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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Santon Group Charity provides funding to EveryChild

The Santon Group's charity, The Sandhu Charitable Foundation, provided funding of £12,000 to EveryChild (www.everychild.org.uk) for a specific 3 month project to help reintegrate children separated from their families and living on the railways in Bangalore, India.

The project sought to address the context of increasing numbers of children running away from home, traveling by rail to Bangalore and surviving on railway platforms and streets; and an ineffective child protection system failing to protect even those children who are put into institutional care. The anticipated outcomes were the integration of children back with their families, a reduction in the number of children placed into institutional care, the establishment of a child protection network and demonstration of home placement as good practice. EveryChild is working in partnership with a local organisation called Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation to implement this project.

Of the 546 children contacted, 530 were identified and rescued from railway platforms during a 3 month period and brought to a shelter run by a local organisation, Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation, working in partnership with EveryChild to implement the project. Of the 530 children brought to the shelter 360 (68%) were reunited with families from the shelter when in their best interest following tracing and contacting their parents and a further 80 were referred to governmental organisations. A small number returned home by themselves or were referred to another NGO or shelter; whilst only 12 walked away from the shelter. 59 were still staying at the shelter. The children live on average 5-10 days in the shelter while their parents are traced and they receive counseling and support and are helped to get ready to go home.

The full Report on the project is attached.

Pardeep Sandhu, Head of Philanthropy at The Santon group commented that *'We would like to thank EveryChild for proposing this project and their joint venture partner, the Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation, for implementing it on the ground. The many stories of why these children ran away from home are heartbreaking and we are pleased that we have been able to bring most of the children back together with their families. It was particularly pleasing to hear that 98% of the children who returned home were continuing to reside at home.'*

Laura Clark, Donor Partnerships Manager, said *"EveryChild and our local partner would like to thank The Sandhu Charitable Foundation for its invaluable support for this project"*.

For further queries please contact

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Dear Mr Sandhu

I am writing to you because I have just got back from India and my colleague Laura Clark asked me if I would tell you a little about my experiences of our work there.

While I was there I was lucky enough to visit our project that supports children living and working on the railway platforms. I saw the outreach workers who work every day on the platforms of Bangalore station. They are there from 6am to 10am and 6pm to 10pm Monday to Saturday to find children who are recently arrived on the platforms. I was told that years ago many children lived on the platforms all the time, but with the hard work of outreach workers like one I met, Nagraju, the children are now living more safely off the stations. The outreach workers see approximately 10 children every day and manage to persuade on average 5 to go back to the shelter to talk to a counsellor about going home. Most of the children have run away from home or school or a bad working environment, often where they are being beaten and abused. They are either running home or trying to find a better life elsewhere. After talking to the outreach workers, the children decide to go to the shelter, and are taken there by the outreach workers.

I also had the chance to visit the shelter, meet the staff and counsellors, and some of the children who were being re-united with their families. At any one time, about 15 children are living in the shelter which is only a few minutes' walk away from the station. They live there for an average of 5-10 days while their parents are traced and they receive counselling and support and they are helped to get ready to go home again.

One boy I met there, 14-year-old Manju, was sold by his mother into labouring in a hotel. She received 3,000 rupees (£45) from a trafficker for her son to work in a hotel for a year. He went away with the man to Bangalore to work in the hotel. He worked under awful conditions, having little sleep or food and being beaten for not working hard enough. The beatings were so bad, he often thought of running away, but felt a huge responsibility to his mother as she had been paid for him to be there for the year. After the year was up though, he felt no responsibility to stay there and so managed to run away. He found his way to Bangalore station, but then wasn't sure where to go to get home. He lives in a rural area far north of Karnataka, and he didn't have the money for a ticket. He wandered in the station trying to think of how to get back, when our outreach worker found him and encouraged him to come to the shelter. He had been there for a couple of weeks while he had some counselling about what had happened and talked about the prospect of going home. The morning I was there, his mother was coming in the afternoon to talk to him and encourage him to come home. Although he wanted to go home, I could still see some apprehension in him as he felt that she had mistreated him by selling him in to this situation. They would be counselled together, and she was going to stay overnight to work out what the best thing was for him to do.

In the afternoon that day, I went to the home re-orientation and de-addiction camp which is also run by our local partner SATHI. The camp is about 30km outside of Bangalore in a quiet rural area placed alongside a boarding school. There were 30 boys there, all aged between 7 and 15 years old. Some had run away from home numerous times and most had an addiction to smoking, chewing tobacco or

Chair: Nadine Nohr.
Patrons: Baroness Billingham, Bruce Forsyth CBE,
Wilnelia Forsyth, Dame Deirdre Hutton, Elaine Paige OBE,
Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind KCMG QC and Donald Brydon CBE.

substance abuse. They sleep and eat together and are there for a month. They have a daily programme of yoga, meditation, counselling and education. They also play games and the opportunity to watch an educational film as well. One of the activities that they do that really struck me was that every day they light a candle and think about something that they did that day that they were not proud of – just sit and watch the candle and think about it. I thought that was a really powerful way of getting the children to reflect on their behaviour and maybe work out what they want to do differently tomorrow.

