

NEWSLETTER

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Registered Charity No. 1074935

From Malcolm Harper, Chairman:

Dear Friends,

Three months have gone by since our last newsletter, but in some ways little has changed. About forty five of the girls at PUSS remain at school, firmly 'locked-down' in the CCI ('Children in need of care institution') block some ten minutes' walk from the main school block; these children are in a special category as ruled by the Government, and cannot be sent home because they have no home as such or because it is manifestly unsuitable. A very small number of children also remain in the main block, because it has proved impossible for PUSS to contact their homes and to arrange for them to be sent there.

The Government has ruled that the remaining two hundred and fifty or so girls have had to be sent 'home' to whatever that may be, and to remain there until the schools are allowed to re-open. They appear likely to remain closed at least until the end of October. We understand that shops and other such places are being allowed to open, but for some reason schools are to remain closed and no date has yet been given as to when they will re-open.

Kuku and her colleagues are doing what they can to keep up the children's schooling in spite of the very difficult situation. We are continuing our regular on-line tutorial sessions with the 45 or so children who are 'locked down' at the so-called CCI building some ten minutes' walk from the main school building in the village of Naharkanta, and they are also receiving a full morning of on-line lessons from their regular teachers who are not permitted to come to school. The four and a half hour time difference between India and the United Kingdom makes it convenient for these teachers to do morning sessions and for our 'team' to do our sessions in their afternoons and evenings.

Our excellent friend and committee member David Landsberg and his family have been doing regular sessions; here are some 'screen shots' he has taken:



(PUSS girls enjoying an online session with the Landsberg family)



(David's Son and friends, teaching the girls what we are reliably informed are dance moves!)

A small number of the children who have had to go 'home' are receiving on-line classes on a family member's 'smart phone' or otherwise; the State Government is providing some distance learning classes, and a few of the children from PUSS have been receiving lessons from PUSS itself; generally speaking, however, their education is suffering, and as ever the children from the poorest households are most likely to be affected.

At least, however, this is not the case with the girls who have remained at PUSS; those who had had to remain in the school are receiving regular classes, and we gather from the staff there that the children are generally remaining cheerful and as well-behaved as usual, and the on-line sessions that we have been providing are making some contribution to this.

The children, Kuku and her colleagues are very grateful for our help; Philippa Baylis has been very competently organising the timetabling, as well as conducting regular sessions, and they and the girls have asked me to thank her and everyone else who is helping with this. Hat Trick have also very generously provided five new laptops to PUSS, so that several classes can go on at the same time.

Friends from Fighting Words, who were introduced to us by Hat Trick have been running story writing sessions with the children, one line per child; here is a short sample of their efforts:

Jamy and Jhanji

Once upon a time in the forest it was a spring morning. Jamy went to play in the forest.

Suddenly she saw a beautiful tree who was singing a song with a lovely voice.

Jamy was surprised. She had never seen a tree who was talking!

She asked the tree, "Who are you and how do you talk?!"...

You can see more about this and learn about Fighting Words on their website

<https://www.fightingwords.co.uk/>

I can say from my own experience that it is great fun. I work with four or five children at a time, they sit close together so that they can all see the screen of the laptop and can hear what I am saying, and I can see and hear them, and in spite of occasional power or network problems it generally works rather well.

They can present their 'homework' assignments and any writing or drawing they do during the class to the camera so that they are perfectly legible from this end, and they can see and read what I want to show them. Also, which would of course not be possible if I was physically there, I can carry my laptop around the house and the garden, they can greet the dogs and name the colours of the flowers, they can comment on the weather, and we can compare the feeling of their thirty five to forty degrees temperature with our fifteen or so.

On-line is not as good as really being there, but it does have its advantages and it is certainly much less expensive !

Laryssa Laporte from the United States has spent 'real' time at PUSS in the past, and she has also spent on-line time with the children; she has asked the children to build their self-confidence and to improve their English by writing short personal statements about themselves and their ambitions.

Below are a few examples of some of their efforts (please note that in line with our safeguarding policy, names of the children have been edited out of the photos. The children were photographed with kind permission from PUSS and Laryssa gave her consent to be featured in the newsletter).



(Laryssa, some of the PUSS girls and their writing from an online session)



- Hello, I am _____ I come from Bhubaneswar.
- I am rich because I can see beautiful gardens.
- In my culture I like to study English.
- I am a strong woman because I understand anything.
- I am valuable because I am the only girl in my family.
- I am beautiful because I have a nice face.
- Now I am a small child in class 6. When I read for Plus 2 first year I will work hard and finish plus 3. When I finish Plus 3 I will study hard to get a job and be happy.



Michele Voss has a remarkable reputation at PUSS as an inspiring teacher and leader in singing and dancing, and she has managed to continue and enhance this with her regular and much enjoyed musical sessions, with far larger numbers of children than the rest of us.

I was able myself to benefit from this during a recent session, when the children and I were having our usual end of class interchange about food. I was teasing them about chocolate, it has become a great joke when I hold a bar up to the screen and they pretend to try to grab it. So then I asked them to sing me a song about chocolate and at once they broke into a wonderful pop song, made up there and then as they went along, and then they danced to their own music; I am sure this was inspired by what they had been doing with Michele a couple of days earlier.

Manoj Kumar tells us that the Indian railways are gradually returning to their usual level of activity, although there is a long way to go. SOCH has been able to return one of their platform teams to work, on the busy platforms at Khurdha, the junction for the sea coast train on the main Kolkata/Calcutta to Chennai/Madras main line, and they hope to start again at the other stations as traffic expands.

In the meantime those of SOCH's staff who remain are being employed in child welfare work and ration distribution in the slums and other urban and rural areas which are being damaged by the continuing lock-down, and the enforced closure of schools and other institutions has at least allowed the construction work to continue and thus to add a second storey and to complete the accommodation facilities at the Matt and Del Page Memorial Rehabilitation Centre. Here are a few pictures of the work in progress:



(foundations laid, walls going up)

The SOCH website is full of lots more information about what is going on, at www.sochforchildren.org

Thank you all again for your continuing support in these difficult times; it is not easy, for anyone, but you are making it much less damaging for a number of very vulnerable children in India.

Malcolm Harper, Chairman.



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