

SCAW



NEWSLETTER

28 Pinehurst Crescent
Islington, Ontario, Canada M9A 3A5

Phone: (416) 231-1841

Fax: (416) 231-0120

E-mail: scaw@idirect.com

Web Address: www.scaw.org

A charitable organization founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

February, 2003

KOLKATA, INDIA: February 5 - 21, 2003: 4,000 Bedkits

BY TED SWANSTON
ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

This distribution was the fifth since 1999, by The Rotary Club of Dum Dum and Sleeping Children Around The World, to the children of Kolkata, India (formerly Calcutta). Thanks to you, our donors, and the partnership between Rotary and SCAW, 21,000 children in this part of India are now able to enjoy a safe and comfortable night's sleep. Rotary are to be congratulated for their decision to "cast the net wide" and select children this time from across the whole of West Bengal to receive bedkits. They came from as far away as two hundred and fifty kilometers.

This was my third trip to Kolkata, following visits in November 1999 and June 2001. Whereas the second trip felt to me like returning to see good friends, this third visit was more like coming home to see distant loved ones, such was the reception our SCAW team received from our brothers in India.

The children pre-selected to receive bedkits were all from poor families, and very needy.

Even though I have been to Kolkata before, one never gets used to the overwhelming poverty. We wish our donors could see the transformation in the children's appearance, from the meager and often tattered clothes in which they arrive, to the girls looking so beautiful in their colorful SCAW dresses, and the boys so proud and smart-looking in their shirts and shorts.

One group of children touched us deeply on this trip. They were the children whose mothers are poor "sex workers" or prostitutes, as we would refer to them. I was invited to interview a group of these sex

workers who are also involved in providing a wide range of support services to their colleagues. Services are provided through an organization founded by a University professor who is the son of a sex worker. The organization provides medical and other counselling, distributes condoms, and provides vocational training (e.g. silk screen printing training) to the women. The women explained that the mothers cared deeply for their children and spend as much time as possible with them. They explained, however, that the mothers are required to be available twenty-four hours a day, so unfortunately they are often away from their children. We were told that the children, prior to receiving a SCAW bedkit, would have slept on the floor or, at best, a mat. I asked which items in the bedkit the women most liked. They said that everything was wonderful; and one lady mentioned that what she called "winter garments" are particularly appreciated to protect the children from the cold—Kolkata temperatures fall to seven or eight degrees centigrade in winter. One can only imagine what this would be like for a child with only scant clothing, trying to sleep on the floor.

Our SCAW team also had the opportunity to visit the homes and interview parents of children who received bedkits in prior years. Kay Mountford talks in her article about the emotional visits we had with several villagers whose children had previously been given bedkits. I won't say much about this except for one aspect. I was in Kolkata in 1999 and 2001, so I was able to recognize the mattresses, mosquito netting, clothing and other items given out on those prior distributions. I can assure our donors that your money is being well spent, since these bedkit items are clearly of good quality and are still being used and worn every day!

Each SCAW distribution leaves me with

many beautiful lasting memories that, even years later, remain "close to the surface" and can be triggered, and returned vividly to mind, as if they just happened. I'd like to share one such image with you from this trip. We had just finished the day's distribution. There is always work to do to clear up the site, but this day I had the urge to see, and say goodbye to the children who might still be there. It had started to rain gently, and when I went through the gate that enclosed our distribution area, and walked down the lane to the highway with my Rotary friend, Tapas, it seemed like all the children had left. Then we noticed a bus some way down the road. We walked to the bus, and to our joy, it was filled with the final group of children who had received bedkits that day. One of the teachers told us the children had come from a remote village over two hundred kilometers away. The children awoke that day at 6:00 a.m. or even earlier, because the teacher said everyone met at an agreed point to get the bus. They travelled for four hours over rough and winding roads to get to our distribution site. And now, they were all going home, facing another four hour trip or longer, each one with their new bedkit. Each child on that bus had a smile I will never forget. They all waved to Tapas and me, and we cried, as the bus departed and they started off on the long journey home. I will never forget the children's smiles, or the looks in the eyes of the teachers who thanked us, and the warmth of their embraces and handshakes.

I would like to close by thanking our team, Roberta, Don, Kay and Duncan for all their work, support and fellowship throughout the trip. And finally, I would like to thank all of you, our donors, for continuing to make the dream and vision of Murray and Margaret Dryden a reality, and allowing 4,000 bedkits to give hope and make a difference in each of these children's lives. Thank you!