All in all, it was a really emotional trip for me and it has really helped me to understand more about the projects and the great work that our staff and partners are doing every day. I would like to pass on a message of thanks from me, but more importantly from the children, volunteers and staff who I met for your support in helping to give the children there a hopeful and brighter future.

Best wishes

Laura Tyler
EveryChild

Reintegration of children separated from their families and living on the railways, India

A report to the Sandhu Charitable Foundation

February 2011



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Overview

The Sandhu Charitable Foundation kindly made a contribution of £12,000 towards this project in October 2010. This contribution funded the project for 3 months. This report is a summary of the impact the Foundation's support has made to the lives of children during that period.

Context

This project seeks to address the context of increasing numbers of children running away from home, travelling by rail to Bangalore and surviving on railway platforms and streets, and an ineffective child protection system failing to protect even those children who are put into institutional care. The anticipated outcomes were the integration of children back with their families, a reduction in the number of children placed into institutional care, the establishment of a child protection network and demonstration of home placement as good practice.

EveryChild is working in partnership with a local organisation called Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation to implement this project.

Achievements and impact: outcomes and activities

Rescuing, assessing and reintegrating runaway children

- **Planned activity:** Rescue and assess runaway children
- **Anticipated outcome:** Children are reintegrated with their families

Rescue

A total of **530 children** separated from their families and living on railway platforms were **identified and rescued** from railway platforms during the 3 month period (516 boys and 14 girls).

Breakdown of beneficiaries	Total
No. of children contacted at the railway platforms	546
No. of children brought to shelter	530
No. of children reunited with families from shelter	360
Returned home on their own accord	1
Referred to another NGO	5
Referred to another shelter	3
Referred to government Child Welfare Committee	80
Referred Rehabilitation Camp	2
Children who returned home on their own	8
Walked away from shelter	12
Staying at Shelter	59



Returning home

Of these, **360 (68%)** were **returned home to their families** when in their best interests following tracing and contacting their parents. We rescued 141 children in the month of November 2010, which is the highest number of children rescued in one month. This is most likely the result of the dedicated team of staff who were successful in rescuing large numbers of children and referring them on effectively.

Eight children travelled back to their families alone because they were over 16 years old and after providing them with train fare and food they were capable of travelling alone. After reaching home, each child was asked to get their parents to contact us over phone. In all these cases, we received verbal acknowledgement from the parents that their children had safely reached home.

Accessing an education

In five cases we were able to refer the children to other non-governmental organisations better placed to help them than us. So they could access an education and vocational training. The details of each of these cases are below. All the children referred are doing well and continuing their studies / vocational training.

Child Name	Age	Family problem	Present follow up status	Help / support
Vinay	9	Orphan	Going to school	Education Support
Harish	14	Separated and neglect	Going to school	Education Support
Ahmad	15	No contact	Staying in NGO	Vocational Training
Hussein Ahmad	16	Orphan	Staying in NGO	Vocational Training
Shankar	14	Orphan	Going to school	Education Support

We also identified 8 children who needed support to continue their education once they had returned home because their parents are very poor and could not bear the cost of their children's education. In these instances we helped these children by providing education support in the form of note books, pens, school bag, pencil and also school fees. We followed up with each child and we know that seven of the children are continuing their education and one child has discontinued his studies for the moment due to family problems, however he will be admitted into a neighbourhood school in the next academic year.

Follow-up and impact

Post-home placement follow-up support (to ensure long-term reunification with families) has been provided to the children, which revealed that **98% are continuing to reside at home** and only 2% of the children have returned to living on the street. This is increased percentage on the last reporting period. Furthermore **72% of children are continuing their studies**. A further 17% of the children are now employed because they are from especially poor backgrounds and are now earning to support their families income. The final 11% remain at home but are not attending school.

Strengthening child protection structures

- **Planned activity: Strengthen child protection structures**
- **Anticipated outcome: Fewer children placed into care**

Sharing best practice

We work with existing child protection structures in India to develop their capacity and effectiveness. For example there are Child Welfare Committees in existence (CWCs) in India but their effectiveness varies greatly, so to increase this we train them and build their members knowledge of their roles, responsibilities and legal jurisdiction. Our main aim is to promote the concept of family reunion instead of putting children to institutional care. As part of this work we share good practice with committees and encourage them to share their experiences and learnings. During this reporting period our local partner **published a newsletter** in October outlining the best practices from the Bangalore Child Welfare Committees. The newsletter was widely circulated among all the NGOs, funding agencies and also among all the CWCs working in other cities. We are also working on producing a handbook on best practices for the CWCs. Once completed this **handbook has the potential to be rolled out across India** in order to increase the capacity and skills of the CWCs, which would ultimately improve the quality of care and welfare for vulnerable children nationally.

Training

We conducted a four day training workshop which was attended by 23 participants from our local partner organisation and 4 other non-governmental organisations. The workshop oriented participants on how their role helps a child in need and about various counselling techniques. The **new counselling techniques have now started to be implemented by the counsellors** in the three locations.

