

Kerala Crafts



Newsletter Spring 2025



VIMALA WELFARE CENTRE (Vimalalayam)



Sisters at Vimalalayam



Vimalalayam circa 1978

The **Vimala Welfare Centre** continues to be a beacon of light in the community after 62 years of service. Currently there are 76 artisans working, be it making basket ware, stitching sarees or making baby clothes. All the ladies are given a Home Unit facility and come to the centre at fixed intervals to deliver their completed items. At present 46 women work in the fibre section and 30 in the ready made garment making facility.



Special trip to Velankanni, Tamil Nadu for artisans



Intricate stitching on handicrafts

As well as providing work and a much-needed income, there have been a number of events during the year involving both staff and artisans. **Vimalalayam** has played host to many programmes – all of which promote the role of women in society and includes the students at the Vimalalayam college, as well as the artisans and hostel girls, and the **Pallavom** project.



A free training programme hosted by Vimalalayam on **Retail Management** was provided for students, who all received a certificate.



As a part of a digital transformation scheme organised by the **National NGO Federation**, students were able to receive laptops at half the market price. Hundreds of students were present and they all received laptops.

Women's Day included talks about the role of women in the modern world and how to overcome the challenges. This included a cultural programme related to women empowerment performed by the students.



Sr.Sophy presenting laptops



Women's Day talks



Mission Sunday



Sophy teaching with Mary assisting



Women learning new skills

Sr. Sophy (president-cum-superior) was invited to conduct a 5 day training course for rural women. This was organised by the **National Rural Livelihood Mission Training** at Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh. Accompanied by Mary (artisan trainer), this was a great opportunity to expand their training to help other rural women develop their skills.



Job Fair



Christmas celebrations '24

A job fair also took place at Vimalalayam for the students, and picnics and gifts at Christmas were well received by the workers.

PALLAVOM (Tender Shoots)

This group of young women has grown in the last year, so that now there are 20 young women whom Sr. Sophy describes as the 'Pearls of Vimalalayam'. The girls join the group after the completion of their secondary education.



Year on year sees their talents and skills increase – so much so, that goods are available to buy in the **Vimala Welfare Centre shop** as well exhibiting their articles for sale outside the centre. This is due to the great encouragement and practical help given by the staff, and the standard of the work is very high.

As well as developing life skills, the women continue to learn cutting, tailoring, drawing, painting, clay modelling, jewellery making and banana fibre work.

A three-month free crafts training course sponsored by the **Federal Bank** has helped these young ladies towards financial independence and self employment. At the beginning of the year the girls also started a Basic Level Computer Course certified by the Government of Kerala, lasting 3 months.



Introduction to computers



Pallavom girls enjoying a day out at the pool followed by a picnic

The Christmas celebration at the Vimala Welfare Centre was on 19th December and the Pallavom girls also actively participated in the whole event, performing a special cultural programme as well as enjoying a special lunch together. Their confidence continues to grow, and Kerala Crafts is determined to continue to help finance this group.

The Pallavom students had an opportunity to be a part of the Christmas celebration which was exclusively arranged by the **Prarthana Foundation**, North Paravur. They were very excited and happy to attend. They won First Prize in the carol competition, which filled them with immense joy as they had tried their best by practising frequently. A special appreciation was given to the students for their participation. Well done to them all!



Pallavom girls receiving First Prize



Craft work



Pallavom girls enjoying their craft work



With Rose

MOOLAMPILLY, KADAMAKUDY & GOTHURUTH



Sr Divya with well-used scooter to access islands



Ambulance at Kadamakudy



Approaching Kadamakudy by the old ferry

The motor scooter has proved invaluable for Sisters visiting families in need especially at Moolampilly - courtesy of Computer Network Defence Ltd, Corsham. This has enabled the Sisters to make frequent visits to families on the islands at minimal cost, providing valuable service, help and support.

Since our last visit, the much-awaited water metro ferry service is now up and running, which is of immense benefit to people living on the islands located off Kochi, especially Moolampilly and Kadamakudy, which have little bus connectivity.

However, even though the water metro is a great asset, many locals are unable to afford this mode of transport and revert to the old ferry crossing as a cheaper option (Rs 2 versus Rs40).

