Friends of Navajeevan
Newsletter no. 10 - april 2005

Editorial

by Ilona Seure

We are pleased to again be able to send you a newsletter with the latest news about Navajeevan and the Friends of Navajeevan Foundation. At the beginning of February, Ilona Seure (Chairman) and her boyfriend, Joris van der Heuvel, went to India. Among other things, they visited Navajeevan where they were given a warm welcome. Although the time flew by and they would have like to have stayed for longer, the visit did give them the chance to (re)visit many Navajeevan projects both inside and outside the city. Of course there was also time to play with the children and to be brought up to date with the latest developments. In this newsletter you can also read about Joris' experiences in the sickbay. It was not only Dutch people visiting Navajeevan, Navajeevan also visited The Netherlands. At the beginning of February, we were able to receive Director Fr. Koshy, for the fifth time in The Netherlands. In addition to official working visits to among others the Kinderpostzegels Foundation, the Benie Foundation and Cordaid, he also enjoyed carnival in The Netherlands and an afternoon skating, although he did not personally venture on to the ice. Two young people and an employee of Navajeevan were also in The Netherlands. Heidi Timmerman has also put their impressions on paper for you. We hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter and thank you again for your support for and involvement with Navajeevan!

My friends in the sickbay

by Joris van den Heuvel

Last February, Joris van den Heuvel spent a week with Navajeveen. The three weeks during which he traveled through India with Ilona, were his first experiences with India. In the meantime, he has become a great friend of Navajeevan and he offered to write a piece for our newsletter. Here is his description of the sick bay and his experience of sick (street) children.

During my visit to Navajeevan, I stayed in a room beside the sick bay. This is where all the sick children in the different Navajeevan projects are taken care of. Sometimes the children also come directly from the street to the sickbay. Children who are seriously ill are brought directly to the hospital of are treated there for a while after which they are taken care of in the sick bay. The room is about 8 x 10 meters with 25 beds and one treatment room. Night and day at least one nurse is present and there are always a few older boys who help with practical things like bring round meals.
At first sight, it was quite cosy and sociable: laughing children playing games, watching TV and sometimes resting in bed. Through play, I got to know the children better and I was shocked by their severe handicaps and injuries. Two children with polio, one of whose feet had also been run over with a complicated leg fracture that just wouldn't heal and many other problems. With a smile, my friend with polio admitted that he had a lot of nopi. That means pain in Telugu. (Telugu is the language in Andhra Pradesh, the state where Vijayawada is located – Ed).

During the week that I stayed in Navajeevan, two children were admitted straight from the street. Suddenly there was a bicycle rickshaw at the door with a child lying on the floor. The project pays the rickshaw to encourage that children will be brought to Navajeevan if they are sick. The street children are often

looked upon more as vermin than as children. The child, about eight years old was covered in shit and looked as if he had come straight from the garbage belt. He was in a very bad way, but there was no point in bringing him straight to the hospital because they are not keen on dirty children. The other children helped me to wash the little boy. He was terrified and too exhausted to stand. After this he was rushed to the hospital and I went on playing the other children. Laughing because life just goes on in India, although I often think of that small boy. It turned out that he had epilepsy.

Two days later a boy of around ten was brought in in a dreadful state. His name is Eukondalu. Other children had found him in a government hospital where he was not being taken care of. After I got back to The Netherlands, I heard that he was in the final states of AIDS and had only a few weeks to live. Navajeevan brought him to a project of Mother Theresa to die. On 21 April, I got an e-mail that Edukondalu had died peacefully that morning in a loving environment.

The statistics:

In the period from April 2003 to September 2004 inclusive, 2032 children were treated in the sick bay. After initial treatment and first aid, 150 of these children were referred to hospital. Luckily most of the children are admitted with problems that are easy to treat such as fever (732), scabies (209), chicken-pox (71) open wounds (68), flu (55), malaria (44) and dehydration (42). But children are also brought in with serious conditions like fractures (36), hepatitis (17), epilepsy (17), tuberculosis (15) and polio (5) and in one extreme case a child had to have a limb amputated (1).

In this period alone, Navajeevan spent more than EUR. 10.000 on hospital bills. On top of this there are the costs of nursing in the sickbay, the doctors' fees, the nurses salaries and the costs of accommodation.

Tsunami

by Ilona Seure

Everybody must still remember the pictures of the dreadful consequences of the tsunami which struck on 26 December 2004. Many people who are involved with Navajeevan have asked us if Navajeevan was also affected. We can reassure you that luckily this was not the case. The Navajeevan team did go to the coast to help. Especially in Machilipatnam, the place where Navajeevan holds its annual outing, they did what they could to ensure that people's lives could return to normal as quickly as possible.

In Chennai (Madras), the situation was much more serious. Given that we are friends with the Karunalaya Foundation and that at that moment there were two Dutch volunteers with the Karunalaya project in Chennai, we advised people who wanted to transfer money for victims of the Tsunami to transfer their money to this Foundation.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed. If you want, you can view an account of how the Karunalaya Foundation spent the money on their website: www.karunalaya.nl.

More information can also be obtained from Ilona Seure. During her visit to India, she also went to Karunalaya and the affected areas (ilona@vrienden-van-navajeevan.nl).

Current Affairs

by Mark Bos and Ilona Seure

Of course, the Friends continue to be active with a number of matters. We would like to inform you about some of them:

- Mark Bos is preparing for the Charity Concert. The proceeds of this classical concert will go to Navajeevan and it will take place this autumn in Harderwijk. Professional singers have already indicated their willingness to co-operate. Expect an invitation during the summer months.
- For some time, Navajeevan has wanted to set up an English medium school. A school where children are taught through English rather than through the local language Telugu. Children who have been educated in schools like these have an advantage in further education, for example at university where the books are often in English. The Children of Indigo Foundation which focuses on education in developing countries has approached us because with the financial support of Child Rights International (www.childright.nl) they would like to help Navajeevan to set up the English Medium School. Thanks Children of Indigo Foundation and Child Rights International.
- Our website is due for a complete update. The new website format is now known and we hope to have the new site on line by the end of May. Have you seen the German version of the site yet? And do you happen to know a teacher or student of English who would enjoy translating our Newsletter into English? If so, we would like to hear from you! As you see while reading, this last point has been solved, thanks to Julie Love.

Youth Exchange

by Heidi Timmerman

At the end of March, eight young people came to The Netherlands at the invitation of Stichting Kinderpostzegels to participate in a two week long exchange in which they shared all of their experiences and the organizations they belong to with each other and with the young Dutch people. Among them were two young people from Navajeevan: Vijay (15) and Saraswathi (17).

'*Your country – very silent country, akka*,' Vijay observed on his first day. Especially if you happen to be practicing on the drum that you've brought with you from India for a dance performance that evening, that does suddenly seem like a whole lot of noise in an apartment block.

It was Good Friday in a Leiden suburb where we had just arrived from Schiphol. Tension and unfamiliarity were uppermost – is this Holland? As Anto, Assistant Director of Navajeevan) aptly said an e-mail just before the children left India *'As the first trip to the Moon, our children are for the first time going outside the country for an International Exchange programme*.' It was an international exchange with young people from Mali, Senegal and India (Bangalore and Vijayawada). The programme consisted mainly of visits to organizations here in The Netherlands that work on behalf of and with children and young people in difficult circumstances.

The silence was broken during the very first visit...We visited the Aknathon cultural centre in Amsterdam where young homeless people have formed a HipHop group and they gave a performance that day. There was plenty of noise! And smoke...

That was something that Praveena (a girl from Bangalore) later commented on – she saw a lot of equality between men and women and that led to a lot of women also smoking – and although she approved of all that equality, and she wanted to leave it up to people themselves whether or not to smoke, she did have an urgent message: don't smoke in the presence of non smokers.

In between, there was time for visits to more touristic parts of The Netherlands like the Zaanse Schans and Madurodam.

It was Praveena too who depicted the canals and the water during a mime workshop in which the young

people had to act out their strongest impressions of The Netherlands.

It is clear that they have gained a whole lot of impressions. To start with the small things: how do I open a pack of milk, why does everybody shake hands when they meet, and what is that paper by the toilet for? The visits to the ISH theatre project, the ROC and the different technical training courses and of course the photographs they could/had to take during their visits – the young people had been given cameras and films by SKN.

Saraswathi had the honour to represent the Indian delegation when meeting Prime Minister Balkenende. She gave a powerful account of the situation of working children in India and of the *bala sangha* that they have established together with Navajeevan to improve the situation. She also however requested Prime Minister Balkenende to encourage the Indian government to ensure that the rights of children in relation to child labour are really respected.

When after many commitments his secretary assured the children that the Prime Minister is a man of his word, Apu saw his chance and asked: '*Could you change the weather then too?*'

After the warmth of Senegal, Mali or India, the children found The Netherlands rather cold and windy. When on the day he was leaving Vijay suddenly no longer felt cold, he joked: '*I will stay! I became a Dutch boy!*'

It was a meaningful, intensive, culturally diverse and enjoyable time together.

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