



# INNOCENTS RELIEF

*Helping poor children in developing countries since 1962*

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## From the President: September 2021

Welcome to our newsletter. This edition features reports from our three Centre Managers, progress on Special Projects and how our Centres are coping during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our major undertaking over the past twelve months has been the building and equipping of two new classrooms and toilet blocks for our two Timor Leste schools. This project, which is still ongoing, was made possible by an extremely generous donation from one of our members and highlights the value of our Special Project program.

Our next major project is support for a new Centre in Batase, Nepal. It will be jointly funded with the Friends of Himalayan Children which is a volunteer-run, humanitarian organisation working in remote and rural communities in Nepal.

While membership continued to decline over the past twelve months, our supporter base increased. Total income increased from \$341,952 in the 2019/20 FY to \$572,519 in the 2020/21 FY, an increase of \$230,567 or 67.42%. Operating costs were roughly the same but due to the increased income, overheads decreased from 1.76% to 0.93%.

Financial reports and the President's annual report are available on the website: [www.innocentsrelief.org.au](http://www.innocentsrelief.org.au)

At the recent Annual General Meeting (AGM), the motion that Innocents Relief (IR) proceed to incorporation was passed unanimously. IR will become a public company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act 2001 (C'th). The reasons for this move were outlined in the letter sent with the notice of the AGM.

Finally, on behalf of all the children and families who benefit from these projects, I would like to thank sincerely the amazing IR members and supporters who have made these projects possible. It is extremely heart-warming to see such wonderful people continuing to support the education of children to break the cycle of poverty.

Gregory J Seymour AM  
**President**



## Sponsors and donors for a new Centre in Nepal: *Can you help?*



The **Batase Boarding and Day School (NEP 01)** is two days' walk from Kathmandu. It provides education for local and disadvantaged students to Year 10. Housing in Batase is basic with no running water or electricity. Before the school was built, children left Batase to work on Kathmandu streets. Girls as young as 12 years could be forced into arranged marriages or tricked into prostitution or slavery in India. The Batase school has given parents hope for a better future for their children, particularly their daughters. The school's founder, Som, has also set up a trekking company through which boys and girls from the village are trained and employed to be guides.

***Annual sponsorship (\$180 per year) and/or support for Special Projects to provide a secure water supply and wages for two maths/science teachers are needed. Can you help?***

# SPECIAL PROJECTS

In the last two years IR's supporters have donated more than \$450,000 for Special Projects.



## Lunch Program, Kenya Chera Mission School, KEN02

Many people are starving in rural Kenya as a result of the pandemic. Fr George, the School's Director, has been trying to address the difficulties experienced in his community. IR has funded a special project to provide a maize and beans meal once a day for the many marginalised children who appear at his school at lunchtimes.

## Educational Tablets (Edu Tabs), Uganda St Matia Mulumba Solidarity Fund, UGA01

The school provides for the nutritional, medical and educational needs of HIV+ children in Kampala. These children are susceptible to COVID-19 and have not attended school for months. IR has funded 20 EduTabs to enable lessons to be delivered online plus interaction with teachers and learning from apps on the devices.



## Classroom and Toilet Block Construction, Timor Leste St John Paul II Catholic School, Maubara TLE01 and St John de Brito Catholic School, Epelo TLE02

Both schools are very grateful for the funds that have been donated by an IR member to build two classrooms and a toilet block at each school. Construction is progressing well. Improvements have also been made to the water supply at each school. Classroom furniture and equipment has also been bought. TLE 01 is hoping to add two more classrooms above the newly built ones and has planned for this in the construction phase. TLE 02 is hoping to build four more classrooms alongside the new ones.

## School Fees for Bright Students, Tanzania Three primary schools TAN04

The Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod have worked for years to build schools and bring education to children in remote areas. Sr Lucy oversees the support for three primary schools. Earlier this year she asked IR to pay the school fees for 15 very bright children in Mololo village who would otherwise not have the means to attend school. She reports that they are working hard and are happy to be at school.



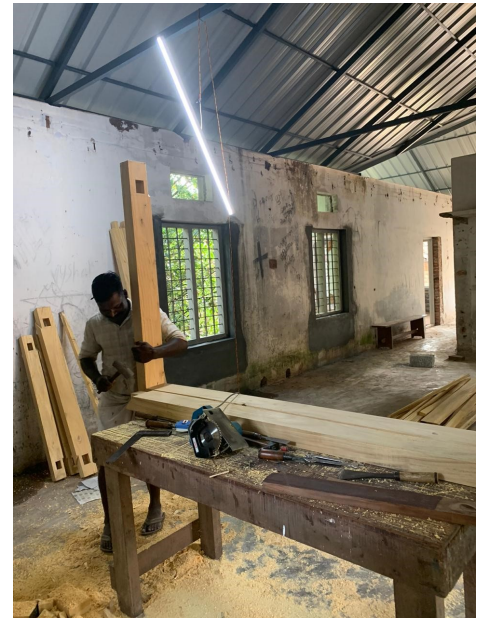


# MAKING EDUCATION POSSIBLE



## Classroom Repairs and Equipment, India Mary Immaculate School, Kanyakumari, IND02

A generous donation is funding the painting of run down classrooms, repairs to doors and windows, the purchase of computing equipment for teachers and the replacement of 150 student chairs.



