

SCAW



NEWSLETTER

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A charitable organization founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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CHENNAI, INDIA: Jan. 12-24, 2003: 3,000 Bedkits & 1,000 Layettes

BY RON THOMPSON
KINGSTON, ONTARIO

India is a fabled land of mystery and allure; of temples and religions; of lions and tigers; and of a billion-plus people. This was my first visit to India, and after a journey of 42 hours, travelling the long way around to the other side of the world across the Pacific; we were met and garlanded at Chennai's airport by members of the Ambattur Rotary Club, our hosts.

On the way to our residence by van, we soon saw that the streets were congested with motorcycles carrying up to four persons; and auto rickshaws; and motor cycles converted into three wheelers with an open hard top; all for hire. During our journeys to our distributions sites, the traffic seemed to travel in an automated form, challenging each other with loud horns, and daring each other with only inches to spare. Traffic came incessantly from all directions, even the wrong way towards us down dual carriageways, and many times we Canadians hid our eyes, waiting for the crash which thankfully never came; as our driver forced his way through the congestion. I have no idea how he did it. I was told that the amount of traffic had doubled every year, and there was a massive expansion of the road system underway – evidence which could be seen everywhere.

Whilst riding, I didn't see as many people as I'd expected sleeping by the roadsides, although I did see a few here and there. There were also many pedestrians, and the women were almost exclusively garbed in colourful saris and *salwars* (a three piece ladies outfit), whereas the men had mainly adopted western dress within the town, although in the suburbs native dress predominated.

The first day, we happily slept in until noon,

and then we were taken to view our first distribution site, at a school funded by the Rotarian Club of Ambattur. The children were to be assembled in a public recreation field some 500 yards away from the school building where the bedkits were stored and from where they would be distributed. The kids would be escorted down narrow lanes in batches of 30, to receive their bedkits; and on the appointed day, we accomplished this with no problems, although we really would have preferred to have the dressing site and handing out site all together.

As always, once the distributions began, our SCAW team, soon settled into a good workable unit with the various jobs being changed on a routine basis. The children who received the bedkits were obviously from poor families. Many were without shoes, and some were undernourished. They really valued their gifts and were extremely reluctant to return them, even temporarily, to the young Rotarian helpers who carried them out to the gate for them.

With the help of the various Rotarian groups led by the Ambattur Rotarians, our Canadian team felt very proud of this distribution, and we applaud the Rotarians for their efficiency, expertise and for taking care of us. They had spent months organizing and selecting the children, as well as deciding on the make up of the bedkits, and the sourcing of the suppliers. We would also like to mention the good and helpful assistance we received from the young Rotarians (Rotaracts), Girl Guides, Scouts and other young people who worked steadily and conscientiously at any and every job we asked them to do.

Being the team leader, I was the designated picture taker, and thus, I was excluded from the team members favourite job of handing out the bedkits to the children. However, at the end of each distribution, the last three bedkits, which had been used for the photo

display, were packed up, and I was able to feel the joy of actually handing them to the last three children who had stood patiently waiting.

Many times when taking the pictures, it was extremely difficult to get the children to look up and stop staring at the 'goodies' they were about to receive. It was also difficult to remain dry eyed when kids who were severely handicapped were led up to receive their bedkits; and I especially remember one lad of about 12, whose legs were both bent backwards and twisted and had to be carried by his mother; but despite this, he managed to smile when his picture was taken. At virtually all the distribution sites we were able to select attractive pleasant areas for the photographs, and to coax most of the children to respond with smiles.

Thus once again, I was excited and very happy to be honoured to represent you, the donors, in the distribution of your gifts of love by way of 3,000 bedkits and 1,000 layettes to these poor children who have so little; and I can assure you that there is no shortage of supply of these children. For every bedkit given, one more deserving and needy child sleeps comfortably and knows that someone from across the world cares for them; so please keep up the good work.

BY JUDY ADAMS
KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The Rotary Club of Ambattur was SCAW's host for these Chennai distributions. SCAW is one of three major projects of their club, which reflects the three eyes of the Hindu god, Lord Shiva. These three, T.V. Nagar Educational School, Ambattur Rotary Hospital, and Sleeping Children Around the World, are interconnected in their mission to assist those in need. The club's SCAW

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SCAW • 32 YEARS • 1970-2002 • 653,600 BEDKITS TO-DATE

(Chennai, India by Judy Adams, Kingston, Ontario, continued from page 1)

motto is "To help we help which helps the helped". This was SCAW's 17th distribution in Chennai, and the club members refer to their work with SCAW as continuing the dream of Murray Dryden.

