

# Enable

(Working in India)

NEWS UPDATE No 17 SUMMER 2005

Registered Charity No 1053560

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*10-year old Nagoor Sheda*

## **TEN YEARS OF *ENABLE***

### **Dear Friends,**

At certain milestones, such as a 10-year anniversary, it is right to pause and reflect on what has passed—and then move on to what lies ahead. For those of us working for *Enable* the past 10 years have been a privilege, but also a responsibility. We have had a responsibility for a constantly increasing number of disabled children. And also a responsibility to use wisely and well the funds that have been entrusted to us. The responsibility has also been a privilege.

In the centre pages, *Enable's* Chair, Alison Davis, describes how the charity was set up and has developed over the past 10 years. The purpose of this is not to pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. Rather, it is to

remind us of what has been achieved, so that we can look ahead with confidence to developing our work in the coming years. So much has yet to be achieved!

### **10-year old Nagoor Sheda**

The front page of our Updates normally has a photo of an individual child. This reflects the importance we attach to each individual that we support. Each child is infinitely precious, with an innate dignity. It seemed fitting to feature 10-year old Nagoor Sheda in this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Update. He is one of our "outreach programme" children, and for the past two years we have supported him in his home village. He and *Enable* have "grown up" together; he also symbolizes *Enable's* future.

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# Celebrating 10 years of Enable

- by Alison Davis

In August 1995, Colin Harte and I visited a small project for disabled children in Kanigiri, Andhra Pradesh state, South India. We had no idea then that those children—and many more to follow—were to make such an impact on our lives. In 1995 there were only 50 children, living in a Centre that had been built for 35, and although they were getting good care, Fr Gali Arulraj, the project's Director, told us he did not have sufficient funds to carry on much longer. We knew we had to do something, and although we had no idea how to go about it, we decided to set up a charity to help continue Fr Arulraj's work with the children.

## Developing slowly but surely

When it started, our charity's name was *The Friends of the Kanigiri Disabled Children's Centre*. It was an apt description of our work, but hardly a snappy title! We began a programme of individual child sponsorship and gradually funds started to come in. The number of children we were helping rose from 50 to 85 by 1998, the year we made our third visit to the project, and as funding became available, we were able to help more children.

Our aim was to provide disabled children with the chance of going to school—often for the first time. We also provided medical care including surgery for those who could benefit, good nutritious food and new clothes for each child. In 1998, we began to realise that some of the children's parents were withdrawing their girls, because it was felt to be culturally inappropriate for older girls and boys to live together. As a result of this we began fund-raising to build a second Centre, just for girls, with the boys remaining at Kanigiri.

## A new centre for girls

When we first heard that £80,000 would be needed to construct the new girls' Centre it seemed an impossible target. However, our supporters rose to the challenge magnificently, and in January 2001, the new Centre was officially opened in Ongole, a large town about



*Alison and Colin with Aruna (left) and Vara Lakshmi. After 10 years' support they are now at university*

50 miles away from Kanigiri. We had a grand concert of songs, dances and dramas put on by the children and, as always, it was the dances performed sitting down by the children who are unable to stand or walk which touched my heart the most. There was such a sense of pride in their faces at being able to take part, and I was hugely proud of them all.

## Starting the Outreach Programme

In 2002, the charity's name was changed to *Enable (Working in India)*—a much more manageable name! It became very obvious to us that we would never be able to house all the disabled children who needed our help. Almost daily, parents would come to Fr Arulraj seeking admission for their disabled children, and there simply wasn't room for everyone. From this realisation was born the Outreach Programme, in which disabled children are supported by *Enable* while living in their home villages. We now have over 150 children supported in this way, and the programme means that we are able to reach out and

support many more children than our Centres can accommodate.

### **The project for blind children**

Also in 2002, recognising a great need, we began a project for blind and partially sighted children—a group who had never previously had any education at all. In January 2003, we were able to meet the blind children for the first time, and they impressed us so much with their eagerness to learn, and with their amazing achievements. In only a few months many of them were already able to read in Braille—in both Telugu (the local language) and English. We discovered that all of them loved singing, and one boy, Yesudas, who had an amazingly beautiful voice, was already winning several prizes at local competitions. Since then, the blind children have given us many beautiful performances of songs they have learned. They have become much more confident and outgoing.

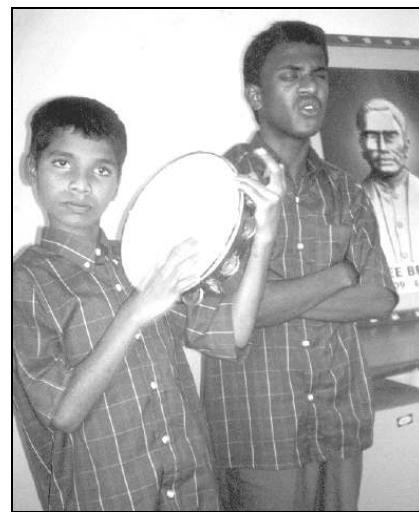
There have been many great developments, but 2003 also saw the beginning of a difficult time for *Enable*. An anarchist group called “naxalites” became active in the Kanigiri area. Fr Arulraj and other members of staff were approached and threats were made against them and the children if money wasn’t handed over. We realised that something needed to be done urgently.