## Study Hall Renovation, India St Vincent's Balabhavan, Thottakom, Kerala IND09

Renovation of the study hall to create a multi-purpose space has begun. This orphanage and boarding school for up to 60 destitute boys is in a marshy area and the boys cannot play outside in the wet season so it will be a great asset.

## Teachers' Wages, Malawi Malawi Kindergartens MAL01

Teachers in the main kindergarten in Bahkita were paid below the Malawi minimum wage for some time. Parents, trained to assist in more remote kindergartens, were working voluntarily. IR was able to send funds to increase the teachers' wages and to purchase bags of maize as an incentive for the volunteer teachers.



## Container for Timor Project, Timor Leste

The Container for Timor Project is an initiative of the Timor Leste Companions at Grovely Parish, the Order of St Lazarus and The Associated Schools. Donations of computers, printers, flat pack shelving, English reading books, sporting goods and school stationery are sought to fill a container that will be shipped to Dili when full, later this year. TLE01 and 02 will be included in the distribution. If you are able to donate any of the items listed above, please contact Mike Stevens at [mcfstevens@gmail.com](mailto:mcfstevens@gmail.com)

## Reports from Centre Managers India A: *Anne Halliday*



*Anne writes...* “Having retired as Education Consultant with the Adult Migrant English Program, working with migrants and refugees for over 25 years and having travelled in Africa and Asia, I am acutely aware of the importance of education in helping children out of poverty. Volunteering with Innocents Relief since 2019 has been a way to further contribute to this process”.

My role is to communicate and liaise with eight Centres in India. The Centres have managed to continue teaching their students in one way or another throughout the last twelve months, with the support of funds from IR. Special Project COVID-19 Relief funds have also assisted the Centres to provide relief such as basic food stuffs and medicines to very poor students and their families affected by the pandemic.

Although governments in India made several arrangements for students to continue learning, there were limited materials for primary students, most being focused on secondary education. Most of our Centres are based in rural areas with poor internet connections and students are from poorer families with limited or no access to technology.

Teachers themselves were not trained to conduct classes in an online environment and **Mary Immaculate School (IND 02)** Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu reported on the intense efforts by teachers to learn to use whatever technology was available and adapt this for the particular technology their students could access.

At **Little Flower Convents and School (IND 41)** Chennai, Tamil Nadu virtual education for hearing-impaired children has been conducted through various apps such as WhatsApp and Google Link for effective education by the special educators. The provision of laptops sponsored by IR for three special educators has been a boon and the teaching has been more interactive, efficient and effective as a result.

Several Centres reported other challenges. At **St John Vianney Girls School (IND 77)** Palliyadu, Tamil Nadu students and families were affected with a sense of helplessness as the pandemic raged on and students lost motivation and became distracted by television or the need to earn money to help their families. Fear and fake news contributed to this trend. The school provided medicines and food using Special Project COVID-19 funds and redoubled efforts to engage students through pre-recorded lessons and mobile technologies. Similar needs were met with IR funds donated to **Infant Jesus Girls High School (IND 06)** Mulagumoodu, Tamil Nadu supporting children who had lost parents and families with medical expenses.

Other inspiring efforts were reported, such as at **St Francis Xavier’s Convent and School (IND 52)** Srivilliputtur, Tamil Nadu, where weekday WhatsApp classes were carefully and creatively planned and each subject was covered on one day of the week. Later on, as some restrictions were lifted, teachers went to visit the houses of their students to help them and they came to know their students and their family better. IR funds allowed books, teacher created guides and videos to be distributed to children.

Teachers at our Centres continually adapted to the changing circumstances. At **St Vincent’s Home for Children (IND 07)** Adaikalapuram, Tamil Nadu many students could only access the family mobile phone in the evening so teachers conducted lessons at that time. During the day the teachers prepared study materials and delivered them to students’ homes and when restrictions eased they conducted football practice for the children.

In Kerala State, the families of students at **St Roch’s Convent School (IND 11)** Thiruvananthapuram had to cope with a natural disaster as well as the pandemic. Sea erosion meant that many students witnessed their houses and household articles being washed away. Many families are still living in rehabilitation centres. The pandemic meant that parents, most of whom are employee fishermen, could not work. IR donations helped fund the learning materials, phone lessons and assignments arranged by the school’s teachers plus emergency foodstuffs.

