



# UPDATE

**MARCH 2018**

## Olie Hunter-Smart. A Story of Endurance.

Self-confessed adventurer Olie Hunter-Smart decided last year to become a walking follower of Mahatma Gandhi by walking the whole length of India, from north Kashmir to the very southern tip at Kanyakumari, a distance of over 4,500 kilometres. He visited, on the way, some of the key places that featured in Gandhiji's life, carrying a backpack weighing 26kg and using only two sets of clothes in keeping with Gandhiji's life of simplicity. He visited New Delhi, the scene of Gandhiji's assassination, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and the Western Ghats before reaching the tip of India in December after a 7 month journey. He walked for 10-12 hours daily, meeting local villagers on the way.

On completion of the journey, he visited Hope, where some of the children accompanied him to complete the walk from the junction on the nearby highway to Hope. His partner, Katie Jackson, was waiting for him at Hope. She had spent 3 weeks working with the children as a volunteer, improving their conversational English, while she awaited his arrival. Olie spent a further two weeks at Hope, engaging the children about his experiences, and organising games and activities, for example, putting up a tent in less than 4 minutes!.

He and Katie have now been back in the UK for the past 3 weeks. Their visit to Hope was truly inspirational for the staff and children who marvelled at Olie's stamina and courage and thoroughly enjoyed Katie's lively English lessons.



**Library Anniversary:** Our Hope Library celebrated its first anniversary on 23/2/18. Established one year ago by UK visitors, Katherine Coussement and Jade Smith who continue to support the project, it now has 150 signed up members with over 2,000 transactions in its first year. Used by both the children of Hope and local people, It is widely used and greatly appreciated by the wider community as there is no other such facility available in the neighbourhood.

Author and Hope supporter, Patrick Moon, performed the opening ceremony last year, and was on hand again this year to celebrate its first birthday.



### **Wedding Bells:**

We are pleased to announce two further weddings since our last edition.

In November, Raji married Pradeep who has his own steel fabrication business. She now lives happily with him and his family, south of Alappuzha. Raji had been at Hope since the age of three and she wrote a very moving reflective piece on her life at Hope – reproduced below – just prior to her wedding. UK trustee, Alan Brooks, was able to be in attendance.

In January this year, Hope celebrated the marriage of Unnimaya and Jineesh. Unnimaya came to Hope at the age of nine where her younger brother still lives. The couple met while working at a supermarket in Kochi. They live with Jineesh's parents in Ernakulam and have both returned to work there after an extended wedding break. UK trustees, Steve and Liv Redmond, and visitor, Shirley Vincent were there to attend the ceremony.

We wish both couples every happiness in their lives together.

### **Christening:**

Members of Parakettil House recently celebrated the Christening of Neethu's new baby born in November. The baby boy is called Adil Antony.



Pradeep and Raji



Jineesh and Unnimaya with her Hope family from Alice House.



Adil Antony's Christening day.

### **Cows to Computers;**

For many years, Hope has had its own herd of cows, kept to supply milk to the Village with surplus sold for a small income. As herds do, it grew and grew, giving rise to a number of difficulties, including pressure on space with our ever-growing family and culminating in a serious accident for our cowman, Purushan when he badly damaged his knee. A reliable replacement during his extended absence for knee surgery proved impossible to find, giving rise to serious animal welfare concerns so, very reluctantly, it was decided to disband the project.

In the meantime, we had become acutely aware of the growing need for a separate study area for our older girls who, till now have been forced to share their study space with all the younger children, giving rise to endless friction and frayed tempers.

So, putting the two situations together provided the perfect answer. The extremely well-built cow byre presented an ideal basis for a transformation. With a very kind grant from the Umbrella Trust in early January, the work could commence immediately and the conversion job is now well on its way to completion. The study block is light, airy and comfortable and comes with its own toilet block and small games room. We now await funding – from some kind source – to finish kitting it out with furniture, fittings and I.T. equipment. Then our new Umbrella Study Centre will be open for business, putting an end to the friction and frayed tempers!

Our grateful thanks to the Umbrella Trust for their grant and, as ever, to our trusty, reliable builder, Sajib, who endlessly offers us quality work, lots of freebies and very generous terms and conditions.





