

SCAW



NEWSLETTER

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A charitable organization founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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CHENNAI, INDIA: Feb. 10-17, 2005: 3,500 Bedkits & 500 Layettes

BY SIEG WILL-DRYDEN
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO

The distribution of Layettes and Bedkits for Sleeping Children Around the World has just finished for Chennai, India. 500 babies and 3,500 children have received a gift of HOPE to assist them in getting a good night's sleep in a part of the world where the difference between HOPE and DESPAIR can be measured in seconds or inches.

During the distribution in this part of India, a part located approximately 90 kilometers north of the major tsunami devastation that hit on December 26, 2004, we were able to assist many needy children, some of whom had been impacted by this great tragedy. On the second day of distribution, at the Kilpauk school, I was introduced to a classroom of children that had travelled from a village, Pattikulam, that was hit by the tsunami. This group along with their teacher had travelled a great distance to receive a bedkit. The children looked like all the other children that were going to receive a bedkit; however, their story is different.

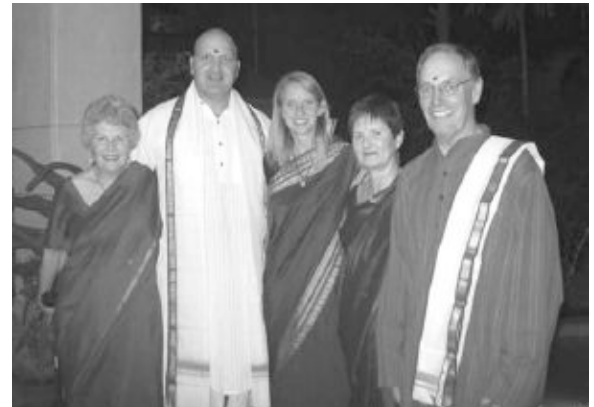
Their parents are trying to rebuild their lives after losing their homes, their possessions and their livelihoods. These children had already been identified as suitable candidates for a bedkit, they were attending school, they are between the ages of 6 and 12, and their family's income is between \$550 to \$650 Cdn. annually. Now, these children and their families will be starting over, and part of their new journey will include the bedkit that will enable them to get a good night's sleep. The children

were certainly excited to receive their bedkits; however how meaningful is it when one has lost everything?

In order to answer this question, we decided to visit a village that had been impacted by the tsunami – it is approximately 40 kilometers south of Chennai. New Kalpakkam is a fishing village with a fleet of 30 fishing boats. All 30 fishing boats, along with the nets, had been damaged by the ten foot tsunami waves; homes of families located too close to the water had been washed away, and concrete homes directly in the path of the killer waves had structural damage and were deemed unsafe for inhabiting. Temporary homes have been built approximately 300 metres inland from the original homes, a short term solution as the Indian government coordinates efforts to rebuild in a safer area.

Despite the devastation and the loss, the people, and especially the children, seemed to be overcoming these tragic circumstances. The children were more than willing to show us what damage the waves had caused to the boats, nets and homes, and were able to do this with smiles on their faces. The possessions of their families may have been washed away, however they are able to continue on with their lives. Playing with sticks and tires, and studying to continue their education, are a few of the things that I was able to see, and be advised of, during our brief visit to this village. The children's optimism, not their self pity or doubt, was the feeling that overcame me as we drove away from this village.

Later on that evening, as we returned to Chennai, I asked myself the question, HOPE or DESPAIR - what message are we sending to the children to whom we are providing a bedkit? For the children that I had met at the school in Kilpauk, who had been affected by



L to R: 2005 Travelling Team - JoAnn Moyshey, Sieg & Debbie Will-Dryden, Andrea Tynan & Tom Chudleigh

the December 26 tsunami, I know the bedkit is a start of a new life. These children will be able to share their gift of a good night's sleep with their entire family, as they work toward starting a new journey, a journey of HOPE that has been provided by your generous donations to Sleeping Children Around the World.

BY DEBBIE WILL-DRYDEN
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO

Watching the labels cycle through in front of my camera as I took the photos for the February 2005 Chennai distribution, I couldn't help but notice the names of all of the donors with whom I have a connection. I was thousands of miles from home and yet I had the names there in front of me reminding me of how connected we all are – of all the Canadians who were showing how they care for the kids of our global community through their donation to SCAW.

