

Editorial

By Heidi Timmerman

In this newsletter, Mark Bos kicks off with a new column 'Bagunawa?'. This column deals with experiences at Navajeevan. You will also find a story about the Navajeevan home placement team. Eric Bontenbal was there when one of the children was accompanied back home. Since the beginning of this year, juvenile justice homes have also been on Navajeevan's programme. That the situation there is far from rosy is illustrated by Papu's story. Marly and Sander who collected money for this project will also do voluntary work there. In the meantime, we have been busy in the Netherlands as well. Mark Bos, who has been active as a member of the Board of the Friends of Navajeevan since the beginning, is alas leaving the Board and so we are looking for a replacement. Finally, on the last page, you can read the annual financial report. We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter!

Bagunawa?

Over dinner, by Mark Bos

'Bagunawa?' means 'How are you?' in Telugu.

When I think back to the six months I spent with the street children, then numerous fragments of pictures fly past. There is a lot of sun and dust on those pictures. They are also gradually beginning to yellow. Still there are some memories which I shall probably never forget. I think those moments are in particular the things that happened regularly. The daily and weekly rituals if you like. The meals, the Sundays off, the evening conversations on the roof. Those moments were very important for me. In the chaos of new experiences and impressions, it was good to have rhythm and routine. They were something to hold on to.

Dinner in particular was a ritual high point. Not last because there was a new cook. He wanted to make a good impression by serving up something new every day for the volunteers and the staff. Every meal there was a new speciality. In the afternoon around three o'clock, I often already looked forward to the many dishes which would arrive on the table in the evening, the one even more colourful and spicier than the other. One of the older boys also worked in the kitchen where



we ate. Unfortunately, his name has vanished under one of those thick layers of dust. It was his job to keep an eye on all the stocks, to do the shopping and to make sure that I enjoyed my meal. In the beginning, having a boy constantly walking round filling my glass and my plate

made me feel a little uncomfortable. I preferred to do that for myself. But after a while we got used to each other. And after a few weeks, we were really happy with each others presence. I would start eating and he would come and sit beside me to keep me company. He explained what was on my plate, and I taught him a bit of English. Until suddenly one day he no longer stood waiting by the table. His parents had been found and had collected him that afternoon. I heard that he was terribly happy and of course it was great. Because that is what Navajeevan is for. But it was a lot quieter at the dinner table.

Homeplacement

Or how we brought Nagulmera home...

By Eric Bontenbal

Abis is one of the people who brings the children home again who are picked up by the Street Presence team at the railway station in Vijayawada. In January, Eric Bontenbal visited Navajeevan and he accompanied Abis on one of his journeys.

Yesterday, Nagulmera, an 11-year old boy, was picked up at the railway station in Vijayawada by the Street Presence team that is present at the station every day to pick up the young train travelers who really belong at home. As soon



as they find a child, they try to find out where he or she comes from and to persuade the child to come with them to the shelter. There the children are quizzed to find out why the child is traveling alone.

Usually it turns out that the young world travelers have taken the plunge and run away from home. Once they are on their way, the children are often very unsure about what consequences this step will have. Luckily they have landed in good hands and they get food, a place to sleep and the necessary attention. But that is not all, because a social worker tries to find out where the child comes from, whether she or he has a family and what the home situation is like. If it turns out that the home situation is not all that bad, then it is usually not too difficult to persuade the children that it would be better to go back home. And that is the moment that Abis, or one of his colleagues, comes into the picture.

So now we are at the station in Vijayawada waiting for the train to Madura. We, that is, Abis, Nagulmera and me. It is 8 a.m. and I'm enjoying the early morning coolness. But, I seem to be the only person who is, because all around us, people are wrapped in towels or blankets to keep warm. I buy a few bottles of water and

a packet of biscuits for the journey. Abis however really knows how to do things because he has bought a piece of sugar cane for Nagulmera who is now chewing hard on it. That is much better than biscuits.

It is touching to see how kind Abis is to Nagulmera. When I came here in 2001, I already experienced what a warm personality Abis was. Then he was a driver, but now his qualities in dealing with the boys have been recognized and he is now part of the home placement team, which means that he brings children back to their homes again. With his gentle nature, he immediately wins people's trust. He has done that with Nagulmera and it is clear that they have instantly become real friends.



