



# India Newsletter

**Vanakkam** ‘welcome’ from Madurai; the second largest city of Tamil Nadu, in the southernmost part of the country.

Madurai is awash with history and beauty and is famed for the Sri Meenakshi Temple and is one of the most revered places of Hindu pilgrimage. The streets around the temple buzz with the sound of the busy market sellers and sweet jasmine fills the air.

With the departure of the monsoon, now is the perfect time to visit with warm, sunny days and sultry evenings!



In this newsletter we are featuring the children of Madurai; the orphans at Grace Kennett and the mentally challenged children at the Anbagam Institute and the up and coming Pongal Festival.

### Grace Kennet Orphanage

Currently there are 21 children at the orphanage and for all of those ex-volunteers and future ones, here is the list:

- |           |              |           |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| Big Priya | Little Priya | Jansi     |
| Rasika    | Rinnie       | Sopna     |
| Mohana    | Achaya       | Supitha   |
| Karana    | Ellie        | Silpa     |
| Ravi      | Sarada       | Latika    |
| Prabath   | Suriya       | Sobiya    |
| Subiksha  | Prisha       | Tiny baby |



On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the Children put on a fabulous performance to celebrate Children’s Day. This date marks the birth anniversary of independent India’s first Prime Minister. Children's Day is celebrated on this date in recognition of his lifelong passion and work for the welfare, education and development of children and young people.



*Doesn't Silpa make a great Prime Minister!*

There have been a few adoptions, Thilaga, Sahana, Arasi, Ritik, and just recently Shiny. Also, another orphan, Jansi, is due to go off to Italy shortly and hopefully Rinnie and Sopna will go abroad too. As for the children who have slight problems, we’ve been told that Rasika, Silpa and Karana will also be sent abroad once suitable families have been found.

More good news! Lathika took her first steps recently, much to the delight of our orphanage volunteers who were with her at the time. So here are two more pictures of Ravi and Sarada:



And now onto news of the playground; it has been a long process for us to get the plans to go ahead with a much needed play area for the children. As ex-volunteers are aware, the children do not currently go outside as there isn't an area set aside for them or equipment for them to play on. But now this is all set to change and hopefully the first phase will be underway soon. However, we are desperately in need of raising all the funds we can to provide exciting play equipment. If you would like to donate to this or any other project, we now have an option to donate online on our website:

<http://www.travellersvolunteers.co.uk/donate.php>

We will keep you updated on the playground progress!

**Anbagam Institute**

Travellers have generously sponsored the re-painting of the girl's hostel at Anbagam, the centre for mentally challenged children. It was in desperate need of improvement having last been decorated over 12 years ago. The Autumn '07 volunteers (Jayne Wilman, Erin Shearer, Kathy Hamilton, Sarah Monro, Katie Smith, Leigh Bowness and Jen Chalmers) all gave up their time to get the walls in to a fit state before the painting process could begin. Just take a look at one of the rooms before it was touched:



One weekend we even had a helping hand, as the children were desperate to help out too. They were all fighting over scrapers in an attempt to do as much as they could. They all ended up covered in dust but it was such a laugh having them around.

Here's a couple of pictures; the first of Moni our helper and Jayne Wilman, whose placement was helping out at Anbagam.



The clean up proved to be a very long process, and after most of the volunteers had left their projects, Leigh threw herself into painting, giving up her precious time with the children at Grace Kennett in order to get it complete with the help of some local painters.

This is the first room that was completed and what a difference it makes! In the photo are our volunteers Leigh, Jayne and Sister Starlet.



Now that the girl's hostel has been completed, we are now going to hopefully raise enough money in the New Year so we can start on the boy's hostel! Watch out for the Anbagam updates in upcoming newsletters!

**Pongal Festival**

Pongal is a time for great celebration in the Hindu calendar and is celebrated for 4 days typically on the 14<sup>th</sup> January every year. Pongal signifies the end of the traditional farming season and is known as the Harvest Festival. In Madurai, the government organises buses for non-nationals to take them to a local village to watch the festivities. The villagers treat you to a delight of traditional dancing and martial arts. On the second day of Pongal, you can witness the boiling of fresh milk and maybe invited to help stir the pot and then get to taste the delicious bowl of steaming sweet rice. The final day, 'Mattu Pongal', is meant to offer thanks to the cows and buffaloes, as they are used to plough the lands. The animals are colourfully decorated, huge crowds gather and the local men try their best to tame the animals by jumping on their backs!



We hope to see you soon in India!