The Rotary Club's SCAW committee consists of an organizing chair and five committees: procurement of materials; identification of children; hospitality; packing; and distribution.

The committee members volunteer 9,000 work hours to prepare for a distribution. All 55 members are asked to sign a duty roster to help at the distribution sites. The club provides \$3 Can. per child for organization, quality control, transportation of the children and the bedkits, etc., and these funds are raised through several projects during the year. The \$30 received from Canada purchases the materials for the bedkits and layettes.

In 1987, the first year of their distributions, the Ambattur Club prepared 250 bedkits, each consisting of seven items. Purchasing of bedkit items has evolved through the years from retail to wholesale, becoming more cost effective, and allowing more items to be added as the program expanded. This year's bedkit had 22 items. This year's new item was a clipboard. Future plans are to purchase directly from manufacturers in order to add additional items. Most items, (i.e. mattress, rug, blankets, towels,) are purchased from cottage industries, or materials are purchased and sent to cottage industries for stitching. No child labour is involved. Thus the benefits are twofold—helping children, and generating employment. Kit items have been changed through the years, to ensure that the most useful ones are included, with practical and cultural considerations.

Ambattur is one of 194 Rotary Clubs in district 3230, in a radius of 190 km. Under their auspices, the program has spread. This year, 76 clubs in the district participated. Each club chooses 15 to 20 children. Children from 150 various schools received bedkits this year. Through a very effective marketing presentation, they hope to continue to expand to include even more children. The criteria used for identifying deserving recipients is: 1) child must be registered in school, 2) generally given to the youngest in the family, 3) one-time recipient only, and

4) parents' income—usually workers earning a daily wage (i.e. fruit or vegetable street vendors, construction workers) earning 30-40 Rupees a day, or domestics earning 500-600 Rupees a month. Currently, 30 Rupees equals \$1 Can.

The central committee carries out selected auditing, where they interview the child in his/her home to ensure the integrity of the selection process.

With any project such as this, one always wonders, "Is it working?" Well, at one distribution, we met a lovely, confident young lady, E-Nithyaree, who received a bedkit six year ago. She is now a girl guide who is doing well in secondary school, and she was asked to volunteer, (and did) at this year's distribution. We were told of a young man who attended T.V. Nagar School, and who is now working in the computer industry in the United States. He had just sent a large donation to the school, which had provided him this opportunity. We also visited two previous recipients' homes where the families were proud and pleased to show us the items the children had received, still being treasured and well used. In short, the answer is "Yes, the project is working!"

On five of the distribution days, we were blessed with the assistance of groups of young people: Guides, Scouts, National Social Service (an extra curricular student program) and Rotaracts (young Rotarians from the school or community). These young people were delightful and very helpful. They worked hard, and when finished, they gathered around us and chatted animatedly. We exchanged a lot of information about our respective countries, plus they shared with us their personal ambitions. One group of young girls I talked with are planning on being doctors, lawyers and social workers.

The hospitality of our Rotarian hosts was tremendous. Not only did they assist us to do the work we came to do, they also made every effort to ensure we learned and savoured their country, their culture, and their foods—and they invited us into their homes. We were certainly their guests and were treated with friendship in a common cause.

The best part of this trip was the personal interaction with our hosts, with our young helpers and with the children, plus the knowledge that SCAW is making a positive difference. *Nandree!* (Thank you!)

GWYNETH THOMPSON, KINGSTON, ONTARIO

This was my fourth trip with SCAW but my first to India. The tiredness of a very long journey disappeared when we were greeted so warmly by our hosts, our luggage quickly loaded, then we were taken to our residence, which we were to call home for the next eight days. On your behalf we were to give out to needy children 3,000 bedkits and 1,000 layettes.

2003 Chennai Layette

Carrying basket with lid.

Powder bowl & puff

Rubber sheet

Talc

3 bed sheets

Soap & soap box

Cotton quilt

Juice sipper

4 dresses/different colours

Teether & rattle set

4 terry towel napkins

Soft toy

Towel

Bottlebrush

Woollen sweater, mitts & hat

Mosquito net

Stainless steel bowl & spoon

Multivitamin drops - 2 bottles

Vacuum flask

Cradle set

In total 34 items; what great value for only \$30 Cdn!

Once the Rotarians are notified by SCAW of the number of bedkits and layettes for which they will be receiving money; their team springs into action. The process of selecting the mothers and babies to receive the layettes begins with a visit to the Government Hospitals. They get a list of possible recipients of babies who will be from one to three months at the time of the distribution. The criteria are that they have to be poor and willing to participate in family planning. A health worker visits them at home to give them pre and postnatal care, teach them nutrition and the importance of taking vitamins. All the babies must be born in Government Hospitals and be immunized against Polio; a disease they are trying to eradicate.

