

NEWSLETTER



Correspondence address: *Friends of the children of Orissa, Rose Cottage, 19 Filgrave, Bucks, MK16 9ET*
email: *secretary.foco@gmail.com* website: *orissa.org.uk*
Registered charity No. 1074935

From Malcolm Harper, Chairman:

Dear Friends,

I hope you will forgive a further newsletter with some news of our friends in Odisha. Many of us are fed up with being 'locked down' and are wondering how our lives and livelihoods will recover; it may put things into perspective to be reminded how lucky we still are.

The earlier lives and experience of three of the girls at PUSS are sadly typical of the backgrounds of many of 'our' children. Mr. Naik (name changed) was a farm labourer from the South of Odisha. He and his wife had three little girls, but his wife died; he remarried but his new wife did not get on with the children, and after a while she left him.

Shortly afterwards Naik was in an accident and lost both of his legs. He was reduced to begging on trains, and the three children who were then 11, 9 and 7 years old, accompanied him or survived as well as they could on station platforms while their father dragged himself along the trains begging for money or scraps of food. Those of you who have travelled on local trains in India will be aware that this is not uncommon.

The railway authorities eventually notified the government child-care authorities about the children, and they asked Kuku to take them into PUSS. Of course she accepted, and they are now happily part of the PUSS community. Like all the children at PUSS, they learn practical skills such as tailoring, and at the same time they help to produce various items which are sold to augment PUSS's income.



Some of the PUSS girls learning sewing

Our supporters often ask what 'our' girls do when they leave the PUSS school. Our occasional surveys are far from conclusive, but most of the girls continue studying for some years and we do know a few individuals who are working in shops, or as government health visitors, or in software businesses. I asked my recent 'class' of nine locked-down children at PUSS to say what they wanted to be when they were grown up, and how much they thought they would be able to earn in a month.

These were their answers:

Maths teacher, £160 a month
Bank office worker, £270 a month
Cook in a restaurant, £160 a month
Cartoon artist for children's books, £120 a month
Geography teacher, £110 a month

Hospital nurse, £200 a month
Police detective, £160 a month
Member of State parliament, £1100 a month
Paediatric doctor, £650 a month.

The financial 'outlier', the aspirant MP, was by far the youngest child, and was prompted by the others, apart from her, the rest seemed to be serious and thoughtful in their replies. These certainly seem to be reasonable; ambitious but attainable. At a recent trustee meeting we discussed ways in which we might be able to assist the girls beyond their PUSS schooling. We hope to be able to make some positive suggestions in due course.



Some of the girls playing snakes and ladders

Manoj and his colleagues at SOCH shared an interesting experience they had when they were distributing food to destitute families in the slums who had lost their livelihoods because of the lockdown. They noticed a very frail old lady waiting for her ration at the end of a long queue of much younger people, so they asked her to come forward and take her food without waiting. She said no, because as she said she should wait her turn and some of the others probably needed their food more than she did.

Finally, it was her turn, so she took her packet, but it was too heavy for her to carry. The SOCH staff offered to drop it off at her hut, but she said no. She said that maybe she could get help today, and tomorrow, but she knew that one day she would have to do it herself; independence is best.

Apparently, she had in the past been a teacher, and she spoke fluent Odiya and Marathi (the languages of Odisha and Mumbai) as well as Hindi, Bengali and English. As she took her leave, she made as to hug the SOCH staff but then she recalled the government guidelines on social distancing. She backed away and smiled and thanked everyone, while everyone else was scrambling to get their rations. Her behaviour was an object lesson to everyone.

Thank you as ever for your continuing support; in the meantime we are continuing our on-line English tutorials for the children at PUSS. We had a well attended 'on-line' AGM on 4th June, with participation of friends from Germany and the United States as well as closer to home.

We still expect that the lockdown in India will be over at the end of July, and let's hope that some of you will soon be able to visit PUSS and SOCH in person.

Malcolm Harper, Chairman.