On the first day of our distribution, giving out layettes, the name of our friend's newborn baby came up on a label. The bedkit had been purchased in honour of baby Gavin's

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MURRAY'S DREAM 1,000,000 BEDKITS - TO DATE 751,850!

(Chennai by Debbie Will-Dryden, Oakville, Ontario, continued from page 1)

December birth, and as I saw the tiny two month old Chennai baby, I couldn't help but contrast how different the lives of these two children will be – babies on opposite sides of the world connected through SCAW.

Day two of the distribution brought with it labels from John Fraser Secondary School, the Mississauga High School at which I teach. My students had, amazingly, raised over \$10,000 through their charity week activities and had donated it all to Sleeping Children Around

the World. As the Chennai children stood in their new school uniforms which the SCAW bedkit had provided, holding the banner I had brought with me – the banner reading our school motto: "Realizing Our Vision"- I could clearly see how my students and the school's staff, in realizing their vision, were allowing others to realize theirs.

In addition, the bedkits for my children's elementary school were given out on this distribution. Their school suggested to parents that in lieu of "teacher gifts" at Christmas, the children are to do good deeds at home which their parents recognize with money. The child then brings the money to school and writes their good deed on a paper heart to hang from a "giving tree" in the school foyer. The pride and happiness with which the children hang their paper heart on the giving tree was entirely matched, if not exceeded, by the anticipation and delight on the children's faces in Chennai as they received their bedkits. I felt very privileged to see in such a tangible way the success of education and the impact of kids helping kids on a global scale.

From the first day through to the last I took photos for people who had donated to SCAW in memory of my grandfather, Murray Dryden. Many, many familiar names came up, emphasizing again the importance of, and the joy in, the SCAW team being where we were, doing our job. A comforting sense of community was created

by the fact that we were working with many of the same Rotarians who had initiated SCAW into Chennai 19 years ago, 42,000 bedkits ago; these were people who, like the donors, believe in the SCAW dream of providing a child with a gift which would cover some of their basic emotional, health, and educational needs, and which, most importantly, provides a child with hope.



So thanks to you, the many and varied donors! What an honour for me and the entire team to be able to witness first hand the happiness which you created

through your contribution to SCAW. We were a great team who not only ensured the successful distribution of 3,500 bedkits and 500 layettes, but we were also able to engage with the children so that they would know that you give your gift because you care about them and wish them all the best in life.

**BY JOANN MOYSEY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

When I was asked to go to Chennai with a team of four others, whom I'd never met, to distribute 3,500 bedkits and 500 layettes in six days, I was not only daunted by the challenge, but full of questions. How are the families chosen? What happens to the other children in a family who don't get a bedkit? Are the bedkits still in use, after say, four years? And the most important question, does it really do any good to give these gifts without teaching them how to improve their lives, i.e. following the old adage; "Don't give them a fish, teach them how to fish". Thank goodness one SCAW member, who is an old hand at distributions, had said to me: "You just have to go for the experience and then you'll understand." She was so right.

This is what I now understand.

The Ambattur Rotarians (our very supportive partners in this project), carefully select a child from the very poorest of families (average income 2,400 Rupees a year), who are aged 6-12, registered in school, and have no more than one sibling. The infants are chosen because of poverty (single parents and grandmothers looking after a child are given preference), and the families must be willing to be educated in family planning, and are connected with a health care worker who watches over the baby's development. Already I'm seeing that these gifts are coming with an educational component.

I also learn that the bedkits have items that are to benefit the entire family: for example, the mosquito net, clothes line, plastic bucket, plastic mug, plastic soap box and soap. The other items are apparently also shared, especially the *jammakkalam* (a heavy woven

bed mat), the quilt, the bed sheet, a pillow, two pillow cases, two towels, and an umbrella. The child gets the benefit of his/her uniform, the school bag, writing pad, geometry box, box of pencils (which again might be shared by an older sibling), and a lunch box. And there is an extra T-shirt for someone.



The infant layette is totally for the baby, but includes many items

which could be recycled for another child, and because many of these are probably unfamiliar to the mother, involves an educational component as well. For example, instead of putting the baby on the floor, she is given a cradle set which is like a small hammock. She also gets a plastic bath tub, soap and a soap box, mosquito netting, four outfits, a sweater set, cotton quilt and pillow, two bed sheets, a flannel sheet, a rubber sheet, four napkins, (important as they are used as diapers, which many mothers have never, ever used.) The other bedkit items included are: a plate, bowl, tumbler, vacuum flask to keep liquid hot or cold, a bottle brush, juice sipper, teether and rattle set, soft toy, plastic mug and two bottles of vitamin drops which the mother would be encouraged to use by the healthcare worker.