### **A new centre for June 2005**

Our boys were moved into temporary accommodation in Ongole, the town where our girls live, and over time it became apparent that the situation in Kangiri with the naxalites was not improving. The problem had a difficult but necessary solution: we decided to build a new Centre for our boys in Ongole. Another great fund- raising effort began, and yet again our supporters are doing us proud. The new Centre will be open in June 2005.

One of the greatest joys for me has been to see our children grow up and mature into young adults. When we first went to Kanigiri in 1995 the oldest children were then only 12 or 13 years old, and the youngest were five or six. Some of those who were 12 or 13 in 1995 have gone to College, and a few have gone on to study for degrees at University. Three of our young people, Lakshmi Reddy, Mahalakshmi and Kasamma are now University graduates, and they provide wonderful role models for the others. There are now many more at College and University.

Over the years many of our children have had surgery. Some children who previously could only crawl or get around slowly are now able to walk upright, whether with or without calipers and crutches. This can make an enormous difference to a child’s confidence and physical health. There are some children, of course, whose disabilities are too severe for them ever to be able to walk. For them education is even more important, so that they can eventually get a good and satisfying job. We want all our children to reach their full potential, both physically and educationally, and for those who are not academically minded we provide vocational training, so that they will be able to earn their own living.



*Yesudas (accompanied by Gandhi) has won prizes for his singing*

### **Looking towards the future**

Of course, the story does not end in 2005. With each new disabled child we meet we are always at the “beginning”, and we still have so much to do in the future. It has been important for me and for all of *Enable*’s trustees to see at first hand that our developments really make a difference. One important development has been the support we are now able to give to other growing projects. In our next Update I will write about *Enable*’s role with the New Life Centre near Chennai (Madras).

I know very well that none of what *Enable* has achieved over the last 10 years, or will achieve in the future, would be possible without the dedication and support of our many supporters. The children, who are very proud of being able to “speak English” say “Very Thank You” when they are particularly grateful for something. That is what they and I would like to say to you all.

## TEN YEARS OF ENABLE

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In January, Alison and I, with other trustees, spent two weeks in Ongole. In addition to overseeing our various projects, we spent many hours discussing future options, with Fr Arulraj, our Director in India, and with other staff. Since 1995, our work has grown so much, and we are now at a stage where we need to plan further developments carefully.

### Planning for the future

Nagoor Sheda was on my mind during our deliberations. Although most of our children are being cared for in our centres, he is one of an increasing number being cared for in his home village. In its first years *Enable* was mainly supporting children with physical disabilities who could attend mainstream schools (provided we gave them the means to do so), but Nagoor Sheda has the learning disability Down's Syndrome, and he needs more specialized tuition. At the moment we realize that, sadly, we are not equipped to provide him and his family with all he needs. So we are planning how we can best support disabled children like Nagoor Sheda—and others with various complex medical, social and educational needs.

### **Enable: a different sort of charity**

The great developments in *Enable's* work since 1995 have exceeded our expectations. The charity was set up simply—and a decision was made to spend every penny of all donations on the children, and not to use it to hire staff in the UK, to print materials, or for other administration costs. *Enable's* trustees (and some supporters who make donations to help them) have always funded the charity's running costs—and this includes necessary visits to monitor the projects in India. We know that by functioning in this way *Enable* is



*Fr Arulraj takes a personal interest in the children*

different from most comparable charities. But we think it is right to be different. And with your ongoing support we will continue to be different!

### **An expression of deep gratitude**

It is understandable that, like other charities, we have had a drop in donations after the public's wonderful response to the tsunami appeal. We are mainly thankful that our children and their families were not affected, especially as just a few miles from our centres many people lost their lives. However, the fall in donations is a matter of concern. In addition to our ongoing costs we still have much to raise for the construction of the new centre.

Visitors to our projects in Ongole always remark on how happy and well looked after the children are. This is a tribute to Fr Arulraj and his excellent staff. Their commitment to the children in their care gives us full confidence to work even harder to help them. We are grateful to all who have supported *Enable* during the past 10 years. With you, we hope to continue and develop our necessary work for disabled children for many more years.

With sincere thanks and best wishes,

Colin Harte

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### **Enable (Working in India)**

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*Enable (Working in India)* is a registered charity (no. 1053560) set up in 1995. It supports centres for disabled children in Andhra Pradesh State, South India. All donations are sent in their entirety to India. Administration, publicity and general expenses are funded by the charity's trustees or from donations made specifically for these purposes. **Please make cheques payable to "Enable."**