



# MAD Cycle South India — we made it!!

February 2005

## Thank you!

Thanks to your generosity, I have just spent two of the most inspirational and enjoyable weeks of my life!

We completed the 400km bike ride from Bangalore in Karnataka to Gudalur in Tamil Nadu. The trip was exhausting yet exhilarating, travelling through stunning landscapes, rural villages and up many hills!

We were able to visit all

the projects that we were funding and I can honestly say that every penny will be put to brilliant use.

The people who volunteer and work at the schools and homes who have dedicated their lives to helping some of the poorest and marginalised people in society are truly incredible.

So many of the youngsters had escaped abuse at home and run

away to the cities. They were found either working or begging without any access to education or health care. Field workers from the projects offered them a safe refuge, an education and the chance of a positive future.

In this letter I've tried to describe all the places where the money you donated will be going.

Jess



### Itinerary:

**Day 1:** Bangalore to Magadi—Don Bosco home for boys at risk

**Day 2:** Magadi to Melkote—Ghandian school and shelter for impoverished children and those with disabilities

**Day 3:** Melkote: A cultural day exploring the unspoilt town and Cheluvanarayanawamy temple

**Day 4:** Melkote to Mysore Green Hotel

**Day 5:** Mysore: Parna Pagnum alternative school, RLHP regenerated slum

**Day 6:** Day off to shop and explore

**Day 7:** Mysore to RLHP girls' home then to HD Kote RLHP boys' home

**Day 8:** HD Kote to Gundulapet

**Day 9:** Gundulapet to Gudalur where the cycling ended

**Day 10:** Accord tea plantation, factory and tribal festivities



Mari and Stan Thekaekara

## ACCORD

ACCORD is a grass-roots, registered Indian charity started in 1986 by Stan and Mari Thekaekera supporting the land rights of Adivasis in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu.

ACCORD started by developing village level organisations called Sangams, which mobilised people to assert their right to land. Over the years these Sangams have formed a membership – based organisation, which looks after 200 villages.

One of the biggest obstacles the tribals face when fighting for their rights is their lack of understanding

of the judicial system and the administrative machinery. ACCORD has not only taught the tribals to read and interpret land records but has also trained them to handle legal issues themselves.



Supramanian the Adivasi founder of Accord

In 1990 ACCORD opened a hospital with the help of individuals

dedicated to the cause of poor people's health. ACCORD then moved into areas of education, housing, income generation and other activities needed for the people of Gudalur Valley. It



strives to achieve a balance of development work with activism on human rights issues.

Stan joined us for most of the trip, driving a support vehicle, occasionally cycling and keeping spirits high. He was a fantastic guide, translating all conversations into at least 3 different languages, explaining everything beautifully and entertaining the kids (and us!) with his magic tricks. I can't thank him enough!



Tribal elders performing one of their traditional dances at a farewell celebration evening.

## First Stop: Don Bosco

### Don Bosco Yuvakara Grama (Youth Village): A New Home for the Young at Risk

Field workers from the home work in Bangalore where they befriend to boys living on the streets or working as child labourers. Many of them have run away from violent or abusive homes and a large number are drug addicts.

The home is purpose built with vast grounds in a rural part of Kanataka in Southern India providing space for the boys to play. Most of the boys attend regular primary schools but they also provide tuition and vocational classes.

Tailoring, driving, welding and carpentry are some of the courses they can pursue.

When we arrived we were swamped by all of the boys, intrigued by these peculiar white people with shiny plastic hats! Having spent the evening getting to know them we were then given a cultural show where they performed a variety of songs and dance routines. Having humiliated ourselves with a relatively poor rendition of Old MacDonald we then took to the floor together to Bollywood and Banghra beats!!

[www.boscoban.org](http://www.boscoban.org)



## Ghandian Ideals in Melkote



Santosh and his mother, the founder of the trust

### Janapada Seva Trust, Melkote.

This Ghandian inspired trust has been striving for the economic elevation of the weaker section of society. It's main fields of work are welfare, education, village industries and agriculture.

Karunagruha was established as a home for rural children with disabilities in 1963. They are given



food, shelter and education free of charge. In recent years other children

from weak social and family backgrounds have also been given shelter at the home. The adjacent nursery strives to bring all round development in the personality of each child through songs, plays, stories etc.

