

Tsunami devastates Sri Lanka

On Boxing Day 2004 the world tuned in to news of the worst natural disaster in recent memory. The Indian Ocean tsunami had swept hundreds of thousands of people to their deaths. At time of going to press the death toll stands at over 170,000.

Sri Lanka has suffered the highest death toll after Indonesia with almost 38,000 confirmed dead and 835,000 homeless. Entire communities on the south and east of the island have been destroyed.

PCC works on the west coast, in Wattala near Colombo, and in Jaffna in

the north east. Although still affected, the effect on the west coast has been nowhere near as great as elsewhere on the island. Likewise the children's home in Jaffna has not been damaged and all staff and children are safe.

In the immediate aftermath PCC was in contact with colleagues in Sri Lanka, working out how best to respond to these challenges and to help with the millions of people whose lives have been destroyed by this tragedy.

See below and page 3 for the full story and how PCC is responding.



A man in Galle on Sri Lanka's south coast surveys the destruction

As soon as news of the disaster reached PCC, contact was made with colleagues in Sri Lanka. Here are some of the responses in the immediate aftermath.

Mari (Wattala, near Colombo) "Canal over-flowed and water came inside church. It was our worship service time. Building is OK. I was so afraid but am alright. Thanks for your concern." (UK time 9.25pm, 26 December 04).

Jenny Sinnathurai (Jaffna, North East Sri Lanka) "Near Paalam building people have moved out of the area. Bahrath and Hema are still living in the building. We can only pray. In where we are in Jaffna the tsunami flooding came to 30 km away. So far at least 100 people are missing, some we know have died. So far we are ok." (UK Time 9.35pm, 26 December 04).

Jenny Sinnathurai (Jaffna) Local news says that we are to be watchful for the next seven days. So far we hear that about 10,000 people have died. It's hard to look at the damage. We have provided clothes so far. We as a church need

to provide something towards our refugees near us. (UK Time 9.50pm, 27 December 04)

Jenny Sinnathurai (Jaffna) It will be helpful if we can give money to the people who are in immediate need. Food items are expensive and at the moment difficult to bring to Jaffna because of the flood. Nothing is allowed on the road from Colombo. Maybe we can bring things up by air. If we have money we can start to give people basic food and shelter. Thanks for your concern. (UK time 1.40am 28 December 04)

Karen Dey (Jaffna) It's very hard to communicate from here. Rajendram's family (Sureka) and Vinoth family have lost their homes and everything. Otherwise all OK. Today things are a little normal but still everyone is in shock. Many people are staying at Paalam sleeping on the floor. (UK Time 12.00 midday, 28 December 04)
Tanya (UK, but in touch with Wattala) I have spoken to people today. Some have lost their houses, especially those who lived near the beach. Mari's church building is ok, but she has lost everything inside. No

shops are open in the area so there is no food. All the children who attend our school are ok (UK Time 4.26pm 28 December 04)

Karen Dey (Jaffna) We need to re-house the two families who are part of the work here. All the people are working together to help. God's hand seems to be over the church people and property; I can only say this has been amazing. There are many testimonies. We need to supply food and clothing to those around us. Keep us in your prayers (UK Time 11.11pm 28 December 04).

Karen Dey (Jaffna) Am going to refugee camps tomorrow to distribute baby food, working with Jaffna District Child Protection Committee and Save the Children. (UK time 11am, 5 January 05)

Karen Dey (Jaffna) Went to visit camps in affected areas. I can't describe what mass destruction we saw. We talked to many families. Many have lost young children and elderly. All have lost homes. I could just sit and cry. What you see is unbelievable and unforgettable. (UK time 11.55pm, 7 January 05)

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ORDER OF NAMES??

Pedal power helps Jaffna children's home

The PCC funded children's home in Jaffna has had a paint job thanks to some strong calf muscles

A Sri Lankan children's home has received a much needed lick of paint and it's largely thanks to a group of young people cycling their lungs out round a London park.