Fr. Merton who was the priest at Kadamakudy and whom we met in December 2023 has now moved on to work in Burari, on the outskirts of Delhi. We have yet to meet his successor, but hope to visit the island on our next trip, hopefully for January 2026 and we will continue to help fund the ambulance.

In July '24, a new member joined the community at Gothuruth, working with Reeta, Irez and Agnes. Her role as a counsellor will be working with the households on the island who experience many problems within their families.

VALSALYA BHAVAN & VALSALYA BHAVAN ANNEX

Over the last year, as situations change amongst the girls for various reasons, some girls move on to different accommodation or are reunited with their family, and new girls in need arrive.

Valsalya Bhavan, Ammathotttil

Age group 6 – 12 years, Total girls 20



Just a few of the highlights of the younger girls at Ammathottil include:

A visit by the **Murivilangu Arts & Sports Club**, gave the girls a fun day demonstrating to the girls that they are supported by the wider community.

A visit from **Councillor Sakeer and Vodafone** staff gave gifts of books and educational materials to the girls.



Making pens



Making earrings



The girls also embraced a craft class organised by the **Mind Empowering Group**, where they made beautiful and eco-friendly pens using recycled paper. This showed the wonderful creativity and environmental consciousness of the students. It allowed them to express their artistic skills as well as the importance of sustainability – an example of how small changes in our daily lives can collectively lead to significant positive impacts on the environment.

There are 4 students who have excelled and deserve recognition.



Sree Priya



Tanuja



Lakshmi



Zara

Sree Priya won first prize in a school level quiz competition. As a result she has been selected to represent her school in the prestigious district-level quiz competition '*Aksharamuttam-Padanolsavam 2024*'. We are incredibly proud of her and look forward to seeing her shine even brighter at forthcoming higher level events. Her remarkable performance and dedication to academic excellence has earned her the top-spot among her peers.

Tanuja earned a grade A in Sanskrit. This demonstrates her outstanding proficiency and deep understanding of this classical language. Her hard work and commitment have paid off, earning her special recognition from the esteemed Sree Shankara University, Kalady, with a prize of which she should be justly proud.

Lakshmi shone in the district level book binding competition achieving first place. Her dedication, skill and attention to detail set her work apart and earned her this well-deserved recognition. This accomplishment not only showcases Lakshmi's talent but also highlights the commitment of Valsalya Bhavan to nurture the unique skills and potential of each student. Her UK sponsors say 'We are super proud of her'.

Zara won first prize in a running competition. Her outstanding performance and talent earned her this well-deserved recognition, and we are very proud of her. This reflects Zara's dedication and skill and we send her our congratulations and know that her achievement will encourage others to follow their dreams too.

Valsalya Bhavan Annex, Vaduthala

Age group 13 – 18yrs, Total girls 25



Sajana 91%



Kavya Suresh 87%



Krishna Priya 87%

Sajana says 'I was provided with all the help & facilities for my studies, including tuition classes which contributed a lot to my academic performance. I thank Valsalya Bhavan for taking care of us & fulfilling all our needs'.

There are outstanding results from both the boys and girls in their SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) examinations with three of the girls achieving high grades. These 3 girls received scholarships as cash awards for their academic excellence. Scholarships awarded by 'Guardians of Dreams' is a social set up dedicated to providing quality life outcomes for children living in orphanages and shelters in India. Their recognition highlights their hard work and perseverance to continue with higher studies and underscores the importance of education and the potential to achieve their dreams.

Only one of the girls above (**Sajana**) has a sponsor – please could you consider sponsoring a girl to enable her to go forward into further education? More details on the website www.keralacrafts.co.uk

2024 saw a number of events taking place for the girls at the annex:



Observing International Yoga Day



Monthly talent event

In June the girls observed **International Yoga Day**, an event which emphasised the significance of yoga enhancing both physical and mental health. Engaging in different yoga sessions, the children demonstrated their ability and acquired new poses with help from skilled instructors. The goal was to promote the various advantages of yoga such as enhanced flexibility, strength and relaxation, and the benefits of integrating yoga into everyday routines.

The monthly talent events tap into the skills and abilities of the girls. With storytelling and elocution competitions, each activity provides a valuable platform for children to express themselves and build their confidence. These are not just competitions but are important milestones in their journey towards personal growth and self confidence.