Sadly, the sickness and death of teachers were also reported. The Director of **St. Joseph’s Convent Primary and High School, (IND08)** Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu passed away from COVID-19 in March this year.



## Reports from Centre Managers INDIA B: *Mary Seymour*



*Mary writes:* “As a Periodontist and Associate Professor my research showed a clear connection between education levels and health disparities. After being a member of IR for over ten years, I began to volunteer in 2016 to further support the education of impoverished children. I look after nine Indian Centres.”

Another year has passed and the COVID-19 situation in some parts of India has worsened with schools remaining closed and reliant on online learning with inadequate Internet facilities and a lack of devices for some students. Our Centres in Kerala have particularly suffered with rapid spread of the virus creating chaos. To add to the distress the Indian Government brought in new legislation requiring all of our Centres to open bank accounts in New Delhi in order to be able to receive foreign funds. There were long delays associated with this, which meant that there were delays to funds usually sent in April.

Despite the difficulties over the last 12 months, all students at **St Vincent’s School Balabhavan (IND 09)**, Thottakom, Kerala passed their annual examinations with flying colours. However, one of the challenges now faced is students being cut off from a social life and the consequent psychological impact.

All Centres have had to work hard during the pandemic to ensure the children’s continuing education and welfare. COVID-19 Relief funds have assisted students at **Nazareth School (IND 45)**, Paduapuram, Kerala with the purchase of smart phones or tablets for online classes, plus medical expenses. But, unfortunately, we have had to end support for **St Vincent’s Boys Home (IND 46)**, Kaloor, Kerala due to lack of communication. This Centre is an orphanage that has always had problems with the Internet. We last heard from them in October when they reported on Special Project funds for repayment of a loan taken out for urgent building repairs.

The **Vimal Hriday Bennmanki Bihar School (IND 60)** Kollam, Kerala with over 400 students, lacks facilities for online classes and 100 rural students have no Internet facilities in their villages. Online classes via television cause stress in families with several children and only one television. To add to the distress, mothers had to move their children and belongings to safer places when quarantine was imposed on family members. IR funds helped 53 families with textbooks and study materials and provided food for many jobless people.

I am pleased to report that **Society of Daughters of the Cross Shraddha Niketan (IND 16)** Ankleshwar, Gujarat has at last completed their solar project after long delays due to the pandemic. This boarding school has 250 students and crippling power costs, hence the need for solar power. The pandemic has been a nightmare for them and the school remains closed. Staff have visited the villages but were not allowed to gather children together. Many parents are now jobless so it is unlikely they will be able to pay school fees or buy their children essential items.

**Holy Cross Convent (IND19)**, Ritapuram, Tamil Nadu is in a very poor rural area where most people live below the poverty line. They are very appreciative of our extra support and have been able to help the children and their families with food, clothing and medical expenses. Many had been unable to attend online classes due to lack of the Internet or mobile phones so were very grateful for the COVID-19 Relief funds enabling them to provide a number of children with mobile phones, and coaching classes.

Last year, Special Projects funded a new roof for **St Helen’s (IND 54)**, Lourdepuram, Kerala. The roof was leaking badly and has been replaced with a concrete roof. Classrooms are now all ready.

IR now supports two schools in Arunachal Pradesh. The **Gora Pertin Memorial School** and **St Joseph’s School (IND 62)** are in the Medo district where the people are poor and illiterate and the Government’s education program does not reach. The local community has requested secondary education. There is a shortage of classrooms. Special Project funds helped 89 girls from the border villages with textbooks and notebooks. Online classes during the pandemic have been a problem for most students due to a lack of Internet access or smart phones.

The **Avila Convent School (IND 66)**, Mysuru, Karnataka provides a boarding facility for girls from economically disadvantaged families but has remained closed throughout the pandemic.

## Reports from Centre Managers AFRICA: *Clare Carter*



*Clare writes:* "I started volunteering at IR in 2016 after being a donor for many years and visiting KEN 01 and IND 54. I am in awe of our Centre Directors whom I liaise with in Africa, Peru, PNG, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Nepal. Their dedication to the wellbeing of the children in their care during a pandemic is outstanding."

**Kenya** is experiencing its fourth wave of COVID-19 with only 2.2% of the population vaccinated. Fr Sunny at **SFS Integrated Primary School (KEN 01)**, Katani reports he is recovering from the virus, as are several of his students. IR funds have helped pay partial salaries for the teachers who continued classes online during nine months of lockdown. The funds also paid for the food and expenses of some students who did not have a home during that time. Internet connections were also funded for students studying from home. Students returned to school in January but many of their parents remain unemployed and unable to pay school fees.