That was the story of 2004 when a team from Phoenix Community Care went out to Jaffna in North East Sri Lanka, armed with an amazing £855 raised by Malachi Kelly (12) and his mates. A sponsored bike ride around Finsbury Park in North London had raised the cash, helping to pay for paint, toys and materials for the decoration.

Malachi was also one of five other volunteers who went out to the country to help the kids and staff at the children's home spruce the place up. Paul Kelly, Robert Day, Korel Mayer, Hazel Thorpe and team leader Tracey Hutchings were also joined by Becca Dyer who was already in the country, working at the PCC funded school in Wattala, near the capital Colombo.

The twelve day trip saw the team working with the kids on the painting, helping local builders to construct a small study area for the girls, and watching in wonder as Silas,

one of the children, created an amazing mural of a bird in the kitchen. He had recently come second in nationwide art competition for young people.

Jaffna is in the very north of Sri Lanka and has been at the centre of a violent civil war that has only recently stopped after 30 years. The war has affected millions of



Tragic site: graves of children aged 12-19 killed fighting for the Tamil Tigers



The team, l-r: Malachi Kelly, Tracey Hutchings, Paul Kelly, Robert Day, Hazel Thorpe, Korel Mayer, Becca Dyer (check this order!!!)

people, and devastated large amounts of the landscape. None of the team had ever been to this part of the country before. Said Tracey Hutchings: "Jaffna is so beautiful, yet has been under siege and at war for so long. I know that the trip had a big impact on all of us. We have come back wanting to do more and to engage with the issues."

One of the most moving moments of the trip was a visit to a graveyard for children aged 12-19 who had been killed fighting for the Tamil Tigers, the Tamil 'army'.

Said Becca Dyer: "The saddest moment was looking out over the thousands of blue graves. The reality of what people here have lived through really hit home at that moment. It was very sad and yet the smiles on the kid's faces when we got back to the children's home were so huge you found yourself being happy that they were safe and alive, despite the injustice of it all.

"It was amazing to think that because of this home the kids we met will now grow up safe. It inspired us all to remember the difference we can make. It seems daunting to think about changing the world but we can help change a few lives and that is just as amazing."

Fundraising update

PCC would like to thank some of the other people who have been fundraising for its work over the past few months. They include:

Russ Jones who put down his DJ's headphones and cycled, swam and ran his way through the London Olympic Triathlon, raising £1000 for PCC in the process. He was only 15 minutes behind the winner of the event.

Andy Smith who completed a sponsored walk to raise money for Kenya.

Dave Bilbrough who organised a fundraising evening of music following the tsunami disaster, raising £xxx for the relief effort.

Russ Jones (again) who put together a stunning line up of performers for a tsunami fundraiser in January.

Barclays Bank who are planning a community fundraiser

PCC is very grateful for the work and sometimes physical pain that people put themselves through to raise money for what we are doing.

Unaccompanied minors

Phoenix Community Care opened its first home for male 'unaccompanied minors' (UAMs) in 2004, housing five teenage boys from China, Romania and Kosovo. UAMs are young asylum seekers aged 16 to 18 who arrive in the UK alone.

There are now also two homes for young asylum seeking women over the age of 18. This brings the total number of those currently being housed to 27.

The projects have seen a steady stream of young people needing to be housed, with the relationship with the London Borough of Haringey going well. There is a constant need to expand the service being offered to keep up with the demand and more staff are being recruited to work with the young people on a day-to-day basis.

CAN WE GET THE AMOUNTS RAISED FOR THE DAVE B AND RUSS J FUNDRAISERS THIS WEEKEND

After the devastation: where do we even begin?

Adrian Hawkes



My phone rang at 6 o'clock in the morning on Boxing Day 2004. It was someone I have known for many years who has a habit of ringing me at all times of day and night to chat or to give me his opinions on various matters. He said something about Sri Lanka "being in a mess" and that I should take a look at the news. At that time of day I am barely human, so I let him chat for a bit, got off the phone and went back to sleep.

About an hour later he called again: "Have you looked at the news yet then?"

I explained as politely as I could that I hadn't. He again suggested that I might like to. I suggested that he might like to ring me after the sun had come up. The call ended.

