

## INTERIM REPORT – No.14

I would like to share with you the stories of some of the children we have admitted into our full-time care in our Children's Villages. So far 98 new little boys and girls have joined us, and as always, there are more girls than boys. We now care for more than 950 children in all our child-care centres. This is a big responsibility and I often think of their futures when they eventually leave us to start their own lives independently, just like any parent.



One of the last children I admitted was an 8 year old street child, **Murugeswari**. For the last two years she has spent her days begging on the streets and bus stand of a nearby town. With the child-trafficking that goes on this is a dangerous life for such an innocent child. And innocent she is. Her father died some time ago, her mother is severely handicapped and tries to care for a two year old boy. So no source of income. So semi-starvation and total neglect. No. school. It is a miracle that she has kept her little-girlishness.

Her aunt controlled her begging and took whatever small amount she collected by begging. Eventually she was picked up by a nun in that town and sent on to us. She came in very dirty, with unkempt long hair and in filthy rags. Not at all attractive. She was just a beggar girl from the lowest of the low castes, unwanted, unloved and a nuisance. Do we ever “see” such children. They are not uncommon? Do we care about their backgrounds and the hellish life they live?

Now she is in one of our “families” with a new good “mother” and it is so evident that she is well-cared for in the short time of two weeks: clean, well groomed, really happy and “at home”. Secure and going to one of our schools with companions of her own age, free to be a little girl once again, able to join in the games and get three good meals each day and no longer at the mercy of a rapacious aunt. She is a pretty child and Murugeswari is very dear to all of us.



Another little girl, typical of our admissions this year, is **Hemalatha** who is 8 years old. She is HIV positive, so are her mother and father. The mother is terminally ill with this horrible and incurable disease and will not live much longer. We are not sure of the condition of the father though he is suffering from this virus. Hemalatha, through no fault of her own has the disease also but presently she is not suffering and once she starts on Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) it is more than

likely she will remain safe like the other 96 such HIV children now in our very special and professional care. But despite all our efforts some children, a handful, lose weight dramatically and it makes us sad to see their emaciated faces, but still smiling. Why children should be afflicted with this disease is a mystery. There is a similar number with us whose parent(s) are HIV positive and for this reason are with us. That makes nearly 200 such children altogether.



**Sneka** and **Seema** are two tiny, stunted girls, one is 6 and the other is 4. Stunted because of under-nourishment, the polite, evasive word for semi-starvation. People do not seem to want to face the fact that 75 million, and that is million, children in India are half starved. Well, Sneka and Seema, are typical of this category and the sad thing is that they think this is normal everywhere in the world. And in their small lives so far they have encountered dreadful traumas. Both parents attempted suicide, one way out of impossible hardships, by setting themselves on fire. Somehow they were saved but then both ran away, deserting the children, who were then dumped on aged grandparents and were living in a hut in a coconut estate. The grandparents could not cope and so they arrived in our office in filthy clothes so evidently neglected and frightened. Now they are safe and cared for and loved in one of our Children's Villages. And it gave me the great joy to see them (on one of the many swings) smiling and secure and truly at home.

I could go on with other stories, some sadder than these. The joy that is ours is due to the words of Jesus who several times said: "Whatever you do for these little ones, you do for me."

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