



AMICI NEWS

Volume 3 Issue 2

For Private Circulation

March 2004

WATCH: Nepal

Leprosy eradication cannot be confined to mere prevention and cure of the disease. Those who have worked in the field know that the real work begins much after the medical intervention. For, these suffering individuals have to be guided back into regaining not only their respect and dignity, but their lost foothold in society.

Any organisation which works with poor and oppressed and their rehabilitation have the basic framework for taking up leprosy work. This is a point proved by Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH), a Nepal based NGO.

Mr M V Jose accompanied Francesca Ortalli, AIFO project manager in charge for Nepal on a visit to the project from February 5th to 12th.

The AIFO representatives went to watch, observe and motivate WATCH and see how it could be effectively involved in Leprosy and CBR work. The project has been working on empowerment of the oppressed including women, HIV patients, disabled, bonded labourers to name a few.

The project has already begun work on leprosy on a primary level. There is a lot of acceptance in the community and with adequate know how, Leprosy work could be effectively integrated into the existing work of the organisation, the representatives feel.

Discussions on the possibilities of integrating the project work with leprosy work were held with project manager Ms Sarmila Shrestha and other resource persons.

A three week training programme for WATCH staff working in the field level for CBR and leprosy has been planned.



Unconditional love: Mother with disabled child in Nepal

The intervention will continue and AIFO is positive about their work.

Meetings/Events

- AIFO representative Mr M V Jose attended the ILEP meeting at Delhi on March 8.
- A three week CBR training workshop was held for staff of WATCH from Nepal from March 11 at the AIMIC office, Bangalore.
- Mr Jayanth Kumar, AIFO CBR coordinator, Mr N V Ranganath and six other resource persons facilitated a workshop for 33 DPO members from Malavally project at Trimurti Rural Development Centre, a rural unit of SRMAB.

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In remembrance

Bangalore office observed the first death anniversary of Dr V Ekambaram, AIFO's first representative in India, on March 1. Our beloved chairman's photo was placed on a simple altar and AMICI Trust secretary Mr T V Srinivasan, trust member Dr Nagendra Prasad and friends at the AMICI office offered silent prayers to the departed soul. .

DR V EKAMBARAM: AN EVERLASTING INSPIRATION...



AIFO representative M V Jose with Dr Ekambaram
(26-12- 1917 to 01-03-2003)

A medical doctor by profession, Dr Ekambaram has made an indelible mark in the history of leprosy in India with his five decades of unstinted work in the field.

After a brief service in the Indian army, he plunged into the field of leprosy, when he was posted to the Leprosy

He was a grandfather among professionals of the leprosy world. He was very personal at the same time thoroughly professional with a real heart for the patients.

Fr. George Kannathanam, Sumanahalli

department in Stanley Medical College, Chennai. There was no looking back after that. His efforts aimed at eliminating leprosy in India continued till the very end of his life. When Dr Ekambaram first stepped into the field of leprosy work, there was no

governmental programme. Undeterred, he went on to become an eminent leprologist and the first state leprosy officer in Tamil Nadu.

Over the decades he was deeply involved in every stage of strategy and implementation of leprosy work in India. Recipient of the prestigious International Gandhi Memorial Award, Dr Ekambaram had in his work spanning several decades proved amply that he deserved the award and more. From the rudimentary isolation of infected patients to the advanced stage of Multi Drug Therapy, he had seen it all. He was considered as the Teacher of teachers, in the field of leprosy. Before his association with AIFO in 1979, he held the post of secretary; Damien Foundation India. It was under his guidance that AIFO was able to extend its reach to a large network of NGOs committed to the eradication of Leprosy in India.

As early as 1983, Dr Ekambaram developed the concept of lending financial and technical support to districts through the National Leprosy Eradication Programme of the government. This saw implementation in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and several other states.

He went on to build the Bangalore urban and Mandya district programs in 1992. These were pioneering efforts between the government and NGOs.

For projects like Sumanahalli, Shanta Jeeva Jyothi, Arogya Matha Seva Kendra in Bhalki, MOB in Mandya and several others, Dr Ekambaram remained a driving force.

He remained the Special representative of AMICI and the

He remains very much alive for me as a father. I retain his living image, since I arrived late for his funeral -M.V. Jose

crusader for leprosy elimination until his last breath in 2003. It is in his memory that the Dr Ekambaram endowment prize has been constituted for the best outgoing NMS student at SLR&TC College at Karigiri. Recently, the

AMICI Trust decided to institute Dr V Ekambaram memorial fund to provide scholarships to children of the leprosy afflicted.

Like Amici Trust member and Tourism minister J Alexander once said.. had he been a Catholic, he would have been canonised and declared a saint by the Vatican. - Tributes:

*He is the only person I have ever been scared of. I do not want to think that he is no more-Or Mani Mozhi, medical co ordinator AIFO.

*It was an inspiring time that I spent with our great leader Or V.Ekambaram. His commitment to service and determination to fulfill tasks are two special features that I will always try to emulate in my work. Physically Or Ekambaram is no more but his contributions to the developmental field will be remembered for ever- Jayanth Kumar

*Or Ekambaram was a personification of immeasurable love, affection and humanity: He is still a living inspiration for those who knew him Patrick K Arokiaswamy

*He was like a father figure to our entire organisation, strict at the same time a loving person. I feel that we could have learnt a lot more if he was here, I am very happy that could serve Or Ekambaram and his wife Sarojini"-Lucy, Secretary, Amici.

