



குயில்

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KUYIL

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUROVILLE HEALTH CENTRE

Editorial

Mother and Child

In the last Kuyil we introduced you to some individual children that we have helped. In this Kuyil we tell you more about some of the programs that we have to help them. This includes information about a new program called 'Mother and Child' which aims to support women with young babies and children in a way that enables both to grow into healthy families.

This work is badly needed to complement our other programs and everything has been planned and is ready to go except that we don't have enough money to get started. Would you like to participate in this program by helping us with finance? If you would, turn to the last page which tells you how to do it.



Some of our programs for supporting mothers and children

Providing a good start in life – The Ante Natal program

To have the best possible start in life children need to be born as healthy babies. This will only happen when mothers are also well nourished and healthy, which is unfortunately not so for many women in the surrounding villages. Our ante natal program is a major area of work which aims to reduce illness and chronic bad health amongst mothers and babies as well as reducing the number of babies who die either at birth or soon after.

Our Village Health Workers are the cornerstones of this program. It is they who identify pregnant women in the village as early as possible and invite them to participate in the program. It is they who explain to the women the benefits of attending and keep track of them as the pregnancy progresses. They organise and conduct the bi weekly ante natal clinics which take place in 18 of the surrounding villages.

About 80% of women who attend the clinics are anaemic and one of the most important tasks is to both identify and treat this condition. Not just with iron and folic acid tablets, but with

information about nutrition and its importance for mother and baby and the rest of the family. The ante natal clinic is not only a place where mothers are checked for problems and assistance given for whatever might be wrong. They are also a place of support for mothers, a place to discuss any concerns they may have as well as a place of education on matters which will help improve their health both for themselves and their family.

Basic checks are carried out which will show that the pregnancy is progressing satisfactorily and identify those mothers and babies likely to be in need of more specialised care. A comprehensive record is kept for each mother with details of her history and physical examinations that have been undertaken. Blood pressure, urine and blood tests are carried out to provide information about haemoglobin levels (low ones signify anaemia) and blood group as well as whether the mother suffers from venereal disease or HIV. A system of risk assessment to identifies those mothers at high risk of complications so that they can be

monitored more closely or if necessary referred to more specialised medical centres. These are the mothers that the Village Health Workers makes a special effort to visit and keep in touch with to make sure that they understand what is going on and to give them support. Most mothers give birth in hospital. Although the place of birth will be discussed with the Village Health Worker she will not usually be involved with the actual birth. Sometimes, however, the Health Worker will accompany a woman to the hospital especially if it seems that she needs an advocate.

Once the baby is born mother and baby will be visited at home by the Health Worker. Support, advice about nutrition and hygiene as well as checks on mother and baby will be carried out. She will also liaise with the necessary Government facilities concerning immunization. Over the last few years it has become clear that this aspect of the work needs to be expanded. As a result in the next few months we will be setting up a Post Natal Program. (see next article)



Healthy mother healthy child.

This issue of Kuyil

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Post Natal program

Despite our ante natal and other programs aimed at improving the health of mother and baby we found that over 80% of new-born children were born underweight - i.e. weighed less than 3kg. Growth and development in the crucial first years of life are easily arrested by illness and these underweight babies were far more likely than those of normal weight to become ill. Frequent illness leads in turn to impaired growth and thus a vicious cycle of illness, impaired growth and further illness is set up. This is exacerbated if the mother becomes pregnant again very quickly when she will often be unable to cope with the breast feeding demands of her first baby as well as the nutritional needs of the new one growing inside her.

Hence the need for our new Postnatal Program which aims to improve the health of mothers and new-born by keeping in touch with them to identify, prevent and treat common problems affecting mother and child. Once again the Village Health Worker will be the cornerstone of the program. They will invite mothers with new-born babies to the clinics where the babies will be weighed. As well as providing information about the health of the baby and whether action is required it will also provide an opportunity to discuss more general issues.

This will include support to establish and continue with breast feeding, immunization for common childhood diseases as well as regular monitoring of the baby's growth to detect and treat as early as possible growth impairment

and developmental delays. The problem of maternal nutrition will be addressed as will family spacing and deciding on birth control as well as the care of girl babies, who in this culture, due to cultural beliefs and economic reasons, are cared for less well than boys. Here health information can be disseminated to groups of mothers in different ways such as the use of games, videos discussions etc.

