



Education IS OUR PRIORITY

In 2000 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the "Millennium Goals" (MG's) as a response to the plight of many of the developing countries in the World. The MG's target poverty, primary education, women equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, environment and global partnership for development. In the past seven years there has been a quantifiable impact in these areas but not in all countries equally.



Tsunami children in our school

The Lasallian Foundation has as its main focus the Rights of Children and their entitlement to a home, food, health, peace, education, and safety from exploitation, a knowledge that they are cared for and about. They need the ability to set goals for themselves and have the opportunity to achieve them. But sadly poverty, over population, poor economic management, natural disasters, disease, corruption and civil war obstruct many from achieving their entitlement.

The Lasallian Foundation deliberately chooses to partner NGO's in PNG, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan that work with children and primarily through the provision of education, both formal and informal. This is consistent with the stated aims of the Australian Government in its overseas aid program. The

make up of the Foundation Board with the competencies and experience of its Directors is certainly skewed to meeting the challenge of fighting for children's rights and for provision of education as a major platform for its determinations. Education is the common thread that weaves through all the MG's goals and makes them achievable over time.

In 2007 the Foundation has provided classrooms, equipped workshops, provided pre schooling in slum areas, supplied transport for access for children in the remotest areas, supported teacher training and technical training and helped establish additional self help groups for women in villages in India.

PNG will be given special priority in 2008 as it is one of the poorest performing countries in the world. Its primary education completion rate is just over fifty percent, only marginally better than in 1990. For girls the completion rate is around forty percent. This failure to educate the population is reflected in the economy, law and order, corruption, standard of housing, nutrition and prevalence of disease with malaria HIV/Aids the two main killers.

This will be our challenge to support our partner NGO's in this our closest neighbour.

"the common thread was extreme poverty where the family needed their paltry wage to survive"

Working Children

MAKING A DIFFERENCE – by Brother Paul Smith CEO

"The worst sin towards these children on the streets is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that is the essence of inhumanity"

This was the conclusion to a letter written to me by Brother Sebastian, the Director of St Josephs Development Fund (SJDT) in Madurai India. He told of his meeting with the street kids and working children of the town of Dindigul.

"Most of them burst into tears as they shared their experiences. They showed me scars of the caning, beatings and even from where they had been branded to indicate ownership by some employee. Palms of the hands were like rock and one had fingers cut off and another a hand. These children ranged from the age of 5 to 14 years. A tender age where they needed care and support, a time to play and sleep and enjoy their childhood. Not so for these. They were victims of exploitation and even torture. For them school was not possible. Some were domestic workers who spent 14 hours a day in labour being cursed, beaten and asked to do tasks well beyond their strength and endurance. Others found work in the street selling drugs, begging, serving as pimps, stealing and cheating. Others worked in the factories and one owner businesses. They could be found in leather industries, brick kilns, white washing, goat abattoirs and hazardous industries where they were exposed to glue and other toxic additives. Matchstick and noodle factories were big employers of children".

Every child had a different story but the common thread was extreme poverty where the family needed their paltry wage to survive. Family dysfunction saw drunken abusive fathers, separated parents, deserted or widowed mothers, adult unemployment, the effects of Aids robbing the family of its wage earner. Some children had to stay at home to look after their siblings whilst their mother sought work.

For many school was too expensive as there was not enough money to feed the family let alone pay school fees, text books and uniform. As well the teachers are poorly trained, poorly paid and treat the children with disdain. It was not unusual for 40% of the staff in rural villages to be absent on any one day. Physical punishment was harsh and used frequently and it was often the poorest that were discriminated against.

The challenge presented to the Lasallian Foundation was daunting. There was a need to respect the economic circumstances that saw the children having to work but there was an opportunity to work with the program at Dindigul to set up a scheme that would allow for an income to be earned but also offer a chance to tackle the illiteracy, the lack of skill training and the need to respect the developmental stages of the children and create a safe place for play, singing and dancing and just being kids.

