

Kerala Crafts

Supporting marginalised women & girls in south India



Newsletter Spring 2026

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Celebrating 25 years!



I can't believe that 25 years has passed since I first arrived in Kerala, never imagining that Kerala Crafts would have enabled me to meet so many amazing people and witness the wonderful hospitality and kindness of Keralan folk.



This year, I was fortunate to have my friend Sue accompany me on the trip. I have known Sue for many years, and I was thrilled to have her company.

Sue has been a loyal supporter of the orphanage for many years, as has her sister and late mother – and felt an affinity to the folk in Kerala. Sue makes hand-made cards and last Christmas, gave her profits to Kerala Crafts. This deeply touched me and I am happy to know that she really enjoyed the trip.

SUE'S VISIT TO KERALA JAN/FEB 2026



Sue's Story...

I have been a supporter of Kerala Crafts for a number of years now, sponsoring several of the girls.

I had mentioned to Chris in passing many years ago that one day I would love to visit Kerala with her and see the work of the charity.

Well, moving on many years and after reading Chris's annual newsletter in the Spring of 2025 where she mentioned she was planning to visit again in January 2026, I was very cheeky and asked if I could go with her!

How happy I was when she said yes. Following months of planning, we set off on January 19th. After 2 flights (which included a short stopover in Dubai), we landed in Cochin, India on the morning of the 20th.

The immigration process was not the nicest of experiences, but once through we were met by Niyas (a friend of Chris's) and his brother-in-law who were going to drive us to our destination of Fort Cochin. The 2-week trip was going to consist of visiting the various centres/orphanages the charity supports and for me to experience everything India!



I was deeply touched and moved by the fabulous work the sisters (nuns) do in both girls' orphanages, the welfare centre for the marginalised women and at the day centre for the older girls who are quite mentally handicapped. I got through quite a few tissues with all the tears I shed. All the sisters were so kind to me and made me feel very welcome.

The first visit to the younger girls' orphanage was really moving especially when I walked two little girls aged 4 and 5 who had only been there 2 weeks. They absolutely melted my heart.

The 4 year old's story was that she was there because her mummy begged on the trains in Tamil Nadu. Such a sad situation but both these little girls seemed happy.

Visiting the older girls' orphanage was also lovely and whilst there, I was able to make handmade cards with many of them. They were all so very talented and unbeknown to me, they were making me a birthday card which was presented to me just before we left.



One special thing I will treasure is being gifted a beautiful sari by Shyju and his wife Anu (the Indian trustees of Kerala Crafts) and they asked a professional to come and dress us in our saris properly – I (and am sure Chris did too) felt a million dollars.



I have so many happy memories (too many to mention) which will always stay in my heart, but I can honestly say the trip was absolutely amazing from start to finish, and I thank Chris from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to share the trip with her.

Sue x

VIMALA WELFARE CENTRE

As we visited the Vimala Welfare Centre recently, celebrating their 65th anniversary this year, we received such a warm welcome. We received garlands and the girls sang songs of welcome and thanks. We felt so humble that those who have so little, give so much. They really appreciate the support (not only financial), but the personal interest we take in each person.

Last year saw Sr. Sophy move on to pastures new. Sophy had been at VWC for several years and is now working in a diocesan college at Kannur, 170 miles north of Cochin. We wish her well in her post and thank her for all she achieved.



Sr. Seline has taken up her mantle. It is always a pleasure to visit the centre and see the ongoing work for marginalised women. It was great to meet Seline in person after months of back-and-forth emails.

Sadly, a few of the older Sisters have passed away, and those remaining are becoming frail. Elizabeth and Aleykutty passed away last year.

Elsy (above) was the first Secretary of the centre when I visited in 2001, and despite having broken her hip in August she is recovering well and still had that warm smile, so beloved.



The centre continues its sterling work by making its unique baskets and handicrafts, as well as the exquisite baby dresses with their renowned smocking and embroidery detail.

We bought goods to bring back to sell, to raise awareness and to support the fantastic work that continues there.



I was reminded that the fibre unit were recycling and using locally sourced, natural, sustainable raw materials long before 'saving the planet' became a thing!

