were eager to see these visitors from abroad - Janet and I were, as always, welcomed with love. Nurse Vasanthi immediately offered us coffee and all kinds of tasty things so any ideas we'd had of using this trip as a bit of a weight watching exercise were out of the window in the first ten minutes.

Sekar had been waiting until we arrived to cut a bunch of tiny bananas which were ready in the Jacob's garden, so that was the first job. The procedure looked very precarious, and our English culture came to the fore as we worried about 'health and safety'. Several residents and staff wielded supporting sticks and wobbled about on makeshift ladders and chairs - others strategically positioned themselves to catch the banana hand as it was cut down. Everyone had their own idea of how it should be done, but in the end the bananas were harvested safely and we all solemnly pronounced them delicious.



Janet and I had visited Holm Court, a lovely Care Home in Ipswich before we went to India, and they gave us some jigsaws to take for our residents. The Jacob's residents had never seen jigsaws before, but Janet soon had them puzzling and I think it is going to be a popular pastime.

Nearly everyone seemed to have something they were responsible for at Jacob's; even the most disabled were involved in the upkeep of the home in some way.



Kasu had been a carpenter in his working days but spent many months with a very badly infected leg after an accident, eventually having it amputated. Since coming to live at Jacob's he has mended and restored several old chairs with the most elementary tools. While we were there Robert took Kasu into town for them both to buy tools - Robert so he could do general maintenance jobs, and Kasu so he could renovate pieces of old furniture. Within minutes of returning from town with his tools, Kasu had made a stand for a washbasin that had been propped up with tins and bricks.

Sundaram (on the right of the picture) was a watchman at a house nearby, but when heart problems made it difficult for him to work, the house owner replaced him. Sundaram lived alone in a tiny room with no water, electricity or toilet facilities. He was unable to earn any money so came regularly to Jacob's for his meals. One day he was taken ill whilst at Jacob's, and he's been there ever since! He is now much stronger, and being the only resident of Jacob's who can read and write, his talents are much in demand. He has several notebooks for recording various matters - he takes notes for Robert from the cook on what supplies she will need for the next day. He meets and greets visitors and makes sure they are directed to the right place, sign in the right book and generally behave themselves! One of his jobs while we were there was to record for the day staff any drinks and medication that Baskaran was given during the night.



Baskaran was gravely ill while Janet and I were in Chettipalayam, and died shortly after we left. However Sundaram was a great help and comfort to him, and was by his side all through the night. Palaniappan took over sitting with Baskaran during the day; it is really heart-warming to observe how the residents help and care for each other.



India celebrated Independence Day while we were there. The yoga master supervised the making of hundreds of paper flags and bunting. Janet and the residents were cutting and sticking for hours, but with fabulous results – we had a beautifully decorated flag pole and the occasion was decorated with colourful bunting. I'm not quite sure how suitable it was for me to raise the



flag, but I didn't have a choice and we all celebrated with appropriate enthusiasm!

The yoga master visits Jacob's on three or four mornings a week and we were amazed how flexible and supple the residents are. They have all learned to meditate, and most lie on the floor to do exercises



– others do them sitting in a chair. It really is impressive to see what they can do, and it does seem to help keep everyone more active. Even the



most disabled walk from room to room – slowly

does it for some of them but the wheelchair very rarely needs to be used. The staff join in the yoga classes – but I wonder if Viji the manager takes part just so she can have a lie down!



Fun and games in the afternoon



Afternoons are 'fun time' and almost everyone chooses to take part in the games organised by Vasanthi. They have such fun, it's impossible not to be cheered and lifted by all the laughter. A number of residents who come to Jacob's are initially and quite understandably depressed. However

the supportive care for each other and the general ambience of cheerfulness and contentment work their magic and even quite severely mentally ill residents have recovered without the aid of medication.

