

NEWSLETTER



Hon. Secretary: Dawn Copsey, Rose Cottage, 19 Filgrave, Bucks, MK16 9ET, email: secretary.foco@gmail.com
website: orissa.org.uk

March 2020

Registered Charity No. 1074935

First, let me wish all our supporters and friends around the world a very happy 2020. I know that it's over two months since New Year's Day, but this is our first newsletter since December last year.

We were very happy to learn from Victoria Rizzo (née Macfarlane) and her husband Alessandro Rizzo that they had visited PUSS. Vicky, well known at PUSS for many years as "Vicky Sister", has been there five or six times, she is not sure how many, and the children were very happy to see her again, and to meet Alessandro, who is all the way from Southern Italy.

Victoria and Alessandro sent us this joint note for the newsletter, with alternate comments from each of them:

Vicky – "Returning to PUSS is always such a happy and emotional experience; every visitor to PUSS knows the feeling of being carried through the entrance and into the main prayer hall on a wave of smiling children, and how elating it is. Immediately I'm greeted by girls whom I met on my first visit nearly a decade ago, who I've seen grow and mature on each subsequent visit, now confident class 10 students who remark that I, too, look much older!"

Alessandro – "This was my first experience of PUSS. There are not enough words to describe how you feel when arriving at the school for the first time, a mix of tension and wonder. You really don't know where to look and who to respond to as you navigate through a sea of little girls and a few boys smiling at you and fighting over who should get to hold your hand. They are so excited to meet you. As you walk into the school through the prayer hall and into the playground some give up, but most persist and stick with you as you familiarise yourself with the surroundings. Soon you forget the busy and noisy traffic of Bhubaneswar, the policemen with their white gloves, and all you can hear is children playing, singing, dancing. PUSS is really a little oasis."

Vicky – "We spent the weekend socialising with the children at PUSS and those who stay in the nearby children's house, practicing spoken English, playing games, and of course, dancing (we tried and failed to keep up with the children's dance routines!). It's impossible not to be impressed by their talents; there are so many gifted artists, karatekas (who practices karate), singers, yogis and dancers (both modern and traditional Oriya dancing) who enjoy showcasing their talents. We spent time with the children from class 9 and 10 and learnt about their goals for the future. It was inspiring hearing from the exceptional Nandini, who has recently had national success in athletics competitions. We also spent time with the highly articulate Janaki, an impressive class 9 girl who has grown in confidence since my last visit. She is very bright and ambitious, telling us all about the state karate competitions she has participated in and how she would like a career in politics."

Alessandro – "While we were there, we managed to get a new computer system that can be used to deliver online lectures from anywhere in the world. This includes a new computer unit with fast CPU and plenty of storage, as well as a new webcam and a wireless microphone. Volunteers from anywhere in the world can connect to the school to deliver classes online on a variety of topics, with the aim of improving the children's spoken English. We are grateful for all the support from members of the staff at the school and to Mr Oyas for arranging the purchase with a local shop in Bhubaneswar, and for endless trips to the town on his motorbike to complete the kit. Lori and Pilu were a great help as well, and I'm sure they will continue to help with the management of the system going forward."

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Listening and being part of a conversation, from far away Scotland

Vicky – “Now that the infrastructure is in place, we are keen to open up the facilities to all involved with FOCO who may be interested in interacting with PUSS, perhaps giving a one-off presentation or being involved in regular spoken English classes with children and/or teachers. We are still in the process of deciding how best to approach the classes, conscious that smaller class sizes will be more interactive, and each child is likely to learn and contribute more. Also, we would like to ensure that, even though classes will hopefully be delivered by a variety of people, there is some continuity and consistency in the material we are delivering. At this early stage, it would be brilliant to hear from anyone who would like to be involved by dropping us an email at pussonlinelectures@gmail.com.”



The girls electronic meeting with Malcolm Uncle's dog far away in England

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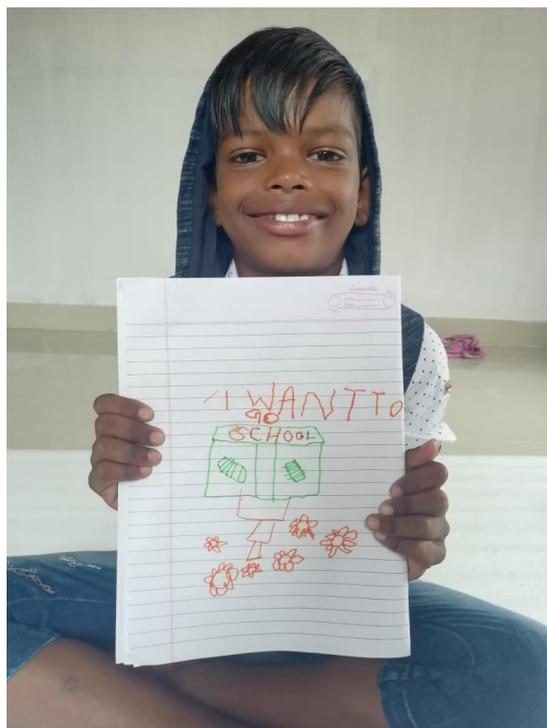
Alessandro – *“Leaving was the hard part, the trip to the airport turned out to be a bit of a school trip as we went in the school bus and several of the girls came with us! We were so sad to leave; it had been just a week, but you feel part of PUSS very quickly. All the good that is done at the school is difficult to miss and without realising it you start to care about the children just as if they were your own family. The joy that you feel at PUSS is contagious and stays with you, it enriches you in ways that you did not anticipate. I’m glad we went, and I look forward to a return visit.”*

The committee and the school are very grateful to Victoria and Alessandro for donating this equipment and for getting it all set up and operating; we hope very much that it will “reduce the gap” between us and PUSS, for a long time to come.

NEWS FROM SOCH (SOCIETY FOR CHILDREN)

Manoj Kumar’s three teams from SOCH at Bhubaneswar, Khurdha Road and Berhampur railway stations continue to do great work. They have rescued almost six thousand children since they started, including 55 in January this year, and their staff have observed a decline in the number of lost children on some of the station platforms. The railway staff and police are themselves more aware of the problem and are rescuing more children themselves, and some traffickers seem to have disappeared. They hope, also, that it is a small sign of better times in the remote villages and slums where most of the children come from.

SOCH have conducted three residential programmes at the new Matt and Del Page Memorial Rehabilitation Centre which started operations towards the end of last year. A total of 61 children have attended, forty one boys and twenty girls; they were there for several different reasons; school dropout, addiction, minor offences, and preliminary results from initial follow-up work suggests that the results have been generally positive. Children have started attending school after months or even years of absence, they have not started using addictive substances again, and their behaviour has generally improved.



A child’s ambition, and an English lesson, at a SOCH programme

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SOCH have also started a major community rehabilitation programme in a large slum in Paradio, a port city up the coast of Odisha towards Calcutta. This is funded by the Paradip Port Trust; SOCH is not totally dependent on Friends of the Children of Orissa, and their success in securing this work demonstrates that they are becoming a recognized and important part of the social rehabilitation scene in the State.



A SOCH worker, counselling a troubled child

As written at the end of our December newsletter, Manoj Kumar has been internationally recognized; he has been selected by the San Francisco-based Gratitude Foundation to be one of thirty 'social entrepreneurs' from throughout the world to attend a week-long programme of networking, seminars and other events in California in June; this should enable SOCH to build a global platform of support. See

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/devinthorpe/2019/12/03/gratitude-network-announces-30-fellows-for-2020-cohort-of-changemakers-for-children/>

Manoj will spend a few days in England on his way to the United States, and we hope that he will be able to meet some of his supporters here. We are proud that Friends of the Children of Orissa has been able to play some part in helping him to start and develop his organization.

Thank you for all your help and support, please keep it coming! Costs continue to rise in India, and both PUSS and SOCH depend on you to be able to assist the hundreds of destitute girls and boys with whom they work every year.

We will have a new website very soon, which will make online and standing order payments very simple, if you would like to send a donation in the meantime please contact our secretary Dawn via email at secretary.foco@gmail.com or using our postal address.

With grateful thanks from

Malcolm Harper, Vice Chairman, Friends of the Children of Orissa.