

BEKIND UPDATE

MARCH 2009

"IF YOU CAN'T BE THERE BE KIND"

Welcome to our second edition of Bekind Update. We write this newsletter to keep you informed about what Bekind Ireland has been doing for the last few months. We want to let you know about the people you are helping, the progress that is being made by the charities and projects we support and to thank you for your ongoing support, without which this charity would not be able to operate.

The rest of this edition is a report from Brian Flanagan, one of the founders of the charity, who visited Calcutta last October with a group of people from the Castleknock area. Please take the time to read this newsletter and feel free to share it with your family and friends.

Brian's report

I started putting this newsletter together before Christmas but decided to hold back and allow the yuletide festivities to



A rare angry face from this little one!

pass, when cards and letters are in abundance and additional reading like this could be seen as a distraction.

Now Christmas is behind us and 2008 ended with a sense of uncertainty as to what this current year would bring. How could our country and booming economy go from being heralded as being an example of success and wealth with a triple "A" rating to now the butt end of jokes in Europe's financial circles? Financial golden circles, dodgy deals, talk of half a million of us being unemployed, millions are now obsolete we must talk in billions when discussing the national debt. January 2008 saw the highest new vehicle registrations ever in the history of the state and yet this January sales were down 66% and the government's tax take down 80%! Talk of the International Monetary Fund coming to bail out Ireland! Unthinkable? House repossessions, queues outside the nations dole offices, welcome to reality, Ireland 2009.

Why do I write this? What has this got to do with Calcutta? In Ireland many people are going through a tough time, becoming unemployed, facing losing not just a livelihood but also a home, a car, a relationship perhaps. It is and has happened at such a pace there is a sense of bewilderment but in Ireland no one will go hungry, no one will have to beg or live on the streets. Yes we have homeless, yes we have poor and drug abuse etc but there is choice,,, in Calcutta choice is limited.

Many of the families I have passed on the streets living in filth and squalor came from villages where they had a livelihood, a business, a home. Through circumstances whether it be failure of crops, devastation by natural disaster or whatever reason they had the option to starve or come to a city to beg and survive. Starting on the outskirts of the train stations, they edge their way closer to the platforms, sending their children to pester the passengers for a rupee or two. Moving to the streets, a better place to beg, more people, more chances of a rupee or two, scores of little urchins each one pestering a western face like mine, slipping little hands into mine and gesturing with closed fingers from mouth to tummy, "Uncle please, uncle please". Make eye contact and you are gone. Walk on in an ignoring way and feel like a cold hearted creep.

Sometimes I break the rules slipping some money into those little fingers or the crippled ones who beg in abundance or the mother with the emaciated baby on her hip. The little ones who have parents or a relative to care for them have some chance, but for those abandoned or discarded because of a disability or just plain neglect need support and a chance, that's where we, you and I come into the picture. Bekind Ireland will continue to support the existing charities and organisations that give the street children of Calcutta a chance. Ireland may be in recession but we won't starve, they will.

Continued Overleaf

FIVE FOR KOLKATA



Brian and daughter Susan Kealy and Brian Flanagan surrounded by the boys from Rupayan. A little over a year ago these children were homeless seeking out an existence and falling victim to crime and abuse before getting a chance of a home and an education with the "Art of Living" organisation.

Saturday 18th of October 2008

I departed for Kolkata for my fifth visit to India, this time with a few volunteers. We met several times in advance of our journey and I tried my best to prepare them for what they would experience.

The adults Tom and Brian K covered all their own expenses and immersed themselves in their work in the orphanages without hesitation.

Two students, Susan and Dearbhaile had worked hard and had fundraised in their school and the local parish amassing several thousand euros, which covered their travel expenses and accommodation. The balance was topped up by Bekind and jointly we were able to distribute over €12,000 to various organisations whose primary objective is the care of the street children, the handicapped and needy in Calcutta.

The group were to meet and spend time with most of the people I have come to know and trust over the last few years, people who really make a difference to the lives of so many in Calcutta or Kolkata as some prefer to call it.

After the ritual sign on at the Mother House on Monday afternoon, we were allocated our places of work, the girls were to work each morning in Shanti Dan a home for abandoned babies and toddlers. Tom Brian K and I would work the mornings in Nabo Jibon a home for mentally and physically handicapped boys.

In the afternoon the five of us would meet and travel to Daya Dan an orphanage for both boys and girls with severe mental and physical conditions. My doubts about the group's ability to cope were unfounded and each enthusiastically met the challenges daily.

We had met with the ageing but equally enthusiastic Jesuit Fr. Karl Dinchar originally from Pennsylvania now in his 54th year in India. He was to inform us of the terrible atrocities in Orissa, south of Calcutta, where massacres had taken place against the Christian communities, churches and homes burnt, people driven from their homes and the rape of one of the sisters of charity and the death of a priest.



Crowded conditions in the slums never suppress a friendly smile.



Teachers funded by the Hope Foundation teaching in the slums.

It would appear Hindu extremists were responsible for these horrific acts of depravity something I would never have associated with Hinduism. Hard to believe those caring for the poorest of the poor for so many years could be treated in such a fashion.

We met Donegal woman Sister Nimala Marie, who arranged a visit to the leper colony in Titagarh for us. Sr. Nimala had also been responsible for making all the original arrangements for Mother Teresa's visits to Ireland.

We met Maureen Forest and her sister Jenny spending a day visiting the dedicated homes and centres run by the Hope Foundation.