Every year a new item is added to the bedkits, and the one for the layette this year is a Cradle Set, which we would more likely label as a Baby Hammock [see below]. This consists of a wooden bar, which has a hole

at each end through which rope (provided) is passed to form a long loop, from which it is hung. The two rope ends are then tied to each end of the long piece of linen, which forms a simple but effective cradle. It can be adjusted in height to keep the baby safely away from rats; roaches and other 'nasties', while providing good ventilation.

There was great joy in holding so many tiny babies, whom the mothers so trustingly placed in our outstretched arms, as we carried



them to the baby seats and placed them for their photo's to be taken. We then had another chance for a quick cuddle before returning them to their mothers. Then, as they were handed their bedkits, we eagerly went to pick up another baby. The mothers have their babies in sight the whole time and are proud to have their child's photo taken. Whilst they waited, the mothers sat crossed legged on the floor; the laps of their saris providing a wonderful resting place for their little ones. They were so contented there was no crying, although a few did cry as they were placed in the seats. Our youngest baby was only four days old; so tiny it was like holding a feather in your palms; however a few were actually a little big for the seats and almost struggled out.

The hardest part of any distribution is not the emotion that arises in dealing with the children, but rather in seeing the many, many others, who wait in vain and who must go home disappointed.

So to the many donors; lots of whose names we recognise as regular givers, we say thank you for the privilege of allowing

us to present your gifts; you will never have given a gift that is so thankfully received and so desperately needed.

To all the SCAW volunteers, both at home and abroad, my thanks also, for all your hard work in caring for these beautiful children.

LYNDA HUFF ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

For many years, I had dreamed of travelling to a third world country to help under-privileged children, and so it was a dream come true, and an honour to go with SCAW to distribute bedkits in Chennai, India.

This being my first SCAW trip, I was overwhelmed by the poverty in the country, and by the hundreds of thousands of people living in thatched-roof huts, tents, or literally on the streets. It is an enormous problem, and India's children are the victims. But, by distributing bedkits to many of these needy children, SCAW is making a real difference in their lives, giving these children a feeling of hope, and showing them that someone really cares.

While I did not know the exact items that went into the bedkit, I did know that every cent of your \$30 contribution is spent on it; and while it is often the first gift that the child ever receives, it also provides needed employment for small cottage industries. Locals make 75% of the bedkit items, thus providing good products at good prices. All of the children who receive bedkits are from parents who are casual workers (labourers, maids, fruit and vegetable vendors) who make only 30 to 40 Rupees a day.

The make-up of the bedkit varies from country to country, but the 2003 Chennai bedkit included a woven mat, quilt, 2 bed sheets, pillow and pillow cover, mosquito net, towel, 2 shirts, 2 pair of shorts or 2 skirts, cotton T-shirt, umbrella, stainless steel lunch box, canvas school bag, pencil box (containing ruler, pencil, pencil sharpener and eraser), plastic bucket, plastic mug, nylon clothes line, and the new item this year, a clipboard.

We also noticed that much less plastic is being used in the bedkits. The bedkit is now wrapped in the woven mat instead of a plastic bag, and tied with a plastic rope, which could be used as a clothesline. Thus,

the environment benefits, and the costs are kept down.

I was definitely impressed with the hard work and organizing that is done locally before we arrived, namely the production of the items in the bedkit, assembling and packing, and the identification of the children who are to receive them.

The most outstanding thing to me was the grateful appreciation of the children receiving their bedkits—the smiles on their faces told the story of how happy and excited they were. The children were very hot, many had to wait long hours for their picture to be taken, and often they had to be comforted because they had never had their photo taken before, and they did not understand what was happening. Yet, as they received their bedkits, we were able to make eye contact and hold their hands, and their faces lit up with big smiles, and you knew then you had made a difference when they said "Thanks!" or "Thank You!" in English.

The children ranged greatly in size and age, and nearly always were extremely thin, with some looking very malnourished. However, on the whole, they appeared clean and well groomed for their special day, with many of the girls having flowers woven into their braided hair. Often the bedkit was larger and weighed more than the child, but they still tried to carry it away themselves with much pride and enthusiasm.

The former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu left his estate in his will to be used for running a school for speech and hearing impaired children. It is a boarding school that also supplies hearing aids to the children. At one of the distribution sites, it was wonderful to see several dozen boys and girls from this school receive bedkits. In spite of the hearing aids, many still need to use sign language.