### Raji - I am getting married!

*"Another great event in my life is happening soon; my marriage. I joyfully look forward to living with Pradeep and his family. However I will be sad to leave my Hope Family and the Hope Village. Here I found people who love and care for me. I came here at the age of three as I lost care in my own family. I have now my mother, though I am not born to her. I have my brothers and sisters, though we are related only by living together as a family. I made my home here, though I lost my own home when I was small. I cannot imagine what my life would have been like if I had not come here to Hope when I lost care of my parents. Thank God and thanks to everyone here and everywhere"* wrote Raji in her diary just before her wedding and she happily agreed for us to quote her here.

There are over 80 children who came, like Raji, to Hope Children's Village, children who lost the care of their own families for various reasons. Here they get a mother, a family, a home and opportunities for the best possible education and long term care till they settle in their lives, just like Raji.

### HELPING THE EMPOWERMENT OF OUR HOPE CHILDREN

In September 2017 I was once again delighted to spend a month at Hope continuing my work as a volunteer. Being able to visit and work at Hope almost every year since 2010 has meant I have got to know the staff and children well, and been able to develop a role contributing to empowering our Hope children in order to equip them to lead happy and productive lives. I have only been able to do this through the support and encouragement of Hope's Trustees, Directors and staff.

Over several years now, I have taken a central role in the planning of Child Rights and Life Skills workshops, which we normally run for the children and mothers over 2-3 days during the Christmas holidays. Working with the Director and staff as a team, each year we identify current needs and plan the workshops accordingly.

The first workshops in 2013 coincided with the introduction of the new Child Protection Policy, and we used them to explain about Child Rights and Protection and also to launch the Child Protection Team and hold the first elections for the children's and mothers' representatives.

More recent workshops have concentrated on the needs of particular age groups and in 2017 included Good Touch, Bad Touch for 5-11 year olds and a wide range of Life Skills inputs for the older children on topics such as: Peer Pressure and Bullying, Gender Equality, Cyber Safety, Financial Management, World of Work, Dealing with Emotions, and Self Presentation in the Outside World. All designed to help equip the children for life beyond Hope Community Village.

We always aim to make the workshops relevant and (very importantly) fun for the children, using interactive approaches like role play, debate and small group discussions and feedbacks in which each child is given the chance to express themselves and 'have a voice'.

Working all my professional life with disadvantaged and marginalised people, first as a Social Worker and then as manager of a Mental Health Therapy Service, my passion has long been the empowerment of such groups and individuals. It is no understatement to say that I love the time I spend at Hope. It is a privilege to work with the enthusiastic and committed staff team and a great source of joy and satisfaction to me to know I am helping to make a difference to these children's lives and contribute to the high quality care that Hope provides.



Sue Coventry



### **Football News:**

Since UK visitor Chris Miller organised an introductory football competition at Hope two years ago, the sport has gone from strength to strength. When it became clear that the children, both boys and girls, loved the game and showed real talent and enthusiasm, we procured funding from several generous donors to buy kit and equipment and buy in the services of a good coach. (Just to put this in perspective, the said coach travels a two-hour journey each way, on his only free day of the week, and is paid the princely sum of £3 – more a labour of love for the sport and for a good cause.)

The girls in particular have shown real interest and have proved to be highly skilful and very hard-working. Two older girls lead the training sessions during the week in preparation for the coach's visit on Sundays. Now the core team of 14 girls attend a school in Alleppey that is a centre of excellence for sport and has its own football coaches.

The girls entered their first competitive schools tournament this year and, to the surprise of everyone – except perhaps the coach – progressed all the way to the final which they won 3-1. In addition, player Viji was awarded the Golden Boot as the best player of the tournament.

They were a real credit to themselves, to Hope and to their school and coaches, conducting themselves in unfamiliar situations with confidence and dignity. Three visitors from UK were able to be present to cheer them on at the final and, as one of those three, I can honestly say that it was a very proud moment and they were truly amazing.

Particular thanks to Carol Cross, supporter from Stockport, who has worked tirelessly to collect endless supplies of good quality second-hand football boots from schools in her area, answering an appeal in our previous edition. Thanks, Carol!



**Collection boxes** form a substantial, steady income for Hope. However, we have only been able to place 35 boxes so far. We are looking for volunteers to place boxes, if possible, in shops, workplaces and homes in their area. Can you help? It simply requires distributing the boxes, collecting and replacing at intervals and encouraging takers to keep in a prominent position. For further details, contact Norma Veitch. Tel. 07968375808 or on [normaveitch1@gmail.com](mailto:normaveitch1@gmail.com)

### **You could be supporting HOPE without it costing you a penny!**

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