SCAW • 32 YEARS • 1970-2002 • 657,600 BEDKITS TO-DATE

BY DON HARRIS
SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO**The Setting**

Kolkata, formerly called Calcutta, is a city of amazing sensory impressions. Traffic swirls and moves in sometimes terrifying patterns, and handsome modern buildings are side by side with palm frond shacks. Everywhere people are living on the edge.

The distribution sites were Sudhir Memorial Institute, a private school of twelve hundred students owned and operated by Dr. and Mrs. Bhattacharya, a Rotarian, and secondly, St. Mary's Convent.

The school and Convent sites were ideal with high fences around the yards for crowd control and security for the bedkits in the school. An addition, now under construction at the school, provided shade for the children and teachers and several excellent photo sites as well.

The bedkits assembled by the Rotarians showed great thrift in using local cottage industries, attention to quality control, and artistry in the beautiful colours selected. The bedkits (4,000 x 22 items) meant that 88,000 items had to be procured, packed and stored in strong plastic bags, by a committee of four persons. The components included a mosquito net, cotton towel, colourful mattress, bedsheet, blanket, pillow and case, two dresses and underpants for girls and two shirts and shorts for boys, windbreaker, sandals, top quality school bag, nylon ground mat, lunch box, water bottle and school supplies. Arranging and providing these bedkits is an amazing achievement, for \$30 Canadian.

Distribution days become exciting, nail-biting days for the recipients—long anticipated since November or December, when a child would have received his/her registration card, indicating that school authorities or other agencies had selected them to receive a bedkit.

Buses, often starting in dark early hours from outlying regions, make their way to the distribution site, bringing children closer to the first “new” things they will ever own.

Some teachers and parents accompany the nervous children.

The children check in at the registration desk, then with the help of Rotarian wives, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, they go to boy and girl change rooms to put on the new clothes from their bedkits. Squeals of delight and excitement are heard as children see the transformation. For the girls it is like a Cinderella experience! Moving on to a waiting room with chairs and a drinking fountain, they enjoy a magic show, complete with sword swallowing, provided by the Rotarians. They respond with polite applause.

The photo taking increases their tension, as many have never before had their photos taken. A serious look seems to them to be appropriate. The Canadian volunteers work hard to make them comfortable and hopefully to elicit smiles. Finally, the child receives his/her bedkit from one of the SCAW team members along with a handshake, smile, greeting and hug. Rotary provides a very nice bag lunch to begin their journey home with their greatest wealth ever owned, their bedkit.



During brief breaks in the hot six hour sessions, the SCAW team greatly treasured the opportunity to meet and shake the hands of teachers and waiting parents. Teachers that spoke English, used phrases like...“noble idea, generous, wonderful project, thank you Canada!” The parents, who usually spoke little English, crowded around the SCAW team members, eager to shake the hands of these Canadian foreigners, who had come from the far side of the world to give their family such a great gift. Within seconds, total strangers were sometimes crying, hugging and blowing kisses. The children, who had received bedkits, were now relaxed and were absolutely beside themselves with joy as they ran forward to greet the representatives of their benefactors.

If you could see the happiness and helpfulness your donation brought to these families, you would agree that it was the best \$30 that you spent this year.

BY ROBERTA HARRIS
SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO

As I was preparing to hand the heavy bedkit to a handsome, but serious young boy, something happened that took me completely by surprise. He suddenly bent down, reached out his fingers and touched my feet, then touched his forehead, and put his hands together in a prayer like gesture, then brought them to his face. My heart was touched as his beautiful brown eyes looked into mine and he whispered “Thank you, thank you”. I had just received his blessing, and I became profoundly aware of the love of the sponsors, and the sacrifice of the many volunteers, that made it possible for him to receive that treasured bedkit. It was an emotional experience and one of many that I would feel over the two weeks of our distribution.

From the moment the SCAW team was greeted by our wonderful, enthusiastic Rotarian hosts, to the time when we sadly waved goodbye to them, we were treated to so many wonderful experiences, and felt such love and caring from them and their wives. They gave us great memories that we will never forget. All of their involvement in getting the children ready for our part was so appreciated.

The SCAW team had the pleasure of greeting the girls and boys who looked so lovely in their new outfits. We tried to put them at ease as we smoothed out their clothes and fussed over them as they were prepared for their photos in front of the bedkits. With the help of Duncan and his kazoo, two hand puppets and some fun loving Rotarians, we were able to get many of the children to smile. Often, they were quite overwhelmed by the whole experience and tried to hold back on their smiles, as they thought they should be serious.

