

Malcolm Harper writes

It has been a long time since our last newsletter; I apologise for the delay; one major reason has been that a lot has been going on for the benefit of children in Orissa (now called Odisha—but we are staying with Orissa for now). I was in Orissa in September, and again earlier this month, and I am off yet again next week. All kinds of good things are happening in the school at PUSS, on the stations (note that it is now stations, in the plural) with SOCH, and even elsewhere in the state.

News from PUSS

I start with what is the least dramatic but most necessary change. Friends in Brussels supported the construction of a new septic tank for the PUSS school well over ten years ago; it has reached the end of its useful life (as some recent visitors may have noticed!), and it has always required frequent and increasingly expensive visits from the local ‘poo lorry’.

Work is already well advanced on the construction of a completely new anaerobic sewage treatment plant; it has been designed to cope with volumes well over twice the present ‘output’ of the school, it will not require emptying, and the treated sewage will be odour and infection free. The start of the construction was delayed by the very late severe monsoon (which caused a major cyclone further South in the state) but it should be completed before the end of the year.

The children’s diet has been substantially improved, in part thanks to your continuing generosity, but also through a small but increasing flow of individually quite small donations from



local well-wishers, through a local website. They can donate as little as £20, which allows every child in the school to have two eggs for a week. It is good to see that Indian people are now supporting children ‘in their own backyard’. Charity begins at home.



Helping destitute children in India to live a better life

Friends of the Children of Orissa

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Children at PUSS school

The children are well, apart from the usual minor problems; Bulari (on the right in the picture) seems to be holding her HIV at bay, and is naughtier than ever, and Pratyusha (on the left), the girl who was found a year ago starved and near death on a rubbish heap, is progressing slowly but we hope surely.

Kuku is also planning some new building work; those of you who have visited PUSS will have seen the cramped conditions where her family live, and if you have stayed at PUSS you will also have experienced the slightly odd arrangements for guests. We have finally persuaded Kuku to make some improvements, at the same time as adding some much needed office space, and providing a quiet place where troubled children can be individually counselled.

It will not be easy to integrate these new facilities into the existing building, and we are taking advice from qualified architects on how it should be done. This process is being

generously supported by Hat Trick Productions of 'Have I got news for you?' fame. Karen Mulville, Linda Deverell and Kate Wilson visited PUSS and SOCH on their behalf earlier this month; they tried their hand at teaching several classes, and they will also be helping PUSS to engage with a Mumbai-based NGO in a five year project to move the school from its present teacher-centred rote-learning towards child-centred methods.

This will be close to Kadambini's original dream of using the Montessori Method when she started the school in the mid-1980s, and they plan at the same time to convert the school to English medium, which will open the door to far more employment opportunities for the girls. I was sceptical as to whether this was possible, but the NGO has in the last thirty years successfully undertaken similar 'conversions' with some 800 schools of all kinds in other parts of India. It will take at least five years, and Hat Trick have agreed to support it for as long as it takes.



News from SOCH

SOCH have moved their Bhubaneswar shelter to a new and slightly roomier location, which is still only five minutes walk from the railway station, along the track and through a small slum. Kate Wilson of Hat Trick took the picture shown below from the slow train we took down to Khurdha junction station, where SOCH has their other operation.

SOCH have rescued over 750 children since they started less than two years ago, and Hat Trick have again undertaken to continue their support for Khurdha. Bill and Michele Voss, who continue generously to support our work, were with us for part of the visit. They kindly hosted a splendid visit to Nandankanan zoo and a great picnic by the lake afterwards. As usual, it was more fun to watch the children watching the animals than to watch the animals themselves, and two of the youngest ones joined the oldest (me) in an electric car for our tour.



Above: visit to Nandankanan zoo. Inset: small slum near Bhubaneswar station



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News from SOCH continued

Some of the SOCH staff took time off from their often very tedious platform patrol work to join the picnic. In the picture below you can see Ishwar, team leader of the Bhubaneswar operation, with one of his colleagues and a small boy whom they had rescued the day before. His parents had apparently been arrested a few days earlier for selling illegally at the railway station, so the child was at his uncle's house. His uncle and aunt are also poor and survive with odd petty jobs; the boy did not like them and ran away from their house. He stayed at the SOCH shelter for two nights. The SOCH team gave him a clean set of clothes, and reunited him with his uncle and aunt, and they were advised to take better care of him. His parents were released from jail on the evening of the picnic day, and the child has apparently re-joined them.



New link with Saheli

Finally, we have started yet another link, with a small institution called Saheli, which is based in the North of Orissa, in the so-called 'tribal belt' near the border with West Bengal.

They have been operating an outreach programme with deprived tribal communities, helping with health awareness, gender issues and other aspects, and they came across a number of children whose families were unable to support them; destitution, drugs, drunkenness, single parents, not so different from similar situations here in England, but in Orissa there are no facilities for taking such children into care.

Saheli have taken in ten such children; you can see one of them on the front cover. They stay in one room in their office and attend local schools, but the situation needs to be properly established. We are providing them with some modest assistance to enable Saheli to offer the children a more secure home. This may evolve into something not dissimilar to PUSS, and we have already introduced the institutions to one-another.

There is always more to be done; thank you for all your help, have a happy Christmas and a good new year, and please give a thought to Friends of the Children of Orissa when you are doing your Christmas shopping.

Malcolm Harper
Filgrave, November 2014



Every penny we raise goes to help children in Orissa

Every penny will go to cover the direct cost of this work for children. **None** of your money will be spent on fundraising, administration, printing, advertising, travel or the other expenses associated with the more familiar charity appeals



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