



குயில்

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KUYIL

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUROVILLE HEALTH CENTRE

Caring for the Children

In this and in previous Kuyils we have described the immense problems that a lot of families in the villages face in bringing up healthy children. In the villages people are poor, and for many getting enough to eat is a problem. Sometimes, in order to bring in sufficient money to buy food - or to grow the food themselves - both parents have to work very hard. Sometimes this means that children have to be left at home, very often without proper supervision so that they don't get the care that they need.

Alcoholism is a common social problem with which many families struggle, often with disastrous effects on mothers and children. The women, who normally have the primary responsibility for bringing up the children, may themselves be malnourished. There are various food taboos which means that they do not eat a good diet, and since they traditionally eat last at meal times their health can suffer even when the rest of the family is well.

Despite all these problems, as you will read in the following pages, the love that families show their children, the day to day

sacrifices that are made, and the lengths to which they go to ensure the best for the children, is very impressive. We want to support these parents.

Sometimes it takes only a very small amount of money to provide help, or something the family needs, which will change the life and prospects of the family completely. Sometimes it takes a lot of money for operations or procedures that will enable a child to live a normal life. Sometimes we

think we can best serve the interests of children by giving them and their parents support through a continuous programme.

As always we rely on our donors for the financial backing that allows us to provide the different sorts of help. Thank you everyone who is helping us to help the children.

Priya Vincent



Special Needs

The Health Worker in Aprampattu was very worried about Muthuray and Kumari, a brother and sister, and asked me to go and see them. The first time I saw them they were lying together on a mat with apparently no one to look after them. I saw at once that they were quite severely mentally handicapped, and my first impression was that the parents were not taking care of them. It is a sad fact that here in India such children are often not taken care of properly and are treated very badly.

Later I found, however, that their parents loved the children very much and were taking care of them as well as they could. The problem was that they had to work hard in the fields and found it very difficult to find the time and money to give these children the extra care and attention that they need. Both children have problems with their throats which make it difficult for them to swallow, hence they were not well nourished.

The parents see that in the future there are likely to be more problems. It is true that children with such special needs are likely to develop both health and mental problems. The parents have asked us if we can find a home for them where they can get the

necessary full time care, which is what seems to be required by these children.

We will continue to support this family as well as we can so that these children can have as good and productive a life as possible.

Gerbrand



When Grandmother has to cope

One of our Health Workers from the village of Annainagar phoned me one day concerning three sisters about whom she was very concerned. She said they always seemed to be ill with either diarrhoea or fever and seemed generally in very poor health.

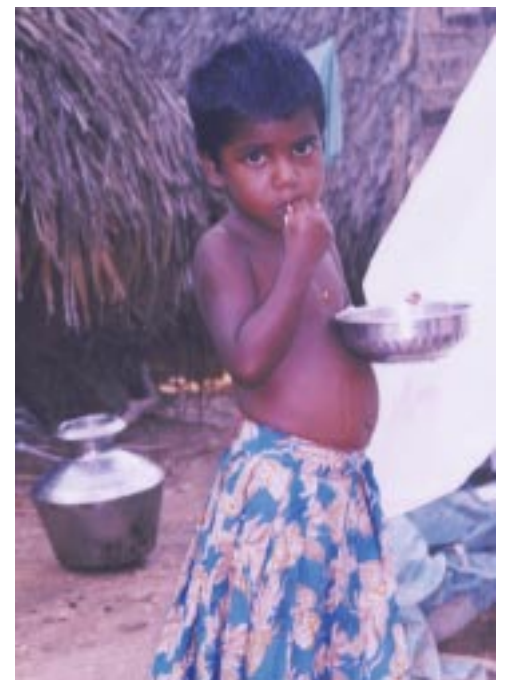
When I visited the girls I found three sisters aged five, three and almost a year old. They all looked very unhealthy, with big bellies, were very short for their age, and

looked very miserable. When I asked about the family situation the grandmother told me that the mother of these girls (her daughter) had committed suicide after she gave birth to a third girl. The father had a temporary job, but didn't look after the girls and a third girl had made him even more disinterested in his children. Since the death of the mother all the care of the children has fallen on the shoulders of the grand mother who was finding it very difficult to cope. As well as

looking after the house, cooking food and trying to care for the sick children, she was also working in the fields to try and get income - the father was not supporting the children financially.

The three girls have been admitted in the Health Centre for treatment. Once their health has improved they will go back to their grandmother. With the help and support of the Health Worker we hope that we can ensure a healthy and happy life for these children.

Gerbrand



Lakshmi's Heart

In the village of Anai Nagar, where one of our trained Health Workers works, you will find a small teashop run by a mother with four children - all girls - and a handicapped husband. This tea shop has to support the whole family, as the husband is unable to work and gets no financial support from the Government or anyone else.

One day this mother came to see us with her youngest daughter Lakshmi. The doctor had diagnosed a heart problem and she was sent to see the cardiologist at JIPMER - a government hospital in Pondicherry. As a result of this investigation it was found that she urgently needed an operation, but unfortunately there was a waiting list of at least three years.

With no money, Lakshmi's mother had come to see us to see if we could help. She was very concerned about her daughter, who at three years old was too weak even to walk, and who would get short of breath after just a little exertion.