During the train journey we find out more and more about Nagulmera. Abis knows just how to dig up the information and by the time we arrive in Madura, we have a pretty good picture of Nagulmera's home situation. Nagulmera is excited and he is really glad that he is going back home. Yesterday morning, after an argument with his stepfather, he ran away from home and after 15 kilometers, he reached Madura station. From

there he took the train to Vijayawada because he was planning to go to his aunt in Guntur. However, he hung around the station in Vijayawada and got picked up by the Navajeevan team. In the end he was very unsure about what he had done by running away and now he is happily going back home.

In Madura, the autorickshaw driver tells us that Nagulmera's mother and father were looking for him yesterday evening. They asked everywhere and were really desperate. They had been round all the nearby villages and finally had found out that he was on his way to Madura. Nagulmera gulps when he hears that and he becomes very quiet.

From Madura, we have to travel 15 kilometers by autorickshaw to Nagulmera's village. But before we can depart, the autorickshaw has to fill up. And by fill up, I mean really full. To give you some idea: the autorickshaw is designed for one driver to take one or two passengers. But there are eleven of us in this small vehicle, plus a big bale of rice and an enormous pot. We drive like this over country lanes with big potholes, often no asphalt, between the cotton fields. 15 kilometers like that is no fun because you really get shaken around, you're so sweaty you stick to each other and after half an hour, there's no way to sit comfortably and if you think that space will come because someone will get out, you're wrong because another someone else just climbs in. In fact, an extra person wants and tries to get in, but luckily it just is not possible. In every village, you hope that someone will get out, but the journey is much longer than you expect when it is so uncomfortable.

Thankfully, an end does come and there we finally are in Nagulmera's village.

We have to go to the other end of the village. It is clear that this is where the poorest people live. The huts are made of clay with roofs of banana leaves. A few pots and pans, and perhaps a bed, that is what these people have. On this side of the village, there is no electricity, no sanitation, no running water or sewerage, in short: an unimaginable situation which gives you a lump in your throat. Nagulmera's parents are not there, they have gone to Guntur to try to find Nagulmera. Only his sister Jany is home.

The whole village has arrived and everyone is getting involved and it is a good thing that we are there because otherwise Nagulmera would probably have been given a hiding. After some time, people quieten down a bit and Abis can ask some questions and the picture becomes clear. Nagulmera's father died a few years ago, and his mother has remarried with a Hindu, although both she and the children are Moslem. The mother and father work as labourers for local cotton growers and earn just enough to keep body and soul together and to be able to send the children to school. Although the husband takes the best care he can of the family, there are sometimes rows and that was the case yesterday because Nagulmera had skipped school. The poverty-stricken circumstances don't help in keeping everyone happy. So Nagulmera decided to run away.

When we have finished our inquiries and Abis has got hold of the telephone number of Nagulmera's aunt in Guntur, people want to find out about me. After we have satisfied the villagers' curiosity, we set off again for Vijayawada. Nagulmera is playing with his friends and clearly relieved to be back home again.

And tomorrow? Tomorrow Abis will be off again to bring another lad back home. To do this he will have to make a 15 hour train journey, he will probably sleep in the hut of the boy's parents, in a hut just like Nagulmera's and he won't get back to Vijayawada until the following day. Sometimes up to 150 children a month are brought back home in this way. Children who otherwise really would end up on the street, who might never find their way back home and their parents would never know what had happened to their child.



On the road

By Marly Peeters and Sander Swiers

You may have read about Marly and Sander in earlier newsletters. At the beginning of January they left Venlo in their Land Rover: on to Asia. Now they have arrived in India and we would like to share some of their impressions with you. If you would like to read their adventures in full (in Dutch), click on www.mensopweg.nl. When they reach Navajeevan, we will tell you more about them in this Newsletter.

On the road, we stop purely by chance in a village of around 150 inhabitants. A lot of people are working in the fields and we camp in a field where some oxen are grazing beside their carts. The villagers quickly notice us and we are surrounded by children.

