

Personal Reflections by Other Members of the Team

What a fantastic visit we had! We have returned from the trip with a heightened feeling of love and togetherness with the team at Vidiyal. The time spent with Jim and Sharmila was very special and forged new bonds. They are an incredible couple and it is amazing to see the amount of work they achieve and the extent of their outreach into the slum community. Their love for the children is so evident and to see the way the children respond to them was a joy.

For Lynn it was exciting to see her sponsor child Nandhini again. She is growing up and becoming fully involved in all that is going on at Vidiyal, dancing, drama, karate, thappu(drums), as well making the most of a good education. These opportunities are helping her to become a confident young lady who, hopefully, will be able to make a difference in the community in the future.

Lynn also says: “One of my most special moments was meeting up again with Renuka, one of the field workers at Vidiyal. We made friends back in 2003 when I gave her some soap as a gift and again in 2005. As soon as she saw me this time she gave me a big hug and every time after that she would always gravitate towards me. She even gave me a hat which she made herself as something to remember her by. At the staff dinner we spent the evening together, finding out more about each other and Renuka taught me some Indian dancing. We know what our friendship, love and support mean to Jim, Sharmila and the children, but what I found even more amazing was how much it meant to the rest of the staff as well.”

Sandra says: “One of the highlights of the trip for me was meeting up with three very special people. We were surprised to be met at the station in Madurai by our sponsor children, who had been taken out of school early so that they could meet us. Bharath, who we sponsor as a family, was introduced to me and gave me a bunch of roses. He then chatted away quite happily in English about all the things that I had told him in my letters. He is an orphan who lives in the Vidiyal Shelter Home and was very caring and attentive throughout our stay. Bharath even managed to speak to my mum in England over the phone, which made her day. He is such an intelligent lad and he now has lots of opportunities before him.

Also at the station to meet us was Rekha, a little girl who lives in the Shelter Home, having been left by her parents with an uncle. The uncle then left her with a neighbour, who tortured her and she was taken by the police to Vidiyal, bruised, battered and traumatised. She would not speak to anyone. However, a year further down the line, it was decided that she was ready to be sponsored. I wondered what I would find, but I discovered a delightful little girl, very quiet at first but then revealing a mischievous grin and a sense of fun. What a difference the security and love of Vidiyal has made.

The next morning I met an absolutely beautiful young girl called Ranjitha. She takes on a lot of responsibility at Vidiyal and has been to Delhi to talk on Children's Rights. Although still at school she showed a maturity and gentleness in all that she did, but still had a fun side, being quite happy to drag me round all the different activities at the water park. Ranjitha took to calling me "Mom" and it was a very proud Mom indeed who presented her with a special award at the anniversary celebration. She hopes to become a computer engineer and is studying hard to achieve this ambition.

I feel very privileged to be able to help support these children in a small way and would ask all sponsors to ensure that they encourage their sponsor children and maintain regular contact with them. Jim and Sharmila give the children a great deal of love and care, but their sponsor is very important to each child who knows that he/she is special to someone here in the UK. You can make such a difference to your child's self-esteem and development."

Sandra and Lynn Davies

It is very difficult to express my thoughts and feelings following my 1st visit to India; I have had the most amazing journey and enjoyed every single moment. I support the trust in fund raising events and have also sponsored a young girl called Meenakshi for some years, however, until I actually saw the work in progress I had no comprehension of the difference being made in so many young people's lives. I am absolutely flabbergasted by the dedication and commitment Jim and Sharmila display, along with the love that is so apparent. I felt extremely honoured to be associated with the Trust and very proud to represent it.

Everywhere we went the welcome was overwhelming and so warm, the children were delightful and were so obviously happy and well cared for. The whole experience has brought home to me a feeling of responsibility to ensure that we continue to support the team at Vidiyal both financially and emotionally. I also now recognize the important role I have as the sponsor of Meenakshi and how just by communicating with her regularly means so much to her. I am so thankful to have had this opportunity, it was such a happy time and the memories I have gathered will stay with me forever.