A visit to a slum area where approximately eight thousand people live in the area of a football pitch was a true experience that none of us will ever forget. **Continued overleaf**



Maureen asks the mother of this malnourished baby to visit the Hope hospital.

We spent some time in the tiny crowded shanty classrooms where teachers had, I believe, a vocation and not just a job. The children of the slums relish the opportunity to learn and get a chance to pull themselves out of slum poverty through education.

The current popular film "Slum dog Millionaire" depicts life as it is in these slums without exaggeration.

The journey back from the slum will stick in my mind forever. We were on our way to visit the Hope boy's home and the Hope girl's home to spend some time with the kids;

At a traffic junction our vehicle was approached by street beggars, nothing unusual about this, it happens all the time. A young lad of perhaps 15 or 16, clad only in a dirty pair of shorts, came to Maureen's side of the car. She would normally not give as it only encourages begging. However this time, she

opened her purse and put a 100 rupee note (€2) out for the young beggar. The boy took it in his lips and tucked it under his arm.

The arm was six or seven inches long, a stump. We were to discover that he had lost both arms in an accident. While under the influence of solvents from glue sniffing he became unconscious and fell under the wheels of a train at the back of Howrah station.

We stopped for a few minutes as Frank, Maureen's driver gave him directions to the Hope Foundation hospital.

This horrific loss of limb is not unusual as our group were to meet a 10 and a 14 year old, each of them lost both a leg and an arm under similar circumstances. These two, Depac and Bejwasit were now living in the Hope boys home and had been treated for their addiction and also had prostheses made for them, through supporting Hope these kids have been given a chance.

Diwali festival while we were there was like Halloween and Christmas mixed together with fireworks and many "pandals" (shrines erected to the god Shiva) all around the city. I made a purchase with Bro Sunil from the boys home Nabo Jibon of a collection of fireworks for the children to enjoy, supervised of course. We were to take these handicapped children to a local funfair where squeals of delight lifted our hearts and theirs- a chance of happiness.

We met with Br. Ambrose who invited us to visit the Lepers home in Shipur. Another of Kolkatas punches hit me as we held hands and sat with these men in their home run by the Brothers. These men, social outcasts, condemned to a life of suf-



5 year old Tumpa gets special attention from Sanchar helping so many families with disabled and mentally challenged children.

fering would be there for the rest of their lives. It triggered the line from the Eagles hit "Hotel California" "you can find me there but you can never leave" Our presence and being with them gave some distraction, a chance.

Their physical and psychological needs tended to day in day out by head Brother Suman and a handful of staff beside the murky waters of the Hoogli river, where life continues, youngsters dive into the river unafraid of it's toxic content believing the power of the sacred Ganges would protect them from harm.

Their energetic health and appearance seemed testament to the Hindus beliefs.

We visited the Sanchar outreach group and spent time with families of children with special needs. Tumpa, a little five-year-old girl was given special attention, stimulation techniques and physiotherapy by a trained Sanchar employee. He worked with the child's mother in their one-roomed house. They may have been poor in terms of possessions but so rich in terms of the unquestionable love of a mother for her single, special child with special needs- a family given a chance.

Continued overleaf

AOL (Art of Living) group works with people with drug and alcohol addiction. Earlier this year I visited their centres and was very impressed by the methods used and also their commitments to improving the centres and their facilities.

We decided to donate by equipping the kitchen in the women's centre, which opened in December last year. A frantic but worthwhile shopping spree ensued. Cooker, fridge, microwave, water purifier, pots, pans, crockery, cutlery etc all bought and paid for including delivery for just €800. I think this demonstrates the value of your support and again the vulnerable given a chance.

Some of the funds given to a very special NGO will go towards medical bills, surgery and special treatment for a 19-year-old named Sagur. He was badly beaten in one of the train stations by the authorities, beaten so badly he suffered a dislocated shoulder and ligament damage to his right arm. Sagur is currently the youngest person in Kalighat, the home for the dying and destitute, where he is making a slow recovery, tended to by volunteers and the Missionary of Charity Sisters. We were to witness his appalling injuries and the scars on his back from the trashing he received. He has a chance. This year we have doubled the number of children we sponsor in the Hope foundation from 3 to 6 at an annual cost of €1500.

We commenced a monthly standing order to Loreto Sealdah Rainbow children's project at a cost of €600 per year.

Our support for the kids from Bowbazar Swimming Club continues at also €600 per year.

The end of year accounts are now ready for the auditor and I am pleased that we together have raised over €26,000 which does and will give many needy ones in Calcutta, the "City of Joy" a real chance

A BIG THANK YOU

Bekind Ireland relies hugely on the support and generosity of others. Our main income stream comes from the regular donations we receive from people like you. Sometimes however, we receive unexpected donations. Since Bekind began, we have benefitted from people running many different events ranging from pancake mornings to sponsored marathons and most recently a book sale.

The sale of the book *Larger than life@ God .com* by Fr. Vincent Travers, took place at the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle, Laurel Lodge at the end of February and raised over €1700. The proceeds were donated to Bekind at Fr. Travers' request. This is another testament to the support we continue to receive from the parish.

We would like to thank all those who have given their time and effort to Bekind. Your support means so much to us and of course to the people of Calcutta that will benefit from your generosity.

Many thanks for your continued support.



Brian Flanagan.

Bekind Ireland Ltd.

Ujwal in his specially adapted chair supplied by Bekind.



The happy faces of the special needs boys from Nabo Jabon as we all enjoy a day at an amusement park in Howrah.



Bekind Ireland Ltd

"If you can't be there be kind"

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