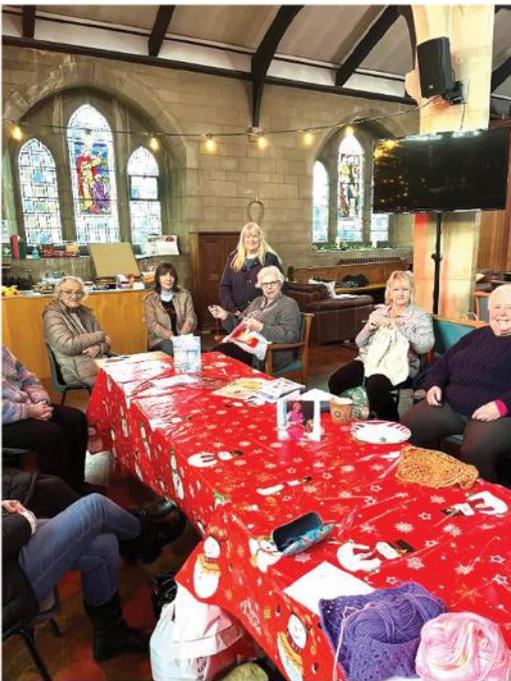


The first floor still has the sewing machine training with plenty of takers.



The nearby outreach at Moolampilly (Neha Centre), the artisans at the Vimala Welfare Centre and the Pallavom students all received gifts and crafts sent from the UK for Christmas.





The knitting group at my local church, had sent knitted and crocheted goods for all the groups affiliated to the centre, Seline distributed them and they were much appreciated.



PALLAVOM (TENDER SHOOTS)

This group of specially abled girls continues to grow and thrive. Seline commented how much the lives of the girls have been transformed since coming to the centre. It was lovely to see some familiar faces and some new ones.



Sophy had told me that the Pallavom girls scored good marks in their computer courses, and some may be able to find a job in data entry. In fact, Seline informed me that 2 of the girls had now got jobs – a great achievement for them, which would not have happened without the support of the centre.



VALSALYA BHAVAN ANNEX (older girls)



We were welcomed as ever, when we visited both the younger girls and older girls' orphanages - Valsalya Bhavan (Home of Affection)



We enjoyed a creative afternoon with the girls, making cards and teaching knitting and crochet. The girls were eager to learn new skills with much enthusiasm, concentration and patience.

However, on 31st January, all the girls came together, including the boys from Sneha Bhavan, to celebrate the Feast of Don Bosco (the founder of the Don Bosco charity). Sue and I were invited and as we sat among the 140 youngsters, felt overjoyed to witness their energy, enthusiasm and confidence as they danced and sang. The smaller children were absolutely enthralled by the event, and hung on every word, song or dance being performed.



Fortunately for us, Sonia Thomas was present – one of the girls who had been at Valsalya Bhavan for many years. In 2 days' time she was due to fly to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, to begin her career as a Staff Nurse.

The timing could not have been better, as on my last few trips I had not been able to see her as she was working away. Due to her perseverance and hard work, she is now ready to begin her career, which will pay her 5 times the salary she could earn in India.

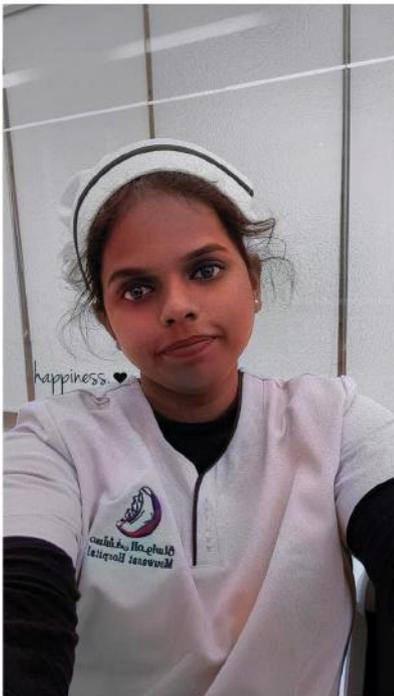
From brokenness to brilliance.....

Sonia was invited to the stage and talked very eloquently of how frightened she was on her arrival at VB as a small child. She went on to explain how the experience of being at VB had given her confidence, had brought her out of her shell and she developed self-worth – a very inspiring talk for all those present.

Sonia expressed her gratitude to Valsalya Bhavan and Kerala Crafts for all the support she has received over the years which enabled her to progress to the career of her dreams. This must include Marit, her sponsor from The Netherlands for many years, for her kind and generous parting gift and the many years of loyal sponsorship.



Sonia came under the care of Don Bosco Welfare Centre Society after a family crisis left her emotionally distressed and socially isolated. Admitted to Valsalya Bhavan she received counseling, compassionate support and a structured environment from loving sisters that restored her confidence and dignity.



Though initially withdrawn, she chose to rebuild her life through education. She scored 89% in Class 10, completed General Nursing & Midwifery with first class at Medical Trust Hospital, and later Post B.Sc. Nursing.