Impact

Through the project's work with CWCs and government-run children's homes, there has been a **shift from children residing in government-run institutional children's homes for lengthy periods to children being reunited with their families at the earliest possible point**. CWCs and government-run institutional

children's homes are increasingly drawing on the services provided by different organisations such as vocational training and counselling, in turn reducing children's residence in government-run institutions.

In the past three months we worked with 35 children who have been residing in state run institutions for a long time. Of this group **30 received counselling** and it was possible to **trace the families of 18 of the children and successfully reunite them** so they can once again grow up in a safe and secure family environment rather than in the institution.

3. Child protection network

- **Planned activity:** Establish a network of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and NGOs
- **Anticipated outcome:** Child protection network established

Working together

In order to provide orphan and vulnerable children with the utmost care and protection **we have developed a network with other organisations working in Bangalore**. These organisations are providing educational support and vocational training to orphans and destitute children. In the past three months we have identified six children who require further educational support and vocational training because these children were either orphans or did not have a caring family. They have now been safely and successfully referred to other organisations through the network. In this way we can ensure that the children have access to all the available support that they need and ensure that non-governmental organisations do not duplicate work.

4. Lobbying and advocacy

- **Planned activity:** Lobby government, media and engage with key stakeholders
- **Anticipated outcome:** Reuniting children with their family is acknowledged as good practice

Engaging and raising awareness with key stakeholders

During the last three months our local partner has held **awareness raising events** with key stakeholders on both of the railway platforms we work on. These events involved volunteers, staff, the railway police, station managers, coolies, vendors and traders on the platforms. At these events we presented information on the children who have been rescued through the project in the past year and how many have been reunited with their families. These events were very well received and we noticed that our presence was noticed and appreciated by all of the groups who are regularly present on the platforms. It was important to ensure the support of the community in this way so that children living on the platforms can be identified quickly and referred to us so we can ensure they have the best possible chance of being reunited with their family.

Achievements and impact: sustainability

- **Sustainability was anticipated to be achieved through:** working with government-run CWCs; promoting the home placement approach; advocacy and lobbying; and skills sharing.

For the specific beneficiaries of the project, sustainability has been achieved through providing **follow-up support** after they had been reunited with their families, and through thorough preparation for returning home via **camps** addressing barriers such as addictions and parental counselling to ensure the family are able to care for the child once they return home.

A sustainable approach that will also aid future beneficiaries, ensuring both **earlier intervention and quicker reintegration**, has been achieved through **working with government structures at various levels**, from national through to local, and policy through to practice: the project has increased the **effectiveness of existing government structures** (CWCs and government-run children's homes) through establishing a network of CWCs and NGOs for child protection. Additionally, through workshops, training and sharing best practice, the **capacity and motivation of CWC members** has been increased. Moreover, systems have been established for the **continued sharing of best practice** through, for example, newsletters and networks.

Making a real difference to a child's life

Hari is a 12 year old boy who was supported through this project in November. We would not have been able to provide Hari with the support he needed without the kind contribution of the Sandhu Charitable Foundation in October.

Hari's parents are separated and his mother Pushpa is from a very economically poor background. For this reason she works long hours as a labourer in a farmhouse Northern Karnataka. Because of the long hours she works she is unable to take care of her children and so leaves them in her employer's house during the day. Hari and his siblings were forced to do all the housework for the employer and they faced regular harassment. The housework and harassment stops Hari from studying and getting an education.

The situation left Hari feeling lonely and dejected which is why he chose to run away from his mother's employers house to Bangalore, over 150 miles away.

At the station our support workers saw Hari sitting alone on the platform with dirty and soiled clothes. He told them he had run away and so the staff told him about the dangers of being alone on the platform and persuaded him to come to the shelter.

Hari was extremely playful with other children in the shelter. He did not display any emotion and willingness to go home. When the first counselling session took place, the child did not divulge any details. He said that he was staying with his mother and wanted to study, but his mother was not willing to support him. The child was kept in the shelter for a couple of days and the counsellor observed a change in his mood. He was counselled again and this time, he divulged the truth that his mother had left him and his sister at her employer's house. The child wasn't willing to go back to their house, as he was harassed and tortured there. He wanted to stay with his mother and continue his education. The child wasn't able to provide us with any contact number but we were able to trace his mother through local police.



Activities at the shelter

Hari's mother was extremely happy to see the child. His mother really wanted him to get an education and had not realised the treatment he was getting at her employers house. The mother and Hari received counselling from our support workers and they helped her to understand that she could have her children living with her and that Hari could be enrolled in a local school and receive educational support from the project.

Hari returned home with his mother on the 13th November and when we followed up with him in December he was still at home and was attending a new school. His sister will soon join them too and Hari sounded very happy about staying with his mother and going to school.

If we had not been able to support Hari and his family so they could stay together, Hari may have been admitted to a state run institution where he would have lived until he was 16 years old or alternatively he could have lived and worked on the streets for the rest of his life, at risk of getting addicted to drugs, being trafficked or forced into hazardous labour.

Thank you

EveryChild and our local partner would like to thank the Sandhu Charitable Foundation for its invaluable support for this project.