At several other distribution sites, we gave out bedkits to disabled children: an older boy whose legs and feet were very deformed from polio, and who had to be carried in by his mother; a very small child who was missing his forearms; another child missing a hand; plus a few mentally disabled children. It was great to see these children receiving bedkits, and hopefully more will do so in the future.

The most upsetting moment for me was to

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(Chennai, by Lynda Huff, Etobicoke, Ontario, continued from page 3)

see many parents with children waiting at the distribution sites after all the bedkits had been given out, hoping to still get one. It makes you realize how great the need is, and how important continuing contributions by the donors are.

However, in contrast, one of the highlights of our trip was to be able to visit the home of two little girls who had previously received bedkits: one last June, and the other two years ago. It was great to see that most of the articles were still being used and appreciated. The girl who received her bedkit two years ago was still using the mattress, mosquito netting, two towels, blanket, two pillows, cup, stainless steel plate and bowl, two combs, plus her school bag and uniform. The other girl was still using her mattress, blanket, pillow, two towels, mosquito netting, umbrella, pail, plate and school bag. This shows how much each and every article in the bedkit is valued by both the children and their parents, and again shows that the donors' money has been put to good use.

To those of you who contribute to SCAW, I can assure you that your continued support is greatly needed and appreciated by all the children and the parents of babies receiving the bedkits and layettes.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with SCAW and represent so many generous donors, and in doing so, bring joy to so many needy children.

**PAUL MIGH'
MISSISSAUC**



The names of the seven distribution sites do not roll easily off a Canadian tongue: T.V. Nagar, Vellore, Avadi, Korratu, Kilpauk,

T. Nagar, and Ambattur. Five are located on school grounds, one is a marriage hall, and one is a hospital. All but one is located in different poor areas of metropolitan Chennai. Vellore necessitated a three-hour, 150 km. drive west, plus an overnight stay.

Everywhere, however, the children are beautiful. The same cannot be said for most sites. Leader and photographer, Ron Thompsen, takes much time and pain to find or create an appropriate location for the picture taking, trying to turn the plain, dirty, dusty, old unpainted walls into a photo opportunity. In one circumstance, two bullocks foul a possible location. Another time, dirty water appears from nowhere exactly where the bedkits were about to be placed. The special hanging cradle (part of the layette) proves a difficult challenge to incorporate in the photos.

Some locations make it awkward to plan entrance and exit paths for the children moving to and from having their pictures taken. Sheltering hundreds from the heat and humidity for four to seven hours can also prove daunting. Children and families arrive early, hours before the first picture and distribution. Though many live not far away, some have walked long distances to get there. Some have been bussed or trucked in school groups from as far away as 95 km. While waiting for the biggest gift in their young lives, the children are offered a "meal", but that often is only a dry local bun.

At many sites, SCAW and Rotary members were ably assisted by eager, bright Indian youth representing Scouts, Guides, or NSS (National Social Service) volunteers. They move and stack bedkits, direct and guide the children through the day's events, and shepherd them back to their waiting parents or teachers, often carrying the bedkits on their shoulders for, in many instances, the bedkit is larger and heavier than the child.

Nothing tops the thrill of handing a bedkit or layette to the needy child or new mother. The joy and happiness is unequalled for both the giver and the recipient. But it is also very special and exciting to see that new bedkit leave the distribution site by bicycle, pedal rickshaw, or in one of India's famous three-wheeled scooters (often eight children or three new mothers per scooter— after a hotly contested fare negotiation, getting the final price down to 25 Rupees). Children from greater distances return to meet their travelling groups, reboard their trucks or buses, and leave waving and singing with the bedkits piled to the ceiling or roped and

trussed high on the roofs.

There is a sad feeling when day is done, in returning a distribution site to how we found it in the morning, but a little piece of each team member remains in the air. Heart breaking also are those children and families who have not been selected for a bedkit or layette, but who remain for hours in the slim hopes there will be just one extra left over for them.

I wish to share three memories to last a lifetime with you. First, to hold, however briefly, new life in my hands close to a new mother so very proud of her child, and so very thankful for SCAW's attempt to give her baby a head start. Secondly, to distribute bedkits to a class of deaf children whose energetic, guttural attempts at "Thanks!" tore at my heart. Third, the sight of about fifty children who returned with their bedkits to the hall in which they had earlier waited for hours. It is a prayer hall. All fifty were kneeling in prayer, giving thanks.

THANK YOU for your contribution to this Chennai, India trip

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