Rose Leech

Maureen's Third Visit - The Privilege and the Pleasure

This was my third visit to Vidiyal. To try and condense the visit into a short space is difficult if not impossible. I have decided to share my pleasure and joy at seeing children I had met before on my first visit. Now they are in their teens and I know them by name. They are charming, caring and self-confident. Taking on responsibilities at Vidiyal as volunteers, helping with the younger children, making a stand for children's rights in India and the outside world. Some are continuing in further studies such as nursing, engineering, science and many more professions; those less academic take up more practical studies, catering, carpentry, plumbing, and sewing. The constant care, support and stability of Vidiyal, being loved no matter what, has enabled these youngsters, against all the odds of the stigma of slum and caste to overcome, stand on their own two feet and to reach their full potential of the young men and women they were always meant to be. This will not only change their lives but will be carried on into their relationships and in time their marriages. Without Vidiyal, the devotion of Jim Jesudoss his wife Sharmilla and the tireless team that work alongside them none of these things would be possible.

Maureen Clarke

India Trip - Second time around.

As I settle back home after my second trip to India, I am reflecting on my experience this time. It was challenging, emotional, exciting, exhausting, uplifting and also thought-provoking. Familiar sights and smells hit me as I walked out of the airport. Familiar faces greeted me in Trivandrum and Madurai, but I was to meet many new faces during my stay there. I often think of all the people I met - Jim and Sharmila and their helpers and all the beautiful children and teenagers, as well as the faithful rickshaw drivers in Trivandrum.

My first taste of Madurai was being greeted by Jim, Sharmila and a group of children on the station platform with smiling faces and posies of rosebuds. What a welcome! I met my sponsor lad Shanmuga for the first time there. A very special moment for me. I had to wait till the following day to meet my sponsor girl Manjula Devi.

As the trip progressed the group became more involved and aware of the projects at Vidiyal. We ventured into new territories – new drop-in centres in the slums where no white visitors had been. We visited the site of the new school and really felt God's presence there. We interacted with the children, had lots of laughter with the staff and above all felt a closeness with Jim and Sharmila. We got to know them and they us. I really felt part of the team and felt very privileged to see firsthand the work the Trust is supporting.

As we joined in the 11th anniversary of Vidiyal celebrations, surrounded by the amazing children and their families, I was aware of the difference Vidiyal has made to their lives

and the responsibility to come back home, not only to continue to raise funds, but to make others aware of the work being done tirelessly and selflessly by Jim, Sharmila and the team, to encourage them and the children by regular contact. Contact is so important. One of the older lads who I met four years ago showed me photos that his sponsor had sent him of that trip, kept in a very precious little album. It means so much to them.

I praise God for all that he is doing at Vidiyal.

Maddy Finch

As we had visited India before in 2003, we wondered if the previous experience would help or hinder this subsequent trip. When we came out of Trivandrum airport, we were faced with hundreds of people, many of whom were Indian families waiting for their husbands and fathers who had been working away for a year. We were trying to spot two cars and drivers that were coming to pick us up from the hotel. Needless to say, there was only one car; they had to 'phone for another amongst the noise the chaos and the heat. Even in the dark, you find yourself sinking into the heat, humidity and warm spicy smells amongst the constant pipping of all modes of transport. This was how we remembered India, the previous visit had set us in good stead, and we loved it!

The next morning, Friday, Dave contacted Thomas Abraham of the YMCA in Trivandrum and Thomas Varghese at SnehadEEPam Hospital to arrange our visits. Some of the conversations were lost in translation, but they got there in the end with the volume raised as they tried to speak and understand clearly!

Our best experience at Vidiyal concerned the centre of the work – the children. Up until now we have supported the outreach work to the street children, as this was something we felt strongly about. However, we had considered combining that with sponsorship. As we met the children, we were struck by their enquiries about their sponsors. It was so important to them to have someone in England particularly interested in their lives and supporting them through the challenges of education etc. We expressed an interest in sponsoring a boy and a girl and Jim was happy to sort this out while we were there. We really enjoyed our time with all the children and on the evening of the Saturday Celebration we were not really thinking about who our sponsor children might be. After the ceremony of the candle-lighting and meeting the children one by one, Jim introduced us to our sponsor children; Surya (aged 9) and Kumaresan (aged 10). We realised that we had met them earlier, when they presented us with our garlands and then Surya had been holding Dave's hand during the candle ceremony. This was a really special time together and seeing that they were as pleased as us, made us determined to promote sponsorship back home. We are looking forward to receiving the information Jim will send us about their background. We also had fun meeting their brothers and sisters and were privileged to meet their Mums on the last evening.

Needless to say, because of this and the whole experience, we shall return!

Sally and Dave Wells

