

It is December again and Sylvia is just about to complete her 35th year of service to the poor, sick and disabled in her remote and still deprived part of South India.

As I reported last year, some services continue more or less unchanged and some things alter. In 2016 this is again the case – though even more so.

In the School for the Deaf, numbers have increased to 207 with this year's intake including a number of slightly older children who have tried to study at "regular" schools and found the provision for their deafness totally inadequate.

A great deal of remedial work is, of course, required with these additional children; the staff are tackling this with great energy and success.

Exam results have again been excellent and almost all the 6th form leavers have gone on to further education at colleges and universities, some helped by our bursary fund.

IT provision, which was kicked off by Roundhay Rotary has been further consolidated and is being extended from the IT centre into the classrooms; the staff and the children are delighted to have this new, visual way of teaching and learning.

The school website is up and running, the three IT teachers are steadily maturing, the syllabus is settling down and the children are unbelievably enthusiastic.

Audiology provision has gone from strength to strength. This project was given a boost by Headingley Rotary who funded the first 40 pairs of good quality digital hearing aids and now the number of children fitted has reached 190. All the remaining children will be fitted next June.

We have had great help from the Hear the World Foundation, a UK speech therapist and individual donors. Four teachers have been trained in basic audiology and the Hearing Aid Project, led by Dianne Ward of our SWAG group, is now moving on to improve speech therapy.

The improvements in their speech (and the increase in the noise level in the school) are astonishing.

The school children have always been happy and have always received an excellent education but these recent developments in IT, English, hearing and speech are also greatly enhancing their social skills, confidence and employability.

The Nursing College continues to turn out qualified nurses with good skills and a caring attitude. 100 are now qualified and there are 60 in training.

Out of an intake of 163 since 2009, only three have dropped out and all those who have qualified have readily found nursing jobs. They are a great source of pride to their families and a great example of female empowerment.

The dedicated staff at the Day Centres continue to give outstanding care to 80 children with severe mental and physical disabilities, albeit within very limited facilities. As you know, our main current project is the provision of a new Education & Therapy Centre on the school campus. This will replace the old dilapidated centres and is now almost complete. It will provide more space, light, sensory stimulation and enhanced therapies, together with a small therapy pool.

The number of disabled children admitted will be increased to 100 and the Centre will provide care to additional patients on a clinic and a home care basis.

The building will be completed in February and formally opened in March. The children will love it.

The Hospital still runs well and still offers a high quality service in a caring environment.

However, at long last, much better government medical provision is in place with a large new hospital in the town and a network of day clinics. Little by little, Sylvia's patients are finding this free provision to be a satisfactory alternative and the number of patients in Sylvia's hospital is slowly dwindling.

Sylvia has filled an enormous gap for 35 years and successfully built a bridge from a time when there was virtually no medical provision for the poor in the Tiruvannamalai district to a much better situation today. Her achievement is a remarkable one. It is now time to move on.

Sylvia and the Trust are seriously considering a major switch of emphasis from mainly medical provision to the management and treatment of disability where there is still a huge need.

In the past year, Sylvia has again had many visitors including Trustees. As ever, they have all come back hugely impressed and committed. Visitors have included 7 GAP students, 4 audiologists, two physiotherapists, a speech therapist, a nurse and many others.

In the UK, we continue to do our best. We have a range of skills in the Trust though additional offers of help would be most valuable, especially from those with experience in the fields of education, nurse training, disability and those with leadership skills, reflecting of course the changes in India.

Our support group (SWAG) continues to give valuable practical support and we continue to work with UK schools through Andrew Lowe (01937 834361) and Bernadette Barnes (01765 278247). Additional school contacts are always welcome as are opportunities for our Trustees to speak at church or social gatherings via our talks organiser Anne-Marie Rose (01132 685423)

Sponsorship, which is looked after by Angela Clarke (01132 677660) is going well and there is now an opportunity to sponsor the children in the new Education & Therapy Centre as well as the deaf children.

I am grateful as always to all who help with our many tasks - records, mailings, Christmas Cards, talks, visits, publicity, web site, Gift Aid, accounts etc. This dedicated help allows us to continue our proud record of sending Sylvia more than 97 pence out of every pound we raise.

You are a marvellous, friendly and loyal group of supporters. Yet again I have been encouraged and humbled by your continued generosity which has helped Sylvia to achieve so much for so long!

God bless you all this Christmas and in 2017

Tony Allinson

Chairman

Patrons: The Abbot of Ampleforth, The Catholic Bishop of Leeds, The Anglican Bishop of Leeds,

The Chairman Leeds Methodist District, Leeds Hindu Temple, The Moderator URC Yorkshire Province.