

# TRIBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

SITTILINGI, THEERTHAMALA spo, DHARMAPURI - 636 906

(Helping tribals heal themselves - ten years of committed support)

## **ANNUAL REPORT - 2002 - 2003**

The Tribal Health Initiative, Sittilingi, is now celebrating its 10-year anniversary. The remote forest valley in which we work is home to approximately 10,000 Malayali (*hill dwelling*) tribals. Only 5 of the valley's 21 villages are linked by a bus that runs infrequently on poorly maintained roads. In 1992 there was no local doctor and the nearest working hospital was 50km away. Surgery or serious illness required traveling to Salem, over 100km from here. Most families rely on rain-fed sustenance farming and have little cash for travel or treatment.

In 1993 we started activities in a mud and thatch hut with just 4 staff. Now, in 2003, we have 25 beds and provide outpatient, delivery and operating facilities. We have a staff of 26 plus 25 Health Auxiliaries providing assistance and advice in their local villages.

Before the Tribal Health Initiative started 15 out of every 100 babies died before their first birthday and many mothers died in childbirth. People of all ages died of common, easily curable, infections.

### **Our aims are to:**

- Bring all women and children through childbirth alive and well
- Ensure children grow up well nourished so they can survive common infections
- Give easy, low cost access to good health care
- Share our knowledge of health care with tribal communities so it becomes part of their wisdom and day-to-day experience

### **Things we are doing to achieve our aims:**

- Regular field clinics in all villages
- Training and placing tribal women as Health Auxiliaries in their local villages
- Training and employing tribal girls as Health Workers/nurses in the Tribal Hospital
- Postnatal checkups in all villages once a week
- Checkups for all children under 5 years old once a month
- Dramas and cultural shows to spread information on health and cultural issues
- Outpatients & Inpatients at the Tribal Hospital for treatment and surgery

### **Where we have reached so far:**

- ★ 90% of pregnant mothers undergo checkups at least thrice during their pregnancy.
- ★ 9 out of every 100 children still die during the first year (down from 15/100 earlier).
- ★ Underweight children are only 30% compared to 50% earlier.
- ★ No mothers died in childbirth last year.

- ★ 13391 Outpatients, 733 Inpatients were seen as also 142 deliveries and 228 surgeries performed last year in the Tribal Hospital.

## **NEWS:**

### **Hospital News**

#### ***Friends of Sittilingi***

Many tribal inpatients continue to benefit from the reduction in costs we have been able to offer thanks to the '***Friends of Sittinlingi***' funds. We feel this has saved the lives of babies whose parents would not otherwise have brought them to the hospital.

#### ***New Buildings***

The hospital has recently completed construction work on site. This has resulted in a new:

- Infectious diseases ward (12 beds)
- Septic theatre
- Laboratory
- Dispensary
- X-ray facility
- Office block

All this work was completed to a low-cost design using bricks constructed from mud and cement on-site by local labourers. The new buildings have given us much-needed new space and have allowed us to provide 3 new neonatal special care beds and an expanded delivery room.

#### ***Health Workers***

Health workers have had an opportunity to develop their clinical skills and now play a much greater part in both outpatient treatment and deliveries.

#### ***Core Committee***

The Core Committee set up for staff to manage their own affairs has been running very successfully. This not only passes more responsibility and control to the staff, but frees up the doctors to spend more time on treatment and new projects.

### **New Programmes**

#### **Organic Farming & Water Conservation Schemes**

Work has now started on our programme for organic farming and the development of water conservation schemes. This is called the SEED Programme (Sustainable Ecological & Environmental Programme). Our own site is in the early stage of development and should show significant progress in the next couple of seasons. The intention is to encourage farmers to halt the increasing use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, whilst simultaneously improving the quality and yield of their crops. A number of tribal farmers were taken on exposure trips to Sathyamangalam & Thally and a number have subsequently adopted some of the techniques demonstrated, and we hope that others will follow soon.



The hospital needs money to continue its work. Two areas are in particular need of support:

**Tubectomy**

Tubectomy is a permanent family planning operation that we perform free of charge for tribal women. Unfortunately, our sponsoring partner is no longer able to provide funding. It is, however, vital to the success of this programme that the operation continues to be free of charge. The cost to the hospital of each operation is approximately Rs1000.

What are the benefits to the tribal community?

- Direct economic benefit of less dependant children
- Children are considered to be more precious and their health more valuable
- Women are able to plan their families

Another major benefit is that women spend 7 days in the hospital. Frequently the women are from the most remote tribal villages, in which we are unable to have Health Auxiliaries or field clinics. During this time the women are taught the basics of hygiene, nutrition and health care. This information and knowledge is then brought back to their community and, leading by example, these women help to improve the long-term health and economy of the entire village.

**Education Initiative**

have identified the lack of adequate education for children as a threat to village life and a major barrier to development in the tribal community.

The Tribal Education Initiative will create a Resource Centre for tribal education that:

- Acts as a focal point for individuals/groups to pursue knowledge and skills
- Provides a variety of learning resources & materials - such as a library and a laboratory
- Supplements what is taught in existing school systems
- Gives workshops on practical skills such as pottery and carpentry
- Encourages and facilitates a positive attitude to education in the community

**Yes**, I want to provide better care and/or facilities for tribals by contributing  
(please tick)

- I would like to indelibly touch the lives of ..... tribal families by contributing Rs..... for tubectomy surgery @ Rs1000/- per surgery.
- Rs. 2000... for the capital costs of a new Resource Centre for tribal children
- Rs. 1000 ... for any of the 'Patient Funds' to subsidise treatment for tribals
- Rs. 500... for the cost of books for a Resource Centre library
- Rs.....for (the Corpus Fund.
- Rs..... for any other purpose you see fit

I am enclosing cheque/DDno..... for Rs.....drawn on.....

My address is

email  
Phone

Signed

Cheques/DD may be made in the head 'Tribal Health Initiative', payable at SBI, Kotapatty (6244) or Canara Bank (1128), Theerthamala or ICICI Bank, Salem

All contributions will benefit exemptions under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act (1961)

We promptly issue receipts for all donations received. All funds will be used only for the purposes donated for. We will keep you updated on our work twice a year through Newsletters and Annual Reports