Fr George at **Chera Mission School (KEN 02)** Chera, Kenya wrote to us earlier this year about a government directive in 2017 to add Years 7-9 (lower secondary) to each primary school. He asked for our help to construct five classrooms to address severe overcrowding in classrooms. Thanks to one of our benefactors, this work will commence in the coming months. Fr George reports that the children are overjoyed!

**Uganda** is experiencing its second wave of COVID-19 and is in its second lockdown. **St Matia Mulumba Solidarity Fund (UGA 01)** supports families with children living with HIV. These children are all vulnerable to the virus and have been learning from home since March last year. Our much-needed donations are being used to purchase medications, food and the textbooks and stationery they need to learn from home.

**Tanzania** is experiencing its third wave of the pandemic. Sr Anne at **Anwarite Secondary Girls School (TAN 01)** Moshi, and Sr Lucy at **Holy Cross, Mtoni Kijichi and Mololo Primary Schools (TAN 04)** have both contracted and recovered from COVID-19. They have been busy looking after many of their sisters who have also contracted the virus. Our COVID-19 Relief funds are being used to support eight homeless children and many differently abled students who are now living at Holy Cross. Their parents are unemployed and struggling to feed them. TAN 01 has used COVID-19 Relief funds to support very poor families in the area with food, medication and blankets.

The ten kindergartens IR supports in **Malawi (MAL 01)** have not reported staff, children or parents contracting COVID-19 as they are in a rural, more remote area of Malawi. Parents, however, have lost their incomes. The Director, Sr Giovanna, has used COVID-19 Relief funds to purchase blankets for 104 children as winter this year has been particularly cold. IR has also funded school fees, soap and stationery for the children.

**South Africa** is currently experiencing its third wave of COVID-19 with less than 2% of the population vaccinated. All three Centres have been in a self-imposed lockdown since March last year, homeschooling the children in their care. These Centres have been doing a remarkable job ensuring that their children continue their education. They keep them occupied with scheduled time for sport, craft and games and try to make their time in the Centres as homelike as possible. The **Holy Family Care Centre (SAF 03)** has employed live-in tutors who are liaising with the childrens' teachers to keep them on track. IR COVID-19 Relief funds have been used to pay these tutors a small wage and to purchase school supplies. They have recently taken in two babies to add to their growing number of babies and toddlers. IR funds are also used to buy baby formula and other necessities, including anti-retroviral drugs which are needed by many of the HIV+ children in our African Centres.

## Reports from Centre Managers SRI LANKA, PERU, PNG, TIMOR LESTE: *Clare Carter*

COVID-19 has been particularly brutal in **Peru** which has experienced the highest death rate as a proportion of the population in the world. Twenty children in the school IR supports in Lima have lost family members, including the loss of parents. Twenty children in the school have had COVID-19. 69% of the parents at the school are now unemployed. 27% of people in Lima now live below the poverty line. This is gauged by how many people can purchase a basket of essential consumption goods. There are now over 30 communal kitchens in Lima feeding 250,000 people. The kitchens are struggling to find enough food as rations provided by the government are difficult to access. Our funds to **Manuel Duato School, Lima (PER 01)** are being used to purchase food for the many families who are in dire financial difficulty.

Vaccine hesitancy is the biggest problem facing **Papua New Guinea**, particularly in the regional areas. It is difficult to estimate the extent of COVID-19 there as test results take at least three weeks. There has been one confirmed death, and two more suspected deaths in Aitape. The policy at **St Ignatius School** has been to lockdown the campus. One of the biggest problems encountered has been a shortage of water. The situation was exacerbated by the Government's decision to re-direct the nearby Raihu River to eliminate flooding during the wet season. This has resulted in a dry riverbed during the dry season but continued flooding during the wet season. COVID-19 funds have been directed towards the installation of roof guttering and water tanks to provide drinking water, clothes and hand washing .

**Sri Lanka** presently has 23,000 active cases of COVID-19 and 1,300 new cases per day. As many of the children and adults at **Prithipura Communities (SLA 01)** are physically vulnerable, they have been in lockdown since March last year. IR's most recent COVID-19 Relief funds allowed them to purchase nutritious lunches for residents. Other IR funds have paid for rehabilitation, transport and medical expenses.

A destructive cyclone in **Timor Leste** this year caused major flooding and landslides in Dili and Liquica displacing 13,500 people. Disaster Relief funds purchased food and other necessities for 82 families who lost their belongings and homes. **St John De Brito Catholic School in Aipelo (AKA Epelo)** experienced damage to its roof, windows, doors and furniture. These have all been repaired or replaced with IR funds. Classroom and toilet block construction funded by Special Project funds continues.



## How to donate

***Your gift, large or small, is greatly appreciated and will be used wisely.***

**BSB No:** 124001. **Account No:** 10110882. **Account Name:** Innocents Relief. **Reference:** Your name.

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