Her dedication earned her 9th rank in the exam held by Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences.

Kerala Crafts paid the lion's share for Sonia to get to Saudi Arabia including visa and ticket costs, Saudi licence classification cost, medical certification, certificate attestation, clothing & luggage and her first month's expenses.



Fr. Joe (previous Executive Director) said *'Valsalya Bhavan is a home, a family where girls can taste human goodness. Their cry for affection, acceptance and recognition needs urgent response'*.



Could you consider sponsoring a child?

23 girls are still in need of a sponsor. It is simple and easy to set up and can range from between £10 and £30. Please get in touch – your sponsorship will have a great impact on their lives, knowing that somebody is thinking of them.



Fr. Thomas (Executive Director) sends me regular newsletters, and the special events organised for the girls are very meaningful, practical and helpful.

Early in 2025 the older girls had a legal awareness session to educate them about their rights and responsibilities. Legal experts provided valuable insights into laws protecting women and girls – to uphold their dignity and wellbeing.

In March, the annex hosted an event to honour the achievements and resilience of women. It inspired and encouraged the girls while promoting gender equality. Debates helped them build confidence and improve public speaking.

Sree Priya must be congratulated on earning top position in her 2nd mid-term examination

On 21st April, the annex celebrated Art Day – dedicated to creativity and self-expression.



The girls explored their artistic talents through activities including CD painting, glass bottle painting and embroidery. They proudly showcased their imagination, transforming simple objects into beautiful works of art.

On 30th July, the girls celebrated Children's Conclave Day – creating a vibrant space with the girls expressing talents and ideas through, dance, music & art.



On 3rd August, Friendship Day was celebrated with happiness and heartfelt bonding.

One memorable day for the girls was a trip to Vypin Beach. It proved a refreshing break from routine – enjoying sea, sand and fresh air.



A **Mental Health Day** programme was also held at the annex, focussing on promoting emotional well-being and psychological awareness amongst adolescent girls.

The session introduced practical coping strategies to help girls understand their emotions and manage stress in healthy constructive ways.



A **Vision Board Making Project** encouraged girls to reflect on their dreams, goals and aspirations through creative art and self-expression, finding a meaningful outlet to express hope and direction.

The girls received **Career Guidance** – focussing on practical steps for professional self-discovery and informed decision making. Sessions equipped students with tools to understand their strengths and approach their futures with clarity and confidence.

There was an offer of a one year paid job through Cyril Roy Consultancy – a bridge programme designed to provide real-world work experience while helping participants identify their true field of interest.



VALSALYA BHAVAN (younger girls)



Our day spent with the girls at Thammanam was truly a magical time. On the day we visited, the children were treated to a traditional Keralan meal, provided by a local dentist, who chose to celebrate her birthday by providing lunch. Sr. Shiny and Mary helped Swami and her husband serve up the delicious food, which we also shared. This was followed by an amazing chocolate cake, after we had all sung happy birthday. The children loved every minute!

This was a great idea that I've noticed on previous visits, and a lovely way to celebrate your special occasion, anniversary, birthday etc. If you would like to feed the children in our centres, multiply your joy, share and celebrate with the children, please get in touch. £50 covers a meal and cake for all the girls.

WASHING DISHES	
Monday	Abigail
Tuesday	Bhavani
Wednesday	Bakym
Thursday	Kareena
Friday	Kin-rii
Saturday	Lakshmi
Sunday	Maria
Monday	Maria
Tuesday	Tamija
Wednesday	Vaika
Thursday	Viji
Friday	Pon3

BELL	TIME
Yoga Bell	5.30 am
Study Bell	6.30 am
Breakfast Bell	7.58 am/8.00 am
Morning Assembly Bell	8.25 am
Hair Tie Bell	8.45 am
Mid-Day Break	10.45 am
Lunch	12.50 pm
Tea Bell	4.25 pm
Tuition Bell	5.20 pm
Assembly Bell	7.15 pm
Prayer Bell	7.30 pm
Dinner	8.00 pm
Night Prayer	8.45 pm
Lights Off	9.00 pm

DUTY	NAME
Dormitory and Vessel	Lakshmi, Polly
Corridor Up	Kareena back courtyard
Study Room	Abigail
Hall	Bakym, Kingini
Wash Room	Vaika, Bhavani
Waste and Wash Basin	Mariya Washing plants
Sink & Step	Tamija
Comb	Zara, Am
Slippers	Aimee, Chandini
Office & Washroom, Front courtyard	Viji



Helping with the chores, prepares them for life when they move on

The girls benefitted from many visits in 2025, all of which enrich their lives. An initiative to assess and enhance food security for children in care was held at VB, considering the nutritional needs of the girls, encouraging healthy dietary habits with quality foods.