One such was Supathal. Last year it was reported to Jacob's that there was a very emaciated old lady lying unconscious in the road in Coimbatore, so the outreach team picked her up and took her back to the Care Home. Physically she recovered within a couple of months and became a very sweet smiley lady, just like a little bird, who loved to help out with jobs around the home. (She is on the left of the picture) However it took a few more months before she started to communicate properly, and only in the last three months has she talked sensibly about her background. She told Viji the name of the village where she lived, which was over a hundred miles away in a rural part of Tamil Nadu. She also told her about her family, and gave all their names. The yoga master had family in a neighbouring village, and when he went to visit them he enquired about Supathal's family. After a good deal of detective work on his part the family were found, and they visited Jacob's the very next day.



They were all thrilled to have found her and told how Supathal had become mentally ill a couple of years ago, and wandered off. The first time she went they searched for a week and found her, but the second time although they kept searching for months, they never found her and in the end believed she must have died. So they were delighted to take their Mum home to live with them again. Sadly Supathal's husband had died a few months before, so they brought a dark sari for her to wear and were all going back to the village to do the funeral rites that such an occasion demanded. That explains why all look so serious in the photograph to the left; Indian culture dictates it would not be seemly for them to smile on such an occasion.



We have been in contact with Supathal since they left, and she is very happy to be living with her family again.

It really is a case of someone doing detective work to re-unite families in this way in India. Supathal's family for instance, are poor uneducated people who are not able to read, and who live in a rural village, so the usual ways in which we would keep in touch are not available to them. Can you imagine the joy they felt on finding their Mum who they had assumed was dead? They had no idea organisations such as Jacob's existed, and have promised they will honour the local custom and bring a gift of food for the Jacob's residents on their father's death anniversary, as a token of their thanks that Supathal had been rescued and looked after.



Whilst thinking about 'before' and 'after' situations, I came across this photo of Vedamanikum. On the left, in 2008 when he was admitted in a very poor mental state, and on the right as he was last week, completely well and obviously thriving! When Viji mails me that 'all residents are normal' I know what she means.



Anyone who has visited India cannot have failed to see there is a problem with rubbish. The natural recycling system of dumping rubbish in the road used to work reasonably well – the dogs, pigs, cows and goats roaming the streets would have first pick, then the scavengers would come and collect paper, rags, glass and plastic which they sold, and anything remaining was burnt. Everything cleared within hours. However the advent of plastic bags meant that bits of plastic and polythene were spread all over, and of late it was becoming a real eyesore. However India is changing fast, and the rubbish problem in Tamil Nadu at least, is taking a turn for the better. We were really impressed to see large metal bins on the side of the road in every street, which were emptied on a regular basis. Not only that but men with carts and brushes were out sweeping the streets!

Sunbeam invited us to a meeting at Global Pathways School while we were there to learn about a recycling scheme starting in the area. Large bags will be left with every household, for their plastic, metal and paper and the fortnightly collection will weigh the filled bag and pay two rupees for every kilo collected. Between us we organised a rally to inform the local residents of the scheme. Unfortunately Janet and I left the day before so weren't able to take part, but Viji did send me a report and photographs. The school children and the Jacob's residents who were able, dressed in their best and paraded through the village with banners and an auto with a loudspeaker to publicise the scheme. Later there was a big meeting for all with a film show in the school playground.



Unfortunately it was all too much for Suban, one of our elderly men and he fainted clean away on the corner under the neem tree. No speeding ambulances required - he was carried back to Jacob's, re-hydrated and within a couple of hours wanted to be off to see the film show!

Jacob's presently has 31 residents, which is the most we have ever had. Almost every day Viji receives requests for admission, so she has to be very selective to make sure we only take the very neediest people. I really don't know how we could fit in any more, but the space seems to expand to accommodate just one more if they really need us. Last week Viji told me of a very frail old lady who had no family and had been looked after for a couple of years by a young neighbour who had taken pity on her. The neighbour was moving to Chennai with her job, so came to Jacob's to ask if we would take her. Viji phoned me to ask what I thought, and from 9,000 miles away it was very easy for me to say no, we don't have the room. But having seen her Viji would have been very upset to refuse her, so we agreed that she should ask the residents if they would share with just one more. Of course they all agreed immediately and the consensus was that they would share with anyone who really needed their help. I don't know how many more they can squeeze in, but I would like to bet they will always find the space to take 'just one more' homeless or sick old person.

