

Christmas Message
10 December 2007



I have now been in Sri Lanka for four months and it has been a whirlwind of activity since then!

The projects are all running smoothly and in their final stages. In **Samarakoon Watta**, an opening ceremony was held for the long awaited community building. This was a low key affair, attended by a representative of the local organisation we are working with, as well as several community members who have been actively involved throughout the project, and myself. Two Buddhist monks also attended and led the traditional chanting to ensure the safety and prosperity of the building, as per local tradition. A larger opening celebration involving the whole community will take place early in the new year. It looks set to be a great day, and I'm expecting to experience lots of singing, dancing and speeches! It will be a real honour for me to be present after all the hard work put in by Raja, Helen and the community members to make this building a reality.

In **Kalpitiya**, we continue to work on another building project, the completion of a pre school in Ammathotam. Building works, as anywhere, are a long and arduous process in Sri Lanka, but we will soon start the final phase of this building and the completion is being eagerly awaited by local community members and children. The other pre schools in the area, supported by SLCT, are thriving, and while visiting I had the chance to play with the children as they played 'dressing up', coming out with a weird and wonderful array of clothes!

At the **Uplands** school in the hill country, we are continuing the work on the playground for use by the school children and local community. It is already in use for various games and activities, but the current work will enable a larger area to become useable. The school was an absolute delight to visit, the children shy and courteous, and the headteacher and his wife were inspirational and remarkably committed to their school.

In **Telwatte**, the community heavily affected by the tsunami, the project continues to go from strength to strength. The original savings club set up is working so well, with 125 members, that another club has been set up so an additional 100 community members can become involved. We are providing support to this club to ensure it can become as effective as the original group. At a recent meeting, a loan was approved for, among other things, an ice cream business, and I told the female entrepreneur, that I would certainly be a customer in the future!

We are also currently planning a review of this project, with the emphasis being placed on involving community members in analysing the successes and limitations of the project. This will mean all parties involved can learn from the process and we can ensure the sustainability of the work that has been done in Telwatte.

All four of our current projects are in their final stages, and it has been fantastic for me to see the commitment to a brighter future in these thriving communities. In the New Year, we will be ensuring everything is in place for the communities to continue their good work while we withdraw our support.

Our focus will turn to new projects in the New Year, and we expect to be working with both current partners, and new partners. I have already begun investigating areas where we could use our expertise, learn from communities, and help to make a real change. On my visits to this end, I have discovered there is still a distinct need for the kind of input we are able to give and 2008 is sure to be an exciting year of development for Shining Life Children's Trust.

During my time spent visiting the projects, I am consistently asked by individuals and groups to thank those in the UK who are providing the support which makes our work with them possible. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued generous support, on behalf of myself, the communities with whom we work, and Shining Life Children's Trust.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and peaceful New Year

Beth Rattigan

Field Director
Shining Life Children's Trust