Now and then an old man or woman brings us fruit or vegetables to welcome us. We are also invited to dinner by the only boy in the village who can speak English. We have fun with the kids who are examining us, our car and the tent full of curiosity. They even spell out the



letters of our website as if they were in school with Marly pointing out the letters. The communication is great and when we start a whistle game, the fun is absolute.

In the evening when we arrive at the boy's home, we see a low house made of mud. It looks very simple with a primitive kitchen and a small yard to wash in. However, when we enter his room, we see a TV and even a computer. And he turns out to have an internet connection as well. That is the last thing we expected.

That evening we are sung to sleep among the oxen by an old man who has made his bed from an old cart. We wake up the following morning with the sounds of the stirring village in the background. As the villagers wave us goodbye, we realize what a great place this was to sleep and that this is the advantage of traveling by car (Land Rover).

Intervention in juvenile justice homes

By Ilona Seure

Navajeevan has taken the first steps to improving the lives of children in the juvenile prisons of Andhra Pradesh. Sander Swiers and Marly Peters organized a large sponsor campaign last October for Navajeevan's new mission. For Navajeevan is going to work for a new target group, children in juvenile prisons, in addition to working for street and working children. They are targeting the juvenile prison in Vijayawada and (via a large network) the juvenile prisons elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh.

This project started on 1 January under the leadership of Mr. Lourdu Prasad who in this short period has already managed to get a great deal done with a huge amount of passion.

The principle underlying the intervention is to ensure the proper application and implementation of a law relating to youth, the so-called Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000. The law is aimed at both delinquent children and neglected and abandoned children: these are the children who live on the street. The implementation of this law

is intended to ensure that children are sheltered, given education, care and emotional support and are rehabilitated so that they can again become part of society. In order to be able to do this, different types of homes have been set up for these children, such as the *Juvenile Justice Homes* (youth prisons), but also *Observation Homes*, *Special Homes* and *After-Care Homes*. One home may focus more on delinquency and on curing bad behaviour, while another may be more of a shelter home. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Navajeevan has had permission under this law to care for neglected children (street children). The law is namely not just implemented by state authorities, but also by organizations like Navajeevan. Because the circumstances in many juvenile prisons vary from poor to appalling and inhumane, Navajeevan decided to take action. In 2000, the law was amended and the good thing about this is that the two groups of children are now regarded as separate groups. Before this the neglected children and the children who were 'in conflict with the law' in that they exhibited delinquent

behaviour were regarded as a single group. This was a thorn in the flesh for many organizations. Implementation of the new law in reality still leaves a great deal to be desired. Action needed!

In January and February, Mr. Lourdu Prasad and others visited the various homes in Andhra Pradesh. The idea is that Don Bosco organizations (like Navajeevan) and state and welfare institutions will jointly implement an intervention programme. In this the Don Bosco organisations will take the initiative.

There have been discussions with the directors of the homes and with children and staff to gather the necessary data (number of children, how long have they been there, what education are they receiving, etc). In February, a one-day workshop took place on the law. The objective was to see how the community can participate in ensuring that the law is properly implemented in the homes. 150 people from different sectors took part in this; from Navajeevan staff members to railway police, child rights activists, police, the unions and law makers. At the end of March, a special workshop was held for Don Bosco staff from different cities. So everyone is working hard to make sure that before long the living conditions of the children in these homes improve. We will keep you posted.

Mark leaves the Board but remains active

By Mark Bos

Hello everyone!

After almost 5 years as a Board Member for the Friends of Navajeevan, I have decided to resign from the Board. This is because I have a lot of other activities, including studying for a degree in Humanistics to which I now need to devote more time.

This does not mean that I will no longer work for our wonderful foundation. I really look back with a lot of pleasure at the many activities we organized, the icing on the cake being for me in particular last December's fundraising concert.

So, I am happy to continue to be involved with the Foundation, for example by helping with various campaigns, and with providing information. And who knows, maybe next year another great concert!



Caught in a nightmare

By father Koshy and Heidi Timmerman



Papu is a boy who has personal experience of the juvenile prison and the homes linked to it. He was seven when he was found wandering in the station at Vijayawada and was brought to the Navajeevan shelter. From there, he graduated to the units to go to school and to be able to study further.