We have a total of nine staff, who do everything, from the Outreach service, accounts and administration, all the cooking for the home the school and outreach, (approximately 3,000 meals per week), the cleaning, nursing, care, befriending and comforting around the clock. They work hard and are all thoughtful and compassionate people, and in return we do what we can to look after them. They are mostly local village people, some with a very basic education, and unfortunately some of them have the problems which may go with that. Three of them suffer domestic violence within the family, regrettably this is still considered a fact of life by many in the rural communities.

We do what we can to help in these situations, and Viji and Sekar are especially good at negotiating and counselling when there are problems. It just isn't possible always for a wife to leave or complain to the police, even in this situation. In theory it should be, but on a practical level and for many reasons, life is extremely hard for a female on her own, with or without children in the culture of rural South India. So on balance most remain within the family and manage the episodes of violence in the best way they can. It is tempting to judge, and to advise, but until we can walk in other people's shoes we cannot truly comprehend their situation, or even know how we ourselves would react.

These thoughts have come about as a result of some very sad news we received a few days ago. Those of you who have been supporters of Jacob's from the beginning will remember Shiny, an ex Families for Children girl and a young, vibrant and beautiful manager we employed at Jacob's for a while. Unfortunately Shiny has committed suicide, leaving two young children.



Shiny instigated the work Jacob's has done at the Government Hospital in Coimbatore. Many hundreds of people have benefited, and no doubt many have Shiny to thank for their lives, because of this scheme.

I have mentioned before in a newsletter that the Outreach team now distribute food to three Leprosy Centres near Coimbatore. I should say that Viji has reminded me that it is now called Hanson's Disease rather than leprosy. We have escalated our visits there as the food we take has been so



welcome, the residents there are unable to work, both because of the wounds from the disease and because their settlements are so far from the city that there is no work in the area. Begging remains the only way for many of them to earn any money, and this too is being restricted more and more by the government. Hence the help they get from Jacob's is not only very necessary but very much appreciated.

We also provide clothes and blankets, and have agreed to give some materials when they have collected enough to renew their community hall, which is falling down. The hall is used by all of them, and plays a big part in strengthening and uniting the settlement as a community. We take the food there in very large vessels, rather than in separate packages, and the bell at the community hall is rung to tell everyone we have arrived! Then each family sends someone with a container to collect their meals. We stop and chat while the food is served and the vessels are washed and returned to us. All the outreach staff enjoy these visits and it has become a social occasion for the settlements.



Fundraising

Three events to tell you about:

November 1st - Divali Lunch at Jen's house (Virginia House in Newbourne) at 12.30pm. Everyone is welcome, not just ladies this time but gentlemen too. Tickets £10 for a Divali curry lunch. Please contact Jen to reserve your place or ask for directions.

December 17th and 18th - The Jacob's Va Va Voom Variety Show at Newbourne Village Hall. The proceeds will go towards buying a new vehicle for the Outreach Programme. Rehearsals are in full swing and there has been lots of interest in the show already, hence two performances! Tickets are £10 each and include nibbles, mince pies and sausage rolls. There will be a bar (table service), a raffle for a really good Christmas prize each night, and a great deal of fun. Tables will be 6's or 8's so you can either reserve your own table or buy individual tickets. Please contact Jen very soon for tickets as this is going to be popular!

December 27th - The Black Tie and Diamonds Winter Ball at the Elizabeth Orwell Hotel in Felixstowe. Clare and Andy Martin are hosting the Ball and proceeds will go to Jacob's. Tickets are £60 each and will include a champagne and canape reception, dinner and dancing to The Tribute Show. With the 27th and 28th of December being Bank Holidays this would be the perfect occasion to enhance the Christmas merriment with a bit of glamour! Do come if you can, it's going to be a fantastic night. Tickets from Clare at Sirens in Felixstowe - 01394 282626

Thank you for all your support and kind comments

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