Ghandi Jayanti



Sajal with pet dog Mikku



'Eyes so bright, smiles so wide poor they might be, but they burst with life'

The girls also celebrated **Gandhi Jayanti** (a national holiday in India to celebrate the birth of Gandhi) on 2nd October, with a heartfelt tribute to Mahatma Gandhi highlighting his life and teachings. The event commenced with an inspiring speech rich with Gandhian quotes and messages, providing the children with profound insights into the values of this iconic leader. After the speech the girls presented a poignant skit that vividly brought Gandhian ideals to life, showcasing the core values of truth, non-violence and simplicity through a moving and articulate performance. To further engage the audience, a quiz competition on Gandhi's life and philosophy was held, testing the students' knowledge and generating enthusiasm.



Outing to Wonderla for both boys & girls gives the children a break from routine giving them an unforgettable experience

Some events were celebrated with girls from both homes joining together with the boys' home. One such occasion was in June for the **Mela 24**, (More Entertainment, Learning & Adventure) - a summer camp organised by Fr. Thomas conducting educational and recreational activities focussing on enhancing students' English language proficiency.

Also in June, **Family Day** was hosted at Palluruthy (boys' home) and attended by both groups of girls. Children, staff and alumni were brought together in a vibrant display of unity and festivity. One of the evening's highlights included a performance by Valsalya Bhavan in dance, music and drama.

In October, the **YAR** (Youth at Risk) National Seminar 2024 took place. This was organised by Don Bosco Sneha Bhavan inviting key stakeholders in child welfare – social workers, community leaders, reps from YAR centres of Don Bosco across India, all dedicated to strengthening family and community involvement in supporting at risk youth.



Showcasing their talents through joyful dances, soulful songs and expressive skits – captivating the audience with their enthusiasm and creativity



Keynote speakers

Keynote speakers/sessions were held on:

- Family based care over institutionalisation
- Legal frameworks surrounding child protection in India
- Experiences in kinship care, foster care and after care
- A child protection specialist from **UNICEF** talked of the importance of community involvement in child care

Their performances are a testament to the supportive environment fostered at Don Bosco where children feel safe to explore their potential and express themselves. The attendees including dignitaries and community members who were visibly moved by the children’s energy and resilience reflecting the seminar’s mission of empowering youth.



The girls say ‘we dance to express not to impress’



All aboard the Metro to Lulu Mall

Both orphanage girls had an exciting adventure as they travelled by Metro to **Lulu Mall** to watch the educational 3D movie ‘Space Safari’. The journey was filled with laughter and anticipation and their joy was evident as they enjoyed every moment of this unique experience. This outing was not just about watching a movie, but about creating cherished memories and sparking curiosity about the wonders of space!

However, the main celebration of the year was the **Golden Jubilee of Sneha Bhavan** (boys’ section) which started on 26th January with the main event held on 9th November - a grand manner of celebration reflecting five decades of impactful service. Many guests and VIP’s were shown a video presentation showcasing Sneha Bhavan over 50 years. The children’s performance included dance and cultural items which added a festive flair to the evening.



Dance has the power to weave magic into our lives



Dancing for a better world filled with kindness, compassion & unity

ANOTHER SUCCESS STORY – SONIA



Sonia as a young girl
Ltd



Presented with a laptop from Fr. Thomas



Sonia with her computer kindly donated by CND

Sonia wrote to her sponsor in The Netherlands, who has supported her for many years:

‘I am over joyed to share the wonderful news that I have successfully passed my post B.Sc. examination in first class. To make it even more special, I have secured rank in the foundation subject. This wouldn't have been possible without your unwavering support and generosity.

Thank you once again for being such an important part of my life and for believing in me. Your kindness and support mean the world to me’.

Sonia also writes at Christmas:

'As for my future plans, I am preparing to embark on an exciting journey. I have decided to pursue a course in February that will pave the way for me to work in studies in Arabia. I am thrilled about this opportunity and eager to see where this new chapter leads me '

Fr. Thomas (Chief Functionary) wrote at Christmas expressing his gratitude for Kerala Crafts' sponsorship scheme:

'Your selfless support and generosity have made a significant difference in the lives of these young ones, providing them with a safe haven, education and a chance to grow into capable and compassionate individuals. Your trust and investment in our mission have enabled us to continue serving the most vulnerable and marginalised children in our community.'