However, one day, he had a row with one of the other boys in the unit, and in angry mood, he ran away. When he reached the station, the railway police were busy picking up any children who were hanging around and sending them to the state observation home. Papu became a victim of this clean-up operation. Campaigns like this are periodically carried out by the railway police for two reasons: one is when an important person (such as a minister) is coming to the city or the station and the place has to be free of street children and beggars. A second possibility is that there are too few children in the state observation home and a message goes out to the police that there are places which can, or have to be, filled!

Navajeevan searched everywhere for Papu and was finally tipped by a few helpful policemen that Papu had been placed in the observation home. However, Navajeevan's request there to have Papu returned was ignored. At that time, Navajeevan had no legal status to relieve the state authority of the responsibility for Papu. After having had its nose rubbed in the legal facts, Navajeevan immediately set to work to gain the required legal status and recognition as a fit institution. It proved to be a long process. Even after gaining recognition as a fit institution, requests to transfer Papu to Navajeevan remained unheeded. Papu was transferred from the observation home in Vijayawada to the juvenile prison in Eluru. It is not legally allowed to keep children there after they turn 16. When the authorities thought (luckily on his fourteenth birthday) that he had reached that age, the earlier correspondence from Navajeevan turned out to be useful. Navajeevan was informed of his release and requested if they would now please take care of him!

In the juvenile prison, Papu was supposed to have been able to study and to be trained as an electrician. Nothing like that had happened. Papu was still at the same developmental stage as when he had entered the institution, he can neither read nor write. There was no programme for children like Papu who have special needs. Papu is a slow learner and he also has a speech defect. In the observation home he was also sexually abused by the bigger and older boys.

Now, back at Navajeevan, he is getting speech therapy and he helps in the kitchen where he is being trained as a cook.

Financial report 2005

By Eric Bontenbal

Income

Contributors	7.530,62
Sponsored run	2.610,28
Don Bosco NL subsidy for Fr. Koshy's visit	357,43
Interest	170,88
Total	10.984,21

Expenditure

Office equipment	94,74
Expenses Fr. Koshy's visit	502,78
Post Bank charges	46,16
Website	120,00
Chamber of Commerce	29,72
Positive Balance	9.875,81
Total	10.984,21

Balance sheet 31-12-2004

Assets

Inventory (printer)	199,00
Bank	7.678,69
Cash	15,48
Total	7.893,17

Liabilities

Capital	7.893,17
Total	7.893,17

Balance sheet 31-12-2005

Assets

Inventory*	132,67
Bank	17.620,83
Cash	15,48
Totaal	17.768,98

Liabilities

Capital	17.768,98
Totaal	17.768,98

* This year, EUR. 66,33 was written off from the value of the printer.

Departure from the Board by Mark creates vacancy for new member

By Ilona Seure

The departure from our Board by Mark Bos means that there is now a vacancy for a new member. We would like to see this filled as soon as possible. So this is an appeal, aimed in the first instance at former volunteers with Navajeevan, to think about whether you'd be interested in joining the Board.

What exactly does being a member of the Board involve?

- Helping with Foundation's policy formation and activities.
- Attending meetings of the Board five times a year and carrying out action points arising from these.
- As a member of the Board you could be responsible for your own portfolio, e.g. PR or Information, but this is not a requirement.
- All Friends of Navajeevan Board Members are active in implementation. We are therefore looking for someone who is not just interested in *thinking* with us, but someone who is also willing to *work* with us.
- Time involved: about half a day a fortnight. During information and sponsorship campaigns more time is required.

Our preference for a new member is for someone who, like the other Board Members, has been a volunteer for a shorter or longer time with Navajeevan. This is a real advantage for a Board Member because in this way, they know and understand Navajeevan, the approach, the staff and the children. However, if anyone is interested but has (not yet!) been to Navajeevan, we would also be interested to hear from you. Probably we can organize a crash course on Navajeevan.

If you would like more information, or if you are interested to be a candidate for Membership of the Board, please contact Ilona Seure (Chairwoman).

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