By this stage hopes of getting back to any decent sleep had faded. My mind was beginning to stir into life and after half an hour of fruitless dosing I flicked on the television. I could barely believe what I saw.

PCC has been working in Sri Lanka for 15 years. Over that time we have helped to fund and develop a children's home, a school and a home for vulnerable young women. We have invested time, money and emotions into a country barely off its knees after 20 years of civil war. And as I took in the news on that Boxing Day morning, as I watched the sheer scale of destruction of tens of thousands of individual lives, I just thought: can this really be happening? After all these years of hardship, does this tiny nation of amazing, hospitable people deserve something like this?

The initial shock soon gave way to practical concerns about staff and friends in

Wattala, near Colombo on the west coast, and in Jaffna in the north east of the island. By about 8.30am I was firing off texts to try and establish that everybody was safe.

It soon became pretty obvious that there were problems with the country's communications with the first responses not making it back to me until 9.30pm on Boxing Day evening.

From Mari in Wattala who spoke of a great black wall of water coming down the canal towards their church where they were having a service. Of the water coming up to her chest and of the adults having to put the children on their shoulders. She told me that she thought she was going to die.

From Jenny in Wattala who told me that the waters had come up to the doors of our school building, but had not flooded it and that all the staff and children were safe.

The news from Jaffna that the flooding had mercifully come no closer than 30km to the children's home and again that all staff and children were ok.

And before I had even established what was going on in Sri Lanka the offers of money from friends and supporters around the world began to come in.

From Links International who offered to wire £1000 immediately to our contacts in the country. From the United States where a community of donors has offered \$20 a month for every child in our school.

Before 2004 was out PCC had received donations of £2000, and as I write this in early January the figure stands at £5000, with two big fundraising events still to take place from musician Dave Bilbrough and DJ Russ Jones.

The big question of course is how do we best respond? The scale of this disaster is beyond our comprehension. The number of dead in Sri Lanka currently stands at 38,000, the second highest death toll after

Indonesia, the epicentre of the earthquake. That is out of a total population of 19 million. The number of orphans is expected to be huge. Entire fishing communities have been destroyed

What can we, a small charity, possibly hope to achieve faced with such devastation?

The answer of course is that we do what we can. Many years ago I came to the conclusion that the world is never short of suffering and need, but that if everyone does a little to alleviate it then a lot gets done.

In the face of this latest disaster my response is the same. Our friends out there are already helping refugees who have come to our buildings looking for temporary accommodation. They have also visited some of the camps with supplies of clothing and baby food. These are all our short term and immediate responses.

But in the medium term we simply need to be looking to do what we were already doing, but to do it on a larger scale. Before the tsunami we were looking after orphans from the war. Now there are tragically many more orphans, and we will seek to help as many of them as our funds will allow us to. Before the tsunami there was a need for training and education. Now that livelihoods have been destroyed and people look to rebuild their ways of earning a living that need will increase. As much as we can afford we will provide.

The generosity of supporters of PCC has never ceased to astound us and never more has this been the case than in the face of this tragedy. I want to thank each one of you for your support both in recent weeks and over the years.

Sri Lanka may be going through one of the darkest hours of its history and PCC may only be offering a tiny glimmer of light at this time. But we do what we can. And if everyone does a little, a lot gets done.

news in brief

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY has outlined its policy on immigration and asylum, proposing a cap on the number of people allowed into Britain each year and offshore processing for asylum applicants. Refugee Council Chief Executive Maeve Sherlock was dismissive: "We need separate systems for refugees and for people coming here to work. An arbitrary

limit on all immigration, including refugees, would put lives at risk and damage our economy."

RISING NUMBERS OF unaccompanied children seeking asylum are having their ages disputed by the Home Office resulting in them being treated as adults, according to the Refugee Council. According to the charity about half of those under-18 seeking asylum are now being challenged. The Refugee

Council said that the practice was "potentially very damaging for children who will already have been through traumatic experiences."

THE HOME OFFICE has published *Integration Matters*, a draft document on its strategy for refugee integration. A major part of the strategy will involve each participating refugee developing a 'Personal Integration Plan' which will consider employment, housing and other needs.