The trust is working to become self-sufficient through the 25 acre organic farm, weaving, dress making and a publication wing.



atmosphere in this home was warm and inspiring. Whilst we were there we witnessed their generosity first



The

hand. Whilst walking to the farm we met 3 small boys walking bare foot in the rain wearing nothing but rags. Having discovered that they were runaways who had been walking for months surviving on whatever they could find, they were offered food, shelter, a home and education. They were naturally suspicious but took details of where to go to take up the offer and we can only hope that they have become part of this outstanding project.

The children were independent and confident and welcomed us into their home. We spent the evening around a camp fire dancing and singing and widened our performance to include Sweet Chariots, Do-a-Deer and Michael Row the Boar Ashore, a definite improvement from the previous night!

## The Green Hotel

This colonial palace is a stunning, award winning hotel owned by the Charities Advisory Trust. All of the profits are put into a trust that provides financial support to local initiatives including the Rural Literacy and Health Project, RLHP. It provides employment opportunities for local people including those that reside in the slum that we visited.

The Charities Advisory Trust organise an annual course, Development from the Inside which was the inspiration for MAD Ini-



tiatives and the bike ride. The course is held each year with guest lecturers on Development from around the world and the opportunity to take part in voluntary placements at two of the related projects.

The hotel provided us with fantastic support throughout the journey including the outstanding mobile kitchen and a heroes welcome and police escort in Mysore.

If you do ever get there, rooms cost between £15 and £50 per night and don't forget to make the most of the hotel tailor—his work is fantastic!

<http://www.greenhotelindia.com/>  
<http://www.charitiesadvisorytrust.org.uk/charitiesadvisorytrust/>

## RLHP

### Rural Literacy and Health Project, Mysore



This NGO provides real hope and solutions through organising and empowering local people through education, slum development, health education, treatment, counselling and women's empowerment projects for 30,000 of the most disadvantaged and destitute people living in and around Mysore. We visited three of their projects, a redeveloped slum, a

Dave surrounded by girls from the Asha Bhavana girls' home

girls' home and boys' a home. From a settlement of overcrowded, unhygienic shacks where the vast majority of children worked or

begged, RLHP has helped residents form associations to discuss and solve their problems. The slum we visited had 118 recently constructed houses with access to clean water and sanitation. 99% of the children attend the on-site primary school, many of whom excitedly told us of their ambitions to become doctors, teachers and engineers.



The Asha Kirana boys' home and Asha Bhavana girls' home provides shelter, nutritious food, clothing, non-formal education, health checks, vocational training and a safe, supportive environment for children previously living on the streets.

The children we met through this project have had extremely

disturbing lives yet were able to talk openly about their pasts, respect and enjoy each others' company and excel in education and sport. We had so much fun playing cricket, singing and dancing and learning how to play Kabadi!



A recent development has been the willingness of the Green Hotel to provide any of the kids involved with RLHP the opportunity to attend university. Any child with the necessary aptitude and desire will have their fees and maintenance paid for by the profits of the hotel.





Javed, our overworked bike mechanic!!



Sweaty and exhausted but happy!

## **ACCORD and the Tsunami**

*Many of you were concerned that the area of Tamil Nadu where I visited was adversely affected by the tsunami. As we were inland, we didn't see any of the effects but heard about the relief efforts from Frank Kirwan, Honorary Treasurer of Oxfam and Stan and Mari who had spent the previous 2 weeks in Nagapattinam co-ordinating relief efforts.*

*The organisation that they were working with is called SIFFS, the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies. SIFFS is actively participating in the relief and rehabilitation activities mainly in Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu. SIFFS is focusing on these two districts for two reasons: first, these are the districts that have been affected the worst. Secondly, these are the districts where SIFFS has its presence through primary fishermen societies.*

*While data is still coming in, preliminary estimates indicate that the loss of life in Kanyakumari is estimated to be around 1500. The loss of houses is around 7800. The losses of fishing equipment is difficult to estimate and is likely to be over 10,000 boats, 1000-1500 motors and 30,000 nets. There are close to 100,000 people in about 75 camps.*

*Nagapattinam is the worst affected district with Over 5000 deaths and with 10-12 villages completely washed away. The number of houses destroyed and fishing equipment destroyed is yet to be assessed. There are 112,000 people in 102 camps.*

*If you would like to donate money to support the work of SIFFS, please visit [www.siffs.org](http://www.siffs.org)*



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