The last nine girls on the last day of the distribution seemed to sum up the experience for me. Kay and I had the opportunity to go to the change room with them as some of the volunteers had gone elsewhere. Quietly the girls arrived in the shabbiest of clothes, but as we helped them into their new dresses and smoothed their unkempt hair, a transformation occurred. Excitement grew in the room as they saw themselves and each other looking so beautiful. The air seemed charged with electricity as they began to

laugh and squeal as they jumped up and down with joy. Suddenly, I felt thin arms wrap around me and squeeze me. I looked down into a dark head pressed against me. When she looked up at me, she said with much enthusiasm and genuine appreciation, "Thank you Auntie, thank you...I love you, I love you." As tears welled up in my eyes and I became choked up, I gently gave her a squeeze and was able to whisper, "I love you too darling". Then she grabbed my hand and out we went, arms swinging, to the area where she would get her photo taken with the other excited girls. In a short time, she received her bedkit, and as she and the others walked beside the rickshaw carrying the nine bedkits, she turned once more to me. Eagerly she waved, and with the big smile still on her face, blew me a kiss. As I waved and blew a kiss back to her I thought, "Your life has really been changed, and dear little one, so has mine."

**BY DUNCAN
MACGREGOR
ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO**

Being one of four "Rookies" on a five person SCAW Overseas Travelling Team, meant that most of us were seeing and experiencing things in a SCAW bedkit distribution for the first time. This column is about the unsung heroes of our distribution of 4,000 bedkits in Kolkata—the members of the Rotary Club of Dum Dum and their wives (our partners in this distribution).

Each bedkit that was given to a child in Kolkata included 22 items and weighed 20 kg. Just think of the time involved to purchase 88,000 items from various manufacturers in the Kolkata area, and then to pack the 22 items individually in heavy plastic bags, ready for storage and eventual distribution to the children. Add to that, the time required to have a quality check on each manufacturer, to ensure that all the items supplied are of the quality specified in the original purchase order from the Rotary Club. Also, when you consider that some of the items in the bedkit are actually sewn and supplied by village people (very poor people), you can begin to see the enormous task that the members of the Rotary Club

undertake when they help SCAW do a distribution in their area.

The February, 2003, distribution in Kolkata is the fifth distribution with the Rotary Club of Dum Dum as the SCAW partners (Dum Dum is close to the Kolkata airport), and they are proud of the fact that they have been involved with SCAW in the giving of a total of 21,000 bedkits since 1999.

But that's only part of what they do! How



Kolkata Travelling Team - 2003
LtoR - Don Harris, Roberta Harris, Ted Swanston, Kay Mountford, Duncan Macgregor & Mr. Garg, Rotary Club of Dum Dum, with photographer's two children.

are the recipients of the bedkits chosen? Enter the Rotarians once again! They took on the responsibility of selecting 4,000 children through talking with schools and orphanages. They needed to ensure that another member of the same family had not previously received a bedkit, and that each child (6-12 years of age) was in school receiving an education (according to SCAW guidelines). This is no easy task, given that the need of the poor in Kolkata is so great. Even as the distribution wound down, a few children were not able to take part, due to illness or some other circumstances, and the Rotarians had to contact substitute children to have them be part of the distribution (remember, phones are not part of a poor home, so contacting families is no easy task).

Then, on the days of distribution, the Rotarians are responsible for having a secure distribution site where the bedkits can be distributed and pictures taken in a hassle free environment. Of course, the bedkits needed to be delivered to the sites ready for distribution. Even on the big day itself, some clothes or shoes may not fit, and the Rotarians are there to look after

these problems. They arranged for Boy and Girl Scouts and their leaders to help the children get dressed in their new clothes so that their pictures could be taken in front of the bedkits. The Scouts did a great job of helping the children, showing them where to go and what to do. In addition, the Rotarians hired a magician to keep the kids entertained while they were waiting to have their pictures taken, they provided breakfast and lunch to each recipient, and provided bus transportation at no cost to the children and parents who came from as far away as 200 km (remember, the roads are nothing like we have in North America). Also, if that was not enough, the Rotarians took our SCAW team under their wing—supplying us with transportation, food, bottled liquids, and adequate accommodation during our stay.