PCC launches foster care agency

After two years of hard work the Phoenix Community Care Foster Care Agency received its official stamp in 2004, with registration from the CSCI (WHAT DOES THIS STAND FOR?).

Since then the process of recruiting and training new foster carers has been taking place and it is hoped that the first children will be placed with them early this year.

So far three families have come on board, all of which are new to foster caring.

The first priority of the agency is in placing children who have come to this country seeking asylum and who are under 15 years-old. PCC has long felt that there is a need in this field. Said PCC Director Pauline



Hawkes: "I felt that although foster carers do a very good job, there is a need for specialist care for asylum children, understanding their background, culture and so on."

The families recruited all have an interest in this area, some of them having already worked in social services in the field.

All carers recruited to the agency have undergone three months of training. This is not only in the basics of foster care, but also in the specific needs and challenges that young asylum seekers face. This covers areas such as language tuition and where help and resources can be found, as well as cultural assimilation issues to do with such basics as food, health and customs. As they begin to take in children the carers will also be able to work towards National Vocational Qualifications in Early Years Education.

Within a year it is hoped that the agency will have ten families taking in children.

PCC: My second family

Orsiola Nezha came to PCC from Kosovo in xxx 200x. Here she tells her story in her own words

can you fill in the gaps here. Is she Kosovan?

I came in London in September 2002. It was a terrible time when I came in this country, which was so strange and people were so unhelpful.

I came at UK because I was a witness of my parents death. This tragic incident was caused of the problems that existed in my country and because my ethnic religion was a gipsy. I had to see my parents death in front of my eyes and the consequences of this incident were my mental and health problems.

When I came in hear I didn't know that I was coming in hear because after I lost my parents I was so shocked and I wasn't able to understand what was surrounding me, and what was happening around me. Everything happened so fast and I found my self in London after my neighbours abandoned me in Finsbury Park.

Please do understand me because this situation is so difficult for me and I still

suffer it and is so difficult writing about it.

But I don't want to continue telling this story. I would like to talk about these wonderful people that I have the privilege writing for them today. I can't find the exact words to express how grateful I am. They opened their heart and welcomed me as their daughter.

PCC was so helpful with me and even now that that I live in my own house they always keep in contact with me and try to help me . I am proud to say that PCC is my second family. They were the only people that were nice with me and make me feel better in my very difficult days.

What PCC does is not only a usually job that people do and are bored and very tired of it's routine (UNCLEAR). Helping other minor people for PCC is a pleasure and believe me they never get tired of helping other people. They helped me to build a new life, to make new friends and they offered me a family. For the first time after my parents death I felt loved, I felt a sincere love that was embracing me. They convinced to create a new life, to get educated and to think about my future. Now I go to college and I my future plans are to go to university, and for all this I have to thank PCC.

God bless you. I will never forget your help.

FOSTERING FOR PCC

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING INVOLVED?

If you would be interested in becoming a foster carer with PCC please contact us for an informal chat. You can call us on 020 8308 8000 or e-mail fca@phoenixcommunity.co.uk

About PCC

What we do

Phoenix Community Care (PCC) was formed in June 1999 by Pauline and Adrian Hawkes to "facilitate a group of people who care about their community and issues within it, in particular providing care for vulnerable people."

UK

The work in the UK encompasses housing unaccompanied minors, vulnerable asylum seekers over 18 and foster carers and their foster children. We have also set up a foster care agency specialising in caring for asylum children.

International

PCC works in Sri Lanka, where we help fund a children's home and a home for vulnerable girls, and in Kenya where we have helped fund health and education programmes.

How you can help

If you would like to donate time, money or other support please contact us:

Telephone: 020 8808 8000

e-mail: info@phoenixcommunity.co.uk

web: www.phoenixcommunity.org

Address: PO BOX 1908,

London N17 6ZN

Phoenix is produced and edited by Ian Wedd



Adrian and Pauline Hawkes

start of penultimate para unclear

fundraising web address?? what is it and where do you want it to go?