Annual Reports

(AMICI News will feature one organisation per month, among its project partners. The featured organisation of the month is Sumanahalli- The news desk)

Sumanahalli CBR Project

A haven for the destitute

An appeal by the then chief minister of Karnataka D Devaraj Urs to the Archbishop Arokiaswamy of the Archdiocese of Bangalore saw the beginning of Sumanahalli in 1978.

So named to mean village of people of good hearts, this special 'village' was set up on 63 acres of land given by the state government.

Since then, Sumanahalli has developed in leaps and bounds involving several religious congregations and lay persons in the one aim of helping leprosy patients.

For patients who enter heavy with despair in their hearts several years ago, Sumanahalli is the haven that never could be in the strongly prejudiced outside world.

Apart from medical care, the patients here learn life skills and are able to return to a normal life, often going on to start a family of their own.

The project supports at a time at least 100 single patients and 40 patients along with their families in the family quarters.

Till date, this society has treated 4039 patients and plans to find jobs for all and resettle them in the society. Not an improbable goal considering that the society and individuals in the society have won several awards, most related to employment and placement.

The institute itself has won the national award in the best employer category for employing the maximum number of disabled persons in the institution in 2003. Of the total 83 staff, 52 are disabled! .

While the rehabilitated patients have won several awards, the institution staff is not far behind.

Sr Mary Mascarenhas, of the institute has won not less than five awards, national and state, for her outstanding efforts and achievements for the welfare of the disabled.

The project has completed 25 years of service, but as Director of Sumanahalli, Fr George Kannathan says, the journey continues....

B V Ramesh Babu and Rathnamma Partners in pain



Ramesh Babu's story is a typical tragedy of many a leprosy patient in India-failure to utilize medical help, He was studying in 4th standard in Bolya, a village in Tumkur when he discovered patches on his body. A health educator, who suspected the disease, immediately referred him to the nearby leprosy hospital.

Continuous medication and support from his family may well have saved him years of hunger, destitution and freedom from deformity'. But like most patients afflicted with leprosy in India, what Babu faced was denial of all human rights and love, once his family and neighbors came to know of his condition.

Unable to bear the torment, scared after seeing other advanced leprosy patients in the hospital, Babu fled. He spent the next seven years with nights in trains and begging during the day.

Efforts to work did not give much relief. He was sent away because he kept dropping glasses owing to the effect of the disease on the movements of his hands.

Living on the streets, he faced years of ostracism, and several painful incidents which have left an indelible mark.

"A woman threw dirty water on me, because I was begging early in the morning," he recalls.

Meanwhile, Rathnamma, another leprosy patient who was to later become his wife, had just faced the harsh reality of the disease.

Though the disease has left her with bent fingers, she was fortunate to find love and support.

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Partners in pain Contd

"It was a kind Father who detected my case early when I accompanied my mother to her work at a construction site. He took me to Sumanahalli," she says. "I was scared when I saw the other patients but the medical officers, Sisters and Fathers took exceptional care of me," she adds.

Taken under Sumanahalli care, Rathamma found unusual help when she was retained at the centre even after getting cured. "Sr Liza and Sr Stella felt that it would be better for me to stay here instead of returning to a life of hunger and possible social discrimination from uninformed neighbors", Rathamma recalls.

Babu meanwhile had been discovered on a railway platform by Sr Mary Mascarenhas who brought him to Sumanahalli. He too remained in Sumanahalli after treatment and owing to her incessant efforts, finally landed a job in the Bangalore city corporation.

"Sr Mascarenhas fed me with her own hands in front of BCC officials to show that I was cured, "Babu remembers fondly. Another gesture of good will that he still remembers is that of an IAS officer Mr Narasimharaju. "On one occasion, he held my hands and even ordered food for me," he fondly remembers.

Babu and Rathamma met each other at Sumanahalli and marriage was the natural result of understanding of each others travails.

Today, they are blessed with a healthy and beautiful baby girl Mamatha and are back with dignity in the folds of the society that once ostracized them.

MOB celebrates

International Women's Day

We are happy to announce the successful celebration of International Women's Day. This year, the MOB rural health centre, Mandya celebrated the International women's day.

Our CBR co ordinator Mr Jayanth Kumar was one of the chief guests at the function which saw a simple marriage ceremony conducted for two economically weak couple.

Mr Jayanth says that the event was organized exceptionally well, in the right spirit of the day. Around 1000 women from 40 Self Help Groups participated in the event which also had several exceptional women gracing the dais.

Among them were Sr Leela~ Director of MOB; Padmavathy Sreenivas, advocate; Jayanthi Devi, director of Nabard; KC Elda, chief of the Daughters of Church.

Other dignitaries included former Mandya MLA M S Athmananda; Father Selvanath of Swargarohana church, Pandavapura.

The event created a platform for women to share their anxiety, equal rights and gave them an opportunity to exhibit their abilities.

Mrs Sheila, staff of MOB was given an award on the occasion in recognition of her efforts to promote Self Help Groups for women. Simultaneously, best SHGs were also given awards in appreciation of their progress.

The programme was entirely organized and conducted by women.

Dear Friends,

Hope you find this issue of AMICI NEWS interesting. We are glad to share with you, that our website www.aifoindia.org has been updated with new links and more information.

Help us to make the web site and the newsletter a success. Let us know if anything interesting happens at your project. You may send us the details preferably with photographs, by e mail, post or even call Anuradha at the Bangalore office between 10am and 4 pm.

You may also contribute your own articles on topics related to our focus area of leprosy, CBR or children which will be published under your name. We will be glad to receive your comments and suggestions on both the newsletter and the website.

Regards,

Friends from Bangalore.