It is anticipated that mothers and newborns will stay in the program for the first five years of the child's life during which time the child's physical growth and mental development can be monitored. It will also give the mother an opportunity to recover from the previous pregnancy and plan for future healthy babies.

Dr Devashish

Murugama

One rainy morning I went into the Health Centre and found a woman lying down in the waiting hall. She was soaking wet and had a very sad story to tell. She had no parents and had been living with her brother who had recently turned her out. She had leprosy and because of this was treated as an outcast. She had somehow walked ten kilometres to come and see us at the Health Centre.

As a result of the leprosy her left leg was severely damaged. It was impossible to save the leg and she eventually had to be admitted to hospital so that it could be amputated. She thought all that was left for her was to sit on the street as a beggar. With the help of donations from Dutch friends we were able to pay not only her hospital expenses but also the expenses of a prosthesis for her left leg. After a long stay in the Health Centre and with the help of physiotherapists she can now walk.

During the time she stayed with us another marvellous thing happened. She met a woman who was willing to take her into her house to do some light household work. She is so proud to have a job so that she can save money for a new sari and other things that she needs. We keep in touch with her and she is still very happy there.

Dear friends from Holland, in the name of Murugamaa, thank you so much for enabling us to change her life in such a positive way.

Mr Albert.



Murugamaa learns to walk again

Manikandan

Manikandan is our new gardener at the Health Centre. He was born with 'Osteogenesis imperfecta', which is a deficiency in normal bone growth; bones will not grow well and are extremely brittle. He grew up in the nearby village of Kuilapalayam and with the help of some foreign friends he was able to attend New Creation School in Auroville. Some months back we were able to offer him a full time job as one of our gardeners as well as a room in our Staff quarters, both of which made him very happy.

A few weeks ago he was busy removing old leaves with a wheelbarrow when the wheelbarrow fell on his right thigh and broke the lower part of his femur. As we saw on the X-ray, it was a complicated fracture so we sent him to Jipmer a big Government hospital near Pondicherry. Unluckily we found out that the Orthopaedic surgery in Jipmer is being renovated and hardly any

operations were taking place. Manikandan would have had to wait, probably for weeks, for surgery. An impossible situation since he was lying in bed in a lot of pain and discomfort.

We decided to take him to the MIOT-Hospital in Madras, which is one of the best places for Orthopaedic surgery. We knew that once there, he would receive the best possible treatment available. We did not know how we would afford the Rs. 40,000/- or US\$ 900-for the surgery and his stay there, but we felt that since he is one of our staff his treatment should be the best and that the money will come somehow.

The day after he was admitted he was successfully operated and a few days later we took him back to our Health Centre. He is now staying in one of our single rooms, is watching TV, listening to Music and slowly recovering from his ordeal.

Mr Albert & Mr Peter



Manikanden recovering in the Health Centre

We invite you to participate with us ...

Our work is growing in response to the needs of the village people who live around Auroville. Existing programs help more people. We have new programs like the Mother and Child postnatal program which need funds to start.

Can you help? Any donation, however, small or large will help us continue with our very necessary work.

Send your donation by cheque in any currency made out to 'Auroville Health Centre'. Or you can send it to any Auroville International group in your country who will send it on to us.



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Glimpses into the history of the Auroville Health Centre from Dr. Lucas

It was during his first visit to Pondicherry and Auroville in the winter of 1973/4 that Dr Lucas first thought about taking up medical studies. He visited the Auroville Health Centre just six months after it had been set up by Dr Sen, who Dr Lucas remembers with considerable warmth and gratitude.

'Dr Sen came from a family of doctors in Calcutta (Kolkata) and after his post graduate surgical studies joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1949/50. He was one of the doctors who attended Sri Aurobindo during the last six months of his life. In the next decade he joined JIPMER, the newly founded medical college in Pondicherry, as a surgeon and lecturer and where he headed several departments. He was well known and respected for his extraordinary knowledge and medical sincerity...

When medical work became

necessary for Auroville he was appointed director of Auroville Health Services by Mother and started work. When I studied and worked under him in the late seventies - during my second stay in Auroville - he told me that he wanted to set up a program for preventative health care in the villages, but was waiting for someone to come forward to volunteer for the work.

Dr Sen is remembered for his outbursts of temper. But from my experience I came to know that if you could acknowledge the undeniable fault he had found in your performance and if you could pass over his loss of temper, he was very appreciative. He was one of the best medical teachers I ever had, a very supportive and warm guide for studies and work.'

Dr Lucas

More glimpses in the next issue of Kuyil