We were very pleased to be able to help. First we admitted Lakshmi into the Health Centre so she could be cared for, and her health improved. After this we were able to get her operation carried out in a special clinic thanks to a donation from a well wisher.

Two months after the operation Lakshmi is a happy child in good health. It is wonderful to see how the relationship between Lakshmi and her mother has blossomed now that she is able to fully express her feelings and share her love.

Albert

Triumph of Love

One day an old woman came into one of my clinics held in the village of Rayapudupakkam. She came into my room carefully carrying a bundle under her torn shawl. I asked her: "What is your health problem?" and she replied that she had come not for herself but for her grandson. When I told her that she would have to bring the grandson if I was going to help him, she lifted the shawl and I was very surprised to see a baby. He was blind in both eyes.

As I looked at the baby lying in the shawl, the grandmother started to cry uncontrollably. We had to wait some time before she calmed down. Then she told me of how her son and daughter-in-law had run away from their houses to marry. She had neither seen nor heard of them for a year until, unbeknown to her, the daughter-in-law had come to the house. Early one morning this old woman had found this little bundle left on her doorstep, which had been left there by her daughter in law. There was a letter saying 'please take care of him as he is your grandson.'

Some time later, she came to know that the daughter-in-law had left their son and married another from another village. For six months now this old woman has been looking after this blind baby and giving him all the love and affection that he needs to grow and flourish.

Dr. Shano



When a cow makes all the difference



During one of her regular house visits to various people in the village of Maathur our Health Worker saw Muthulakshmi who was suffering from anaemia. She learnt that her husband had run away leaving her with five children - one boy and four girls. With no work and no education that would help her find a job she was left with no income. She was helped out by her neighbours who gave her food, but Muthulakshmi gave most of this to her children - hence the anaemia from which she suffered.

When I saw the family, the mother was very anaemic and her children were complaining of worms and fever. The whole family was checked up and given medication by the Health Centre.

A few weeks later everybody in the family looked much better. The son had dropped out of school and was working in a firework shop to bring in some money for the family. Muthulakshmi said she would very much like to purchase a cow as this would enable her to earn some money by selling milk. With no income this seemed impossible as they cost at least Rs.3,000.

Two Dutch nurses who were visiting the Health Centre went to visit Muthulakshmi and offered to buy her a cow. This was a wonderful gift, for which we were all very grateful. It will enable Muthulakshmi to earn her own money, which will provide independence for herself and her family. They will hopefully now be able to live a healthy life.

Gerbrand

When more than food is needed

I was surprised to find a little boy of maybe four years old or less with big round eyes watching with great interest my group of 4th and 5th grade children. They were enjoying the programme called "child to child" with four of our trained Health Workers. The game was passing around a brightly coloured picture cards of "Vitamin A" deficiency.

I asked the Health Worker, who also lives

in this village, about this little boy, as he looked different and stunted with very small arms and a big head and eyes. She said: 'He seems to have a growth problem. He is now seven years old, but from his height he looks as if he is only four years old'.

Later I went to his house with the Health Worker and found his uncle, who has leprosy. His mother had gone to work, but the boy's uncle talked with us and told us about the family conditions. The father had run away some time before, and Kumaran's mother was the only breadwinner, who worked hard to make ends meet. There had been no time

or money to try and help Kumaran.

The next day we sent Kumaran in our Health Centre ambulance to MGR hospital in Chennai for the tests for growth problems. He came back with all the tests done, which showed that he required growth hormones. He will need these once every month and the cost of each dose is 15-20,000 rupees. We do not know for how many months he will need this treatment.

This amount of money is way beyond the means of this family, so for now the treatment cannot take place.

Dr Shano

Growing Healthy Children

What can we do to help children have a healthier and happier life?

Once when I visited the village of Annainagar to see a family I found other mothers there who began to ask me questions about their children. Many of the children were not in good health. Some had symptoms of illness like diarrhoea, rash or cough, while others, although not 'ill', had signs of malnutrition; hair that was dry and reddish colour or they were small for their age. It surprised me that when I tried to guess the age of the children I was almost always

wrong. They all looked two years younger than they really were.

It felt to me as if we ought to try and to something to improve the health of these younger children. After discussing it with Dr. Piyali, we decided to set up a new programme for mothers and children. We will monitor all the children under five and the mothers will be given education on how best to feed their children. We will concentrate especially on discussing what is good food for children at different ages and how it should best be prepared.

The project is a continuation of our antenatal and post-natal programme. We have selected three areas, where we will start with a pilot project. One is a village, and the other two are colonies, which where the lowest caste and often poorest families live. To measure the magnitude of malnutrition in children aged under five, we are conducting a house-to-house survey in each place. Soon we will start weighing all the children and give them a check-up to see if they have any diseases. At the same time we will give the mothers education about food and help them start their own kitchen garden.

As a reward to the mothers for allowing us to check their children, and to motivate them with the kitchen garden, we would like to give each participant a fruit tree. This of course will eventually give them some much needed fruit.

With this programme, which we hope we will be able to implement in other areas, we look forward to making a healthy difference in the lives of the all the village children.

Gerbrand



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