The staff at SJDT worked the streets to meet with the children, gain their confidence and assess their needs. Once assessed there was a many pronged path the child could take. For some a centre was being used for Sunday gatherings to allow for games, counselling, cultural pursuits, meals and some tuition. A further initiative was the setting up of a school that had an industrial and vocational focus, La Salle Industrial School.

This offered classes to the working children at times that suited their schedules and gave them a chance to learn trade skills that could see them rise above the cycle of hopelessness into which they seemingly were trapped. We were pleased to be able to assist with the establishment of the vocational school as it touched on many of the principles underpinning the Foundation: to improve literacy,

offer vocational training, respect gender equality and strive to empower, to give a hand up not just a hand out.

The partners we work with in Dindigul have developed great rapport with the children and with some employers. We are assured the children targeted are those with greatest need and are properly assessed. We know that their families are engaged wherever possible and every effort is made to get the children to some education, even if it is only the tuition classes.

This year we have funded the establishment of computer training for both formal and informal learning. The adults in the surrounding community can also access the computers for their own advancement. The computers are a special bonus to the girls for whom far greater opportunities will present once



Computer training in Dinigul, India

Right: Street kid in Madurai, India



they have this training. This grant has paid for the computers to provide training each year to 40 extra disadvantaged youth, as well as complementary skills training to 80 other students in trade courses.(Due to generosity of three of our donors)

In 2006 we provided the equipment for the electrical and motor mechanics workshops. These were opened in December. It allows for 40 more students in each trade to be trained, undergo work experience and be in a much better position to gain employment. This is primarily for the boys but the girls are not excluded. This has meant boys can move into factory work already having the knowledge and skills to be competitive in the market place. It is expected that over the next few years they will be sought out as the training is recognised as of a high quality. So LaSalle Industrial School Dindigul is a partnership where we have made a valuable intervention in the lives of the marginalised and those needing greatest help.

Our next challenge is to assist with the additional programs that rise from our involvement in this town.

A) The establishment of a community based development program of self help groups targeting girls and women in 20 of the surrounding villages. It will assist in the setting up of small self help groups conducting small stalls, pickle making, crafts, goat and cow raising. From these villages and groups some 80 extra will have access to the industrial schools program. Cost A\$21,354

B) The construction of extra workshops to provide training in Fitter, Wireman and information technology. This will mean an extra 60 youth can be trained. Cost: A\$121,202

C) Establishment of study projects for 300 school drop outs and street children in 10 remote villages around Dindigul. It will target 210 drop-outs and 90 street children over a three year period. (Aged between 6-14 years). Teachers will be appointed to each village as animators and undergo further training in child psychology, child centred learning and joyful learning. It is hoped to reengage many of these drop-outs with the formal education system over time. Cost: A\$20,520 over three years.

Whilst this is a social and economic problem that will take many years to overcome the Lasallian Foundation will keep assisting in the Dindigul program development and take great satisfaction in knowing it is conducted with great professionalism and accountability.

Welcome to our New Project Manager

WHAT A WELCOME TO THE LASALLIAN FOUNDATION! – by Miranda Chow

In my first two weeks as Project Manager, I met with our Board, implemented new accounting and travel management risk software, furnished our new Melbourne office and then visited some of our existing and potential new projects in Papua New Guinea!

Papua New Guinea was an eye opener as we arrived during the Federal election. The security alert was high due to tribal tensions that are more intense than usual during the vote counting period. People literally stop working to wait to see if their candidate wins. Sometimes they don't work for weeks!

We met people and heard stories of school children getting up at midnight to walk to

school because they couldn't afford the 40 cents for the bus; children who may not eat for two or three days as their families can't afford food; children who start school but then must drop out because their families can no longer afford their school fees; and people too afraid to walk to a neighbouring village because of fear of being mugged or attacked.

But despite the poverty and hardship, the locals always have a smile for you. And it was great to see firsthand that the Foundation's support is really making a difference. You have to admire the courage and perseverance of the teachers, program managers, and administrators who are working to make life better for these children. They are an inspiration!