The families who receive the bedkits come full of anticipation and they are often frightened because many have never seen Caucasians, a camera or, many of the items in the bedkits. The children know it is a big deal because they have on their new school uniforms (which had been given to them two weeks earlier, but must be worn this day) and many have jasmine woven in their hair and special jewelry saved for celebrations. They are mostly barefoot as are many of the mothers, and one can see in their big brown eyes that they are very happy, but still very anxious.



As the mothers line up with their infants, waiting to be photographed, we are amazed that there is very little crying. They watch on the sidelines with pride as we place each infant in a car seat to be photographed. Many of the infants have *kajal* (lamp black) around their eyes, and a black spot on their forehead and the bottom of one foot, a superstitious belief to ward off the “evil eye”, that unfortunately, sometimes actually causes skin and eye diseases especially in babies. Some of the babies are tiny, the youngest is only a week old, and sadly we see a few who are malnourished and dehydrated. The mothers are young themselves and as we hand the babies back to them, we feel optimistic that they will learn to use the items to improve the health of their babies, by talking among themselves and with the help of the health care worker. Just by waiting in line with so many others, they have the opportunity to learn from each other and, for instance, we see that some of the mothers have put cloth diapers on their babies for the occasion.

The children are either smiling and chatty, or frightened and unable to look us in the eye. Sadly, we see some with glassy eyes who are too thin and extremely deprived. Since they often have to wait for several hours to have their picture taken and get their bedkits, our challenge is to try to make them as comfortable as possible, and to make this occasion fun. I found that my pussy cat puppet was a great source of curiosity and, unfortunately sometimes, fear, as some thought it was real. Once I got a few to shake its paw, the others followed. As time passed, they started to repeat my words in a joyful chorus and imitate my movements as I said “jump”, “clap”, “hi”, “bye” and “dance.” At one point I said, “Oh you’re

good!” and stuck my thumbs up in the air and they repeated the words and action with shouts of glee and giggles. It was then that I realized that this is what it’s all about.

The children are experiencing something new and different and seeing that there are people from a far away land who care about them and think that they are special. Most important, 4,000 children are now going to sleep better because of these bedkits.

The last questions were answered as we visited three families who have received bedkits in the past. The homes were small... roughly the size of one of our plush master bathrooms, with a small cooking area and the rest used for sleeping and living. Two of the three had small hot-plates, but the third did their cooking inside on an open fire. The homes were immaculate with all the pots and pans in place, and each one had all the items from the old bedkits proudly displayed. They are being used and they are lasting well.

As we walked from home to home we were greeted warmly and offered tea. The children were scampering around us obviously happy to see us.

So, does a bedkit make a difference? Yes! These people are getting a gift which is practical, educational and has the added benefit that they know we (donors) care about them. Not only are we teaching them how to improve their lives, but we are demonstrating that, in the larger scheme of life, they are very important to us.

On a final note, I would like to assure all donors that the money you gave is being put to good use on many different levels. To future volunteers, all I can say is: “you just have to go for the experience, and then you’ll understand!”

BY ANDREA TYNAN BURLINGTON, ONTARIO

Chennai 2005—What is the role of the SCAW Volunteer? This was the question to which I hoped to find an answer. As it was my first experience in India, I felt that a door had been opened for me to not only find my answer, but to

provide me with an exceptional opportunity and experience.

We were five individuals who had previously only met briefly, but Debbie and Sieg proved to be excellent, meticulous team leaders, confident and knowledgeable about what was required in order to fulfill the promise to making sure that every donor dollar—all \$30, went into the bedkit and that each and every recipient child received his/her bedkit.

SCAW maintains a close working relationship with the Rotary Club of Ambattur in Chennai. This club is responsible for assembling the bedkits. They recognize the needs and respect the culture of the recipients. The bedkit consisted of many items which had been made as products of a cottage industry, thus encouraging an emerging economy. The effort of the Rotarians is overwhelming and cannot be appreciated too much. They work through the schools and social workers to identify the recipients using very strict criteria. It includes that the family income must be below 2,000 rupees per month (\$60); the child must be in Grade 1 or 2; only one child per family is allowed to receive a bedkit, and single child families do not qualify.

