

News from the villages

Thursday, 01 September 2005

Dear friends,

The second academic year for Saint-Anthony's School started on the 1st of July. This year, unlike last year, parents admitted their children in advance. As we could not accommodate all the children, we have taken those who came first, however, we have not refused any admission for the girls. As the number of girls were not up to our satisfaction, we did go in search of poor girls to admit them. This year, the maximum number of children in a class is 45 and we have two division for smaller classes (LKG, UKG).

At the moment we have only two class rooms remaining available for the year 2006. That means we can admit only 90 children next year. We need to think about another floor on the top of the existing building for the near future which will accommodate another 450 children.

As the work progresses, the expenses raise too and we count on each of you for the continuation of your support in reaching out to these children who otherwise don't have an opportunity to come up in life.

Marc Valentin,

President

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Sponsorship of leprosy patient's children

In the first newsletter of this year 2005 we had mentioned to you about the request we had from the leprosy colonies for supporting the education of their children. Last month, I visited some of these leprosy colonies to see the children we have already sponsored and to take more children in sponsorship program. I could see that there are many children who don't attend schools. Many parents approached me asking to integrate their children in our program. Whe were able to sponsor some of them.

Since the parents feel that they cannot help their children at home with their studies, they were asking me to have a special teacher after the school hours to help the children to do their homework. Most of the parents receive only a small help from the government (5 euros per month) which is not enough for them to survive, that is why they go out to beg in the street to make a living.

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I went to the different schools of these children to meet their teachers. They are all happy with their performance.

Recent events from Saint-Anthony's school

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In August, we had three university students from Belgium coming as volunteers to help teaching the children. They experienced the life in rural India and the indian way of teaching. It was really amazing to see how they got adjusted to the heat (36 to 38°C)... without having fans or an air conditioning system because of the lack of electricity. I remember one of them saying : «I am like a cloud, raining» they could find humour even when their sweat was pouring down like the rain. They could overlook the inconvenience as they had plenty of new experiences and surprises all around. We hope to bring you their experiences in the next issue of our newsletter.

This academic year we have four more teachers. Two of them are from Kerala (south of India) and two from north. All the staff was happy to welcome the volunteers.

News from the villages near the schoolThe month of August was eventful for the villagers in Uttar Pradesh (state where the school is located), they had to elect their local political representatives for another five years. The government of India has a good political system : they have decentralised the power at the village level to implement projects. However, none of these government machineries functions... and most of the money to be used for the villages is taken away by the leaders.

There were 8 people to contest in the closest village of Dugawar. We didn't get involved directly in the election as we felt that it is not good to favour a particular group.

On 18th was the election and the government declared it as a day off for schools. But on the day of the election's results, people got violent and they blocked all the main roads, so schools had to be closed again... There were reports of violence and killings in many parts of the district.

The new elected person in Dugawar was the leader once before and the rumour in the village is that he bribed the people who counted the votes to get elected...

We are planning to work with women more actively in some villages around the school to help them understand the present situations and to empower them to be able to make their own decisions in choosing their leaders who would bring better changes in the community.

Ashwini, a girl of 7 affected by tsunami

You all remember the terrible tsunami which killed many people in South-East Asia at the beginning of this year. Ashwini is one of it's victim... Here is her story :

Mother Mary's shrine in Velankanni (Tamil Nadu, south India), is a little Lourdes for Indians, thousands of people go there for pilgrimage every year. At the time of tsunami, there were hundreds of people attending the sunday mass and water from the sea rushed into this shrine and swept away almost all of the pilgrims... very few survived.

Ashwini with her parents, sister and a few close relations had gone to this shrine from their village. She was playing at

the sea shore with her friends when the tsunami wave rushed in. A woman found Ashwini with her nostrils filled with sand and her throat blocked. The only indication of life in her was her pulse. She brought her to a man called Anthony (yes it is his real name !), who was rescuing people from the sea shore. Seeing her serious condition, Anthony took her to the nearby nursing home where she recovered. The next thing Anthony had to do was to find out where she was from. She was unable to tell her address, only the name of the area and the one of her school. Anthony published her story in the newspaper and some reader informed the grand parents of Ashwini that she was alive.

Ashwini now lives with her grandparents. Her grandfather is weaving clothes. With a hand weaving machine, he produces one dothi (a piece of cloth south Indians wear instead of pants) in few days and gets about 65 to 70 rupees for it (1,50 euros). Her grandmother is a heart patient. Soon after this disaster she was weak and was admitted for about a month in an intensive care unit. The government of India decided to sanction for Ashwini and the other orphans some money on a fixed bank deposit. But this money cannot be used before the little girl reaches 18 years. However, now she needs money to pay for the school and her grand parents are too poor. For that reason, we decided to support Ashwini, she is now one of our sponsored children.

The whole world offered plenty of money for the tsunami affected people but when we listen to individual stories of families, struggling to survive, it makes us wonder where all this money has disappeared...

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The presence of Ashwini make her grand parents forget the sorrow of the big loss.

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Molly Sebastian,

Project manager