An Anti-Drug Awareness Campaign was held, promoting responsible, healthy living. The girls created powerful posters and discussion on the dangers of substance abuse.



Also a skilled female trainer led simple yet effective self-defence techniques and hands on practice, emphasising the right and ability to defend themselves.



On 22nd April, the girls celebrated World Earth Day, planting trees symbolising a shared commitment to a greener, healthier planet.

Dr. Sayana Suzkin, a clinical psychologist conducted a session for the girls on World Mental Health Day, explaining the significance of mental health in daily life and providing guidance on how to manage emotions positively.



Lakshmi should be proud of winning 1st prize again in Work Experience Competition at Christ King Convent High School, in the book binding category.

Valsalya Bhavan celebrated Gandhi Jayanthi – remembering Mahatma Ghandi's inspiring messages of truth, non-violence and simplicity through meaningful activities. Honouring his vision of cleanliness, the girls participated in a cleaning drive – appreciating the importance of responsibility, community care and adopting clean habits in daily life.



Before Christmas, the girls made adorable snowmen-shaped sweets, organised by the Round Table Club.



Finally, both sets of girls came together for Independence Day – with patriotic songs, speeches and colourful drawings on national themes, leaving girls joy, pride and a deeper sense of unity and independence, inspiring young minds.



Onam is a 10 day annual festival reflecting Kerala’s cultural richness and hospitality. Onam is both a harvest festival celebrating agricultural prosperity and a Hindu cultural festival celebrated by all. The younger girls played games and enjoyed a traditional meal. The older girls showcased their skills while promoting healthy and innovative cooking practices.

Reading these accounts of events during the year, inspires me to want to continue sponsoring the girls and encourage others to do so. This gives them an amazing breadth to life experience and boosts their knowledge and confidence, which will help them in their future years.

I have sponsored 2 sisters, Sajana and Sajal for many years and watched them grow and develop.

Sajana, age 18 (below) writes to me every Christmas, explaining how she participates fully in and enjoys all these programmes and she is doing well in her studies. I feel she has a very bright future ahead of her.



Sajal, age 21 (right) writes that she is studying a 6 months’ beautician course, and will then have a professional qualification.

She is happy and has made good friends at the salon where she works and studies and is learning a lot.



I decided to visit Sajal recently at work, and was very impressed.

Head and Face at Chakkaraparambu, Kochi is a very upmarket salon offering a wide range of beauty services under one roof. Sajal's manager showed us around and I was overwhelmed by the quality and luxuriousness of treatments at prices, that in the UK, would be exorbitant. Sajal has blossomed into a beautiful young lady and she now visits the annex on her days off.

At Christmas, Fr. Thomas wrote:

'... Because of sponsorship, many young lives feel seen, supported and cherished'.

Please consider sponsorship – you really are helping to give the girls the best possible chance in life of being happy and fulfilled, and it is a real privilege to be part of a girl's life journey.



SARA ANTONY

Sara got married on 28th September 2025. She is working as a scanner at Cochin Airport, and in order to get promotion, she has been studying alongside working, to enable her to work on cruise ships. She has worked for IndiGo for 2 years now, and wanted to make another step up in her career.

She has the support of her husband Ashly and his family, with whom she now lives. Sara has completed her STCW (Standards of Training, Certification & Watchkeeping for Seafarers) and passed all 5 subjects and is now just waiting for her certification including passing a Seafarer's Medical Certificate. We wish her well for her future ambitions.

KANNAN

Having completed his B.Sc. in Medical Imaging Technology from SRM Medical College, Chennai, Kannan now has the offer of a job as a radiographer in a small hospital in Chennai. He has accepted the job, and we are so pleased for him as he embarks on his chosen career.

Sadly, Kannan's father passed away on 7th March 2025, after many years of suffering.



I came back from my Kerala trip, as always, fully inspired by the work undertaken by the sisters, brothers and staff we know, and full of admiration for the selfless and sacrificial giving they exude.

'God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December'
(James M. Barrie – but prompted by Fr Joe!)

On my return to a very wet, cold UK, full of doom and gloom, I do indeed have so many memories to sustain me – smiling faces, blue skies and sunshine, and look forward to another visit if possible

The various ways that people have supported Kerala Crafts are much appreciated and donations received are most welcome and cherished, especially in these challenging times.



Thank you to all who have supported us this year. A mention must be given to my local church, who have pledged a monthly amount – this makes a huge difference.



Kerala Crafts



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www.keralacrafts.co.uk
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