I spoke at length with the Rotarians and with teachers, and their overall message was that, as stated by the Rotarian in the town of Vellore, we [SCAW] were there to help them help their own people. At one of the schools there was an old, water stained poster which showed a child running through a field of flowers – it’s caption stated “all our tomorrows depend on your love”. While I’m not sure we could pretend to assume such an awesome responsibility, I sincerely do believe that 4,000 children in Chennai and Vellore are now better off because of your (donor) \$30 love. One teacher told me

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(Chennai by Tom Chudleigh, Milton, Ontario, continued from page 3)

that, in her experience, the children who had previously received bedkits did, in fact, do better scholastically. If pride and self worth counts for increasing one's ability to improve in school, then certainly that teacher's experience would again prove true.

Our faith that this would be true was realized as we witnessed the beautiful faces, bursting with smiles and beautiful dark [black] eyes shining brightly, as the children proudly came forward dressed in their new school uniforms to receive their bedkits. What a new beginning for them; they also received a new uniform, plus school supplies, and thus will have many good nights of sleep. All these things add to their feeling good about themselves, and will go a long way to motivating them to work at improving their lifestyle conditions.

We visited the homes of three previous bedkit recipients, certainly the poorest of the poor. They lived in overwhelming poverty, yet I never did witness squalor. I felt these women had immense pride, as was evident in the neatness of their meager homes, and in the fact that they were willing to show us [strangers] into their homes.

Now I think I know the answer – our role as volunteers to India taught me to appreciate the lives and culture of these people. We had to ensure that as ambassadors for SCAW, we got to represent you, the donors, appropriately. We also ensured that the bedkits, all \$30 value in them, did in fact go to the individual recipients. And we learned that this is a win, win situation. Many children and their families gained by receiving the bedkits, but also many others benefitted by the cottage industries used to produce the bedkit contents. The Rotary Club of Ambattur in Chennai is to

be congratulated for doing such a fine job all around. As well, their gracious hospitality to us is greatly appreciated.

It was a great experience for me to be part of the process of putting smiles on the faces of 4,000 little ones and their families, and I'm thankful to have been a part of this distribution!

BY TOM CHUDLEIGH MILTON, ONTARIO

Thanks to all you contributors to a very worthwhile project. It provided me with the opportunity to help on the distribution, and also gave me the "feel good" feeling with which I'm sure every overseas volunteer comes home.

This was my second consecutive year in Chennai. I got to fill in and go as a replacement for a volunteer who had a serious back problem. This time I had the opportunity to see India and SCAW efforts at a different and progressive level.

First, the area of Chennai had a vibrant, new, and exciting feeling everywhere we went, compared to last year. The public works (infrastructure) was encouraging, in that so many newly paved roads replaced hard-pack and dirt roads. The most improvements were obvious in the sewage systems. This year we saw no open sewers with planks across them for pedestrians, and there were now pipes below ground, although not all were covered. Yet, all sewage was now contained. The street cleaning was also a big improvement. People were paid to pick up large bags of paper for recycling. Many store owners were seen sweeping their store fronts during the day.

All of this seems to represent the new industrial India, with fresh money in government treasuries being used to improve the country.

This all impacts SCAW in an exciting way. Previously, I felt we were helping, but there were so many children: what was their future and where were the jobs? Now it appears, at least I felt, that a good night's sleep is even more important to face the next opportunistic day. They can now stay in school longer



and go on to exhibit the excitement of their teenage brothers and sisters who showed such eagerness for education and life in general.

The Indian Government is improving, and Sleeping Children Around the World's efforts, I feel, can see some light and real meaning in showing a child the confidence we have in him or her.

Thank you donors – now your donations are needed more than ever!

THANKS to the following for their contributions to this Chennai, India trip:

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Kay Kelly, Harry Keating, and Maurice Kowanetz for publishing this newsletter

Milton van der Veen for maintaining SCAW's web site

Donors and volunteers for their continuing support!

NEXT SCHEDULED DISTRIBUTION TRIPS

**April, 2005
PHILIPPINES - 5,000 BEDKITS**

**May/June, 2005
UGANDA - 5,000 BEDKITS**