I started this article by making reference to the unsung heroes of our distribution—the members of the Rotary Club of Dum Dum and their wives. These people did all of the above and much more. The

Rotarians were as warm and as hospitable a group of people as any that I have met in my travels. They took us into their homes and into their hearts. They cared as much about the children as our SCAW team did, and it was wonderful to see them interact with the children wherever we were. Their motto in Dum Dum is "We Love and Care for Children", and there is no doubt that they live that motto! For a SCAW Rookie, I take my hat off to my new heroes—the Rotarians of Dum Dum, and their wives! May God Bless them in their ongoing work with SCAW!

**BY KAY MOUNTFORD
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO**

Six years ago, a dear friend, Gail Duncan, made a SCAW presentation at our church of her experiences on a SCAW distribution in the Philippines. I was deeply moved by Gail, and inspired by the SCAW organization. The seed had been planted! I have been a fundraiser ever since, and finally it was to be my time to become a SCAW Overseas

(continued on page 4)

(Kolkata, by Kay Mountford, Mississauga, Ontario, continued from page 3)

Travelling Volunteer. What a privilege!

Blessed from the very beginning of our trip, we were accompanied on our British Airways flight by a group of the Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity. Representatives worldwide were gathering for a convention at the Motherhouse. We were able to share our missions with each other.

Thanks to the kindness of the Dum Dum Rotary Club members, we were able to visit the Mother Theresa Motherhouse, which is situated in the poorest slums of Kolkata.

Two of my most vivid memories include, a sea of cribs in the orphanage in a very large room, with one, two, three or four children occupying each crib. All were very clean, but they had big sad eyes, just longing for love.

The other poignant memory was of a group of about 25 toddlers all seated on red plastic "potties" after their dinner, just having a grand ole time. What a refuge for orphans.

SCAW is also making a difference in Kolkata, India, for children who do have parents or guardians. The Rotary Club does an exceptional job of locating the most needy children in this city, as well as its surroundings. They are selected from schools, social services, sex workers' organizations, orphanages, as well as from deaf and mute organizations.

We visited some beneficiaries of bedkits of years gone by, and we witnessed the very deep gratitude from the families for these precious bedkits—each one now considered a cherished gift.

One mother, so tiny and frail, was so moved that we would travel so far to visit her home, met us at the end of a flimsy bamboo bridge (that we crossed over a marsh), weeping with sobs of joy. Her husband had met with a construction accident years ago and suffered from gangrene in his feet. He is no longer able to work. The mother tried to make ends meet by making quilts on her sewing machine (manual, with a bicycle wheel). Her daughter had received a bedkit last year. Four of us, barely able to stand in her home, realized there was room for no more. Even so, she offered us all tea and refreshments.

We can assure you that the right people are receiving the bedkits. The bedkit for Kolkata included a heavy mattress, pillow and pillow case, bed sheet, heavy blanket, mosquito net, 2 dresses and 2 pair of panties/or 2 shirts and 2 shorts, nylon ground mat, windbreaker, shoes, towel, napkin, school bag, water bottle, 2 school books, 1 pen, a ruler and a small lunch box called a *tiffin*.

Kolkata is truly "the Black Hole"—with poverty as I could never have imagined it. Yet, despite everything, there is love and generosity. With organizations such as SCAW, there is also hope. We will help each family one at a time.

Thank you, donors, for your financial support. This has been the single most important contribution to humanity that I have ever made. Thank you, SCAW!

**DONOR LETTER DATED
DECEMBER 8, 2002**

Please accept this donation to your organization in memory of our son, Jonathan Rizzo. Jonathan believed in the goodness of others and that kindness towards others was the only way to make this world a better place. Sadly, he died trying to help someone who had evil intentions. During his time at Boston College High School and at George Washington University, he was involved in many charitable organizations and efforts, but none gave him more pleasure than helping children. He worked at Project Headstart



and Christmas in the City, two programs for underprivileged children in the Boston area. We know that he would be pleased for us to make this donation so that you may continue your good work with children across the world. He always thought that he was fortunate to have what he did and felt every child was entitled to a good night's sleep.

Thank you for doing what you do and if there are opportunities for us to help you in the future, especially with the distribution of your bedkits, please let us know. Wishing you peace in this holiday season.

(Signed) Michael and Mary Rizzo
Jonathan Rizzo Memorial Foundation
Kingston, Mass. USA

**Happiness is a decision we make
about the journey we call life; it's
not a destination.**

**THANK YOU
for your
contribution to this
Kolkata, India trip**

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Donors and Volunteers!

**NEXT SCHEDULED
DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

**MAY, 2003 - PHILIPPINES
5,000 BEDKITS
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