Only 11 out of 45 girls at the homes have a named sponsor. If you feel moved to help be a part of their lives, please do consider becoming a sponsor. It is a privilege to be a part of a girl's life – and they truly treasure the contact with you. Sponsorship can be between £10 and £30 a month. Please get in touch if you can help.

www.keralacrafts.co.uk

The girls we sponsor say: '..... for us you mean so much since we don't have anyone' and '....very often I take the photograph of you with me and it makes me feel happy'

CRAFTING FUTURES

In our last newsletter we stated that with help from The Souter Charitable Trust, the boys' home has started a new initiative specifically aimed for boys who are struggling academically but have a keen interest and aptitude for arts and crafts. This project has proved a great success and one student has displayed remarkable skill in the art of wood-working and crafting with coconut shells. What started as a hobby has flourished into an amazing display of talent.

The craftsmanship includes intricately designed items such as scooters, aeroplanes, key holders and a variety of other practical and beautiful creations made from natural materials. Kerala means 'Land of Coconuts', so utilising the abundance of this natural product is very apt!



The artist remains humble about his accomplishment and is committed to inspiring and fostering creativity among his peers, continuously working to cultivate a supportive and collaborative environment. This narrative effectively illustrates how investing in nurturing talent and providing opportunities can lead to significant positive transformations.

SARA ANTONY

Previously we reported that Sara had begun work at Trivandrum Airport following training in Bangalore.



In August Sara was delighted to tell us that she has now transferred to work at Kochi Airport which is just what she wished for as her parents live in Aluva just north of Kochi city centre, and this enables her to live at home. The round trip to and from her home to work is 30kms, and to make this viable, Kerala Crafts has given her funding towards buying an electric scooter which she can charge whilst at work. Sara had planned on taking out a loan but this would have been for 4 years, leaving her with little wages left, as well as having to pay off a loan borrowed for the deposit.

This will make a huge difference to her, and she has worked so hard, passing her last exam in December with high grades, so that she is now a certified scanner. We wish her well in her new post.

NIYAS & NOOR THE TAILOR

Though we have ceased the retail arm of Kerala Crafts, we are still in close contact with both Niyas (our man on the ground) and Noor. In fact, due to popular demand and requests, we are hoping to be able to offer our famous boxer shorts once again. This is in response to the many enquiries we have had from satisfied customers. I will be emailing past customers when products are available – so watch this space!



Niyas



Noor



In June we enabled Niyas to purchase the auto rickshaw that he was renting daily; this makes a big difference to him, and gives him security for his future as well as being able to transport his family on local trips. He had to sell his car, as he couldn't afford to run it.

Like many others, Niyas has had a lot of problems within his family and we have been able to help to give him and his family a better standard of living.

KANNAN

Institution SRM Medical College Hospital And Research Centre						
S.No.	SEMESTER	CODE	COURSE DESCRIPTION	CREDIT	GRADE	RESUL
July - 2024						
1	6	BRT18601	MEDICAL LAW AND ETHICS	3	B	PASS
2	6	BRT18602	BASIC LIFE SUPPORT	2	A+	PASS
3	6	BRT18603	PHYSICS AND TECHNIQUES OF ADVANCED IMAGING TECHNOLOGY	5	B+	PASS
4	6	BRT18604	PHYSICS AND TECHNIQUES OF ADVANCED IMAGING TECHNOLOGY - PRACTICAL	5	A	PASS
5	6	BRT18605	REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DIAGNOSTIC RADIOLOGY	4	A	PASS
6	6	BRT18606	REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DIAGNOSTIC RADIOLOGY - PRACTICAL	2	A+	PASS

We are pleased to report that Kannan has passed all his subjects obtaining a B.Sc. in Medical Imaging Technology from SRM Medical College, Chennai. He is currently working in a hospital for his internship & graduates in October.

We are so proud of all these individuals known to us who have proved that with help and support, and being given the chance, can really shine and achieve great things.

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO SUPPORTS US!

NEXT YEAR WILL BE OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY