

Hundreds of suitcases, 58 bikes and a few new houses: where your tsunami money went

The Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 resulted in unprecedented generosity from PCC's supporters. An extraordinary £16,000 was raised.

Your money was sent out to our partner organisation in Sri Lanka, Paalam Project, to use as they felt best in the face of the tragedy. Paalam identified both immediate short-term needs - to which they allocated 20% of funds - and longer term problems receiving the remainder.

The short-term needs were obvious. People had lost everything - their homes, clothes and possessions, furniture and fishing boats. Many ended up living in hastily erected refugee camps.

Paalam visited two of these in Jaffna in the north of the country. The statistics they were presented with were horrifying. At the Kaaddai Kaaddu camp they were told that in the nearby village 124 adults and 44 children had died. Nine families had lost all their children and 28 children had lost both of their parents. The homes of 405 families had been completely destroyed. The majority of families had lost fishing boats, their means of making a living.

Paalam was asked by the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (another charity working in the camp) to supply suitcases and underclothes to the families. Said PCC's project worker Kathy Pellatt: "Supplying suitcases sounds like a weird thing to do, but the truth was the families had nothing to keep things together and dry. We



Freedom: Bikes have allowed people to get out of the refugee camps and trade

bought as many as we could and put some underclothes and t-shirts in each one, stock from our sewing training centre. It took us two hours to hand them all out, because so many people needed them."

At the tsunami camp in Sakkodai Alvai the stories were equally heartbreaking. Twenty-three families were living there, all of whom had had houses right on the seafloor.

They had only returned to Jaffna two years earlier after the civil war ceasefire, setting up



Without walls: UN camps have been 'home' to thousands of tsunami victims for months

fishing businesses and a small tailoring shop. The tsunami took everything. The families were consulted on what would be most use to them and asked for bicycles. They said these would give them freedom to get around and start trading items they could make in the camps. They were sick of relying on government tsunami rations. Paalam sourced and delivered a brand new bicycle to each family. In the longer term there are plans to help them re-establish the tailoring business. Thirty-five bicycles were also delivered to the Kaaddai Kaaddu camp.

In addition local schools were supported with items such as sports equipment, children's shoes and school materials.

In Wattala, near the capital Colombo on the west side of the island, the longer term needs were being addressed. Several families lost their houses in the wave and Paalam took the decision to buy land and work in partnership with Habitat



Heartbroken: this woman stands in front of what was her home before the wave

for Humanity to build them new ones. The families will pay back a small amount towards the cost, after which the houses will be theirs.

In Jaffna, the longer term work includes using the children's home to care for tsunami orphans. So far three new children have been taken in.

Teams from the UK have also gone out to help Paalam's work and been moved by what they have seen. Said one team member, Tanya Carter: "It was shocking to see the after-effects. The local people explained that the water was higher than the 30-foot palm trees, with boats floating on the top. It is hard to even imagine this scene. We met so many children with smiles but sad eyes - many had lost their families in a sudden instant. One lady showed me pictures of her burying her 3-year-old and 8-year-old children."

With all of the work done in the last 18 months there has been the continual backdrop of the simmering tensions between the government and the Tamil Tigers (see page 3). In December 2005 a booby trapped bomb exploded right outside the Jaffna children's home, killing seven government soldiers. As Kathy Pellatt put it: "Everything is still incredibly fragile. If anything goes wrong we are aware that the whole civil war could escalate again. The politics has not helped with the reconstruction after the tsunami. There has definitely been unequal distribution of aid between the north and south of the country."

Many feel it will take a generation for the island to recover from this tragedy. "There is now this clear divide etched on people's minds in Sri Lanka - before the tsunami and after the tsunami," said Kathy Pellatt.

As long as the recovery takes, PCC remains committed to doing all it can. Once again we thank you for all your generous and ongoing support.

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Phoenix Academy

PCC moves home

Last year saw an exciting development in the life of PCC with the opening of the e-base resource centre in Edmonton, north London. This all singing, all dancing facility brings together under one roof PCC's training arm, London Training Consortium, Phoenix Academy, PCC's school for older children, and all the office and administration staff of PCC. The building also houses the arts-justice organisation JAE and Elthorpe Mortgages

London Training Consortium (LTC), has been welcoming the world through the doors of e-base with its European Union-funded education programme for young asylum seekers. Countries as varied as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Turkey and Vietnam have been represented as girls and young women aged 14-25 have been through the three month scheme. The 16 hour a week learning programme focuses in the main on English language training, but also includes literacy, numeracy and IT, as well as practical advice on finding jobs. Some of the women have children and childcare is provided as part of the service. The students have all been referred to LTC by local agencies such as social services, housing groups and asylum welfare organisations.

Said LTC Manager Matt James: "The effects of this programme on the confidence of the women has been amazing. We have already seen several go on to higher levels of study as a result. Our aim is always to be a centre of excellence and the results so far seem to suggest that we are achieving that."

LTC is also running an NVQ in Childcare Learning and Development, a qualification allowing a successful student to work with any children aged 0-16.

Phoenix Academy is also now housed in e-base meaning that every child has a PC at their desk. Not surprisingly interest in the school has been growing steadily and it is expected that capacity will be reached by the end of the year.

Interest was also shown in the school by none other than eminent scientist and notorious atheist Professor Richard Dawkins, for a Channel 4 series entitled 'The Root of All Evil?'

The series was looking at the negative effects he feels religion has had in the world, with this episode examining science teaching in what he termed 'fundamentalist' Christian schools.

Phoenix Academy uses a Christian teaching programme called Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), which seeks to give a biblical perspective on all subjects on the curriculum.

PCC director Adrian Hawkes was interviewed on his views on some of the school's teaching materials and said that all children were encouraged to question the curriculum and that atheism required more fundamentalist beliefs

than Christianity, requiring as it does a position of knowing for certain that there is no God. "I'm liberal in comparison", he said.



Conference facilities at the e-base

PCC wins new care contract

PCC has won a contract to be a 'leaving care' supplier for young people moving out of mainstream foster care. The competition for the contracts was fierce with 77 agencies applying of which 12 were successful, confirming the regard in which PCC is held by local authorities.

The PCC Foster Care Agency also continues to grow, five fully approved carers having been through the training programme and five more in the middle of training.

In September 2005 the agency was inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection and received a favourable report (viewable via www.csci.org.uk).

The growth in contracts means that more carers are required, so if you are interested in receiving the highest levels of training from an agency which puts time and resources into ongoing support of its carers then please get in touch (details on the back page).



KENYA UPDATE

Rapping for justice

Young people from Phoenix Academy and Rainbow Church have put together a fundraising CD to help street kids in Kenya.

Produced by experienced musician Wesley Muoria-Chaves, the CD, called 'If We Never Change (Heart of the Rainbow 7)', features a mixture of styles, from five-year-old Tayna Muoria-Chaves

(Wesley's daughter) singing her own song, to Mark Cummings performing a self-penned rap. Other tracks include those written by Tony Mayer, Zippy, Darleen Muoria-Chaves and Clair Smith.



The money raised from sales will help to fund 25 young people aged 14 to 16 to go out to Kenya later this year and work with vulnerable street kids. At £7, the CD will be available from e-base (see back page for contact details) or via www.nlmshop.com.

Fundraising thanks

Andy Smith and friends at Roehampton Church continue to do amazing work, both fundraising and helping out practically on PCC's overseas projects. March 2006 saw Andy and Luke Clifford organise a fundraising meal in a Roehampton restaurant for PCC's work in Kenya, raising a staggering £3500 in one night.

Luke (19) first went out to Kenya in 2005 with Andy to work with street kids. He was so moved by the experience that since getting back he has made it his mission to do all he can to help. As a trained mechanic he is currently working on establishing a garage in Nakuru which will give street kids training for a trade and a route out of poverty.

Guest house news

The Kenya guest house project is also taking shape. PCC has purchased seven acres of land in the stunning Rift Valley and the building is going up at a rapid rate. A company called Amptex Ltd has been established to manage the programme. When completed the building will not only function as a guest house, but will double as a distance learning centre. Income from visitors will help fund education for people from surrounding villages, with lectures taking place in the building itself.

A year of heartache

After the tsunami many hoped Sri Lankans would find a political unity in grief. It was not to be

Ian Wedd



It is often said that out of adversity can come unity, that sworn enemies can abandon their differences if faced with a new and common threat. The spirit of the blitz in 1940's London is the usual cliché. Squabbling neighbours putting their quarrels to one side, standing together behind Churchill's defiant and stirring words: "We shall never surrender".

In December 2004 Sri Lanka was hit by a disaster the likes of which it had never known, as the Boxing Day tsunami took away 30,000 of its souls. The civil war, of course, had claimed over twice that number, but those 64,000 perished over two decades of fighting. The tsunami did its work in a matter of minutes.

A natural disaster of this dimension leaves us speechless and helpless, confused at the random and cruel forces of nature. We naturally start to hope for silver linings to the cloud, that some form of good might come from the horror.

That was our hope for Sri Lanka. The tsunami showed no prejudice or favour. It killed Tamil, Sinhalese, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim alike. The supporters of the Tamil Tigers in the north and east drowned in pretty much the same way as supporters of the Sri Lankan government living in the south. Surely this common humanity, this sharing of grief could heal divisions and lead to those experiences of working together that change hearts and minds and stimulate peace.

Our hopes, it seems, were in vain. Instead of being a year of unity in tragedy, 2005 turned into one of squabbling over aid, political assassination, boycotted elections, escalation of violence and a fear by many observers that the nation could slip back into fully fledged civil war. Instead of working together to ensure the best use of aid for ordinary people, the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government politicised the relief effort, making it a new front in the conflict.



No shortage of aid. Big shortage of peace

Even before the wave struck things were looking precarious. Although the 2002 ceasefire brokered by the Norwegian government was just about holding, the two sides had not had face-to-face meetings since April 2003, when the Tigers pulled out of discussions saying they were being sidelined. Numerous violations of the ceasefire

had taken place, with the Norwegian-led monitoring mission estimating that over 300 people had been murdered and 1000 disappeared.

Then the tsunami struck. Once the waters had subsided there came a rare moment of hope when the Tigers were forced to ask for help from the government. It was an opportunity. An opportunity to show that most rarely demonstrated of virtues in politics - grace. A virtue requiring bravery and risk, but one which can turn situations around, with the power to break cycles of violence and revenge. Did they take it? They did not.

Instead the two sides descended into arguing over how aid should be distributed and controlled, as ordinary people who had survived the wave struggled to survive in their makeshift camps. When some sort of agreement was finally reached between the Tigers and the then President Chandika Kumaratunga, it was challenged in the courts by pro-Sinhalese nationalist groups who argued that sharing funds with terrorists (ie the Tigers) was unconstitutional. As a result the Supreme Court suspended the deal.

Then in August 2005, the Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar was assassinated near his home in Colombo. It was almost certainly the work of the Tigers (although they denied it) and, many feel, almost certainly a response to the suspension of the aid deal.

Despite being a Tamil himself, Kadirgamar had long been one of the Tigers' most vocal

The tsunami showed no prejudice or favour. The supporters of the Tamil Tigers in the north and east drowned in pretty much the same way as supporters of the government in the south

opponents, critical of concessions given them as a result of the ceasefire agreement and instrumental in getting them banned in the US and UK as being a terrorist organisation.

The assassination put the fragile peace deal in a state of crisis, exacerbated by the Presidential elections in November 2005 which were close run but resulted in victory for Mahinda Rajapakse, backed by hardliners opposed to any concessions to the Tigers. The defeated candidate, Ranil Wickramasinghe (a former prime minister and generally more sympathetic to some form of power sharing deal with the Tigers) lost by 180,000 votes. Had the Tigers not imposed an unofficial boycott of the elections in the north and east, then he would have won. In Jaffna for example, turnout was only 0.014% of more than 700,000 registered voters.

Many feel that the boycott was a strategic political decision, that the Tigers wanted conflict



Devastation: the tsunami left thousands homeless

rather than peace, as the peace they could have achieved under Wickramasinghe would not have been on the terms they desired.

Since the elections conflict has certainly been what they have got. Countless government soldiers and sailors have been killed. In one incident the Sea Tigers (the navy wing) sailed a boat alongside a Sri Lankan navy patrol vessel and blew themselves up killing 13 sailors. The Tigers claim that 40 Tamils have been killed by security forces.

As is usual, the average civilian Tamil on the ground has suffered from both sides. House-to-house searches, abductions, detentions and scrutiny at checkpoints have all been intensified by the government. At the same time pressure comes from the Tigers to join up and fight. Civilians have been forced to undergo basic military training by the rebels. If they refuse they are beaten up. All of this has provoked fears of a return to total war.

Those fears had reached critical level, when, remarkably, the Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim managed to broker peace talks in Geneva in February this year. Even more remarkably those talks resulted in a deal, an agreement to curb the violence from both sides. The outcome was described by Solheim as "frankly above my expectations".

Sadly, since then things have deteriorated once more. In April, a female suicide bomber entered army headquarters in Colombo and blew herself up, killing 10 and seriously injuring the head of the army. The Sri Lankan government blamed the Tigers (who again denied the attack) and retaliated with airstrikes on Tamil positions in the east. Reports claim that 100 people have died in two weeks, many of them civilians.

Norwegian mediators are desperately struggling to get the sides back together.

Eighteen months ago we dared to hope tragedy could lead to peace. It seems that those hopes were in vain.

I work for PCC and my name is.... **BLAIR MORTIMER**

Blair Mortimer is PCC's student social worker. Phoenix magazine caught up with him over a cup of PCC coffee to find out what makes him tick

So, Blair, thanks for the coffee

My pleasure.

Blair, let's cut right to the chase. What's with the weird name? Any Prime Ministerial inspirations there?

No, I was born long before our leader was on the scene.

Glad we cleared that up. Now, you have been with PCC since 2004 as their student social worker. What do you actually do?

I work primarily with the Foster Care Agency and I have two main roles. One is to complete potential foster carers' applications. This involves home visits, interviews and forms, making sure applicants fully appreciate what the role involves and that they are competent...

Is that what they call the F1?

Yes. And my second role is to support the carers if they then start fostering. We need to provide the best possible service for young people, so we do visits to ensure the home is functioning and the young people excelling.

And how long till you are a fully fledged social worker?

I am on a three year degree course at the moment and should be finished in 2007.

And then you will receive a huge pay rise?

[laughs]

So, what got you into this line of work?

I used to work in a Haringey primary school as a 'Primary Learning Mentor'. I did that for four years but reached a point where I needed to get a professional qualification to progress. I knew social work would give me skills in things like theories of child development and all the legal stuff. At the time Adrian and Pauline Hawkes [PCC Directors] were looking to set up the foster care agency and took me on.

Right. So let's go back to the mentoring. What on earth is that?

It's an extension to special needs assistance. Basically it's about working more intensively with kids with very difficult barriers to learning.

Sounds terrifying

It was great! I loved it.

And what got you into that?

I was working in sales for hotels. It paid the bills but that was about it. Someone suggested I look into special needs work in schools. I had a background in theatre workshops with young people and have always felt geared towards engaging with them and their futures. So I applied and got taken on by an agency.

And they broke you in gently?

Not quite. I was given the job of looking after a youngster who'd been expelled for violent behaviour and arson! None of the schools in Haringey would have him.

Sounds lovely

He was an absolute angel. He was only nine.

Nine! And did you sort him out?

Well I worked with him for two years and what we achieved with him in primary school will stay with him. How he arrived with us and how he left were totally different. Like a lot of these kids he just needed decent, consistent role models. Funnily enough he was the first child I saw when I started the job and then the day I left, after he had moved on, he made a point of coming back to see me off. He was running up the road, desperate to see me. It was a very moving moment.

So what's your secret?

I'm not sure there is a secret. It's just about recognising that every young person has ideas and potential. In my opinion success is based on only promising what is possible, surprising them by doing more and always trying to see things from their point of view.

But you do seem to be a natural at it

Well...

Don't be modest

OK maybe. When I was doing the job there were kids that only I could calm down. I don't know how or why. I think I can relate to young people who grow up without the security of role models. That influences the way I work.

Where does that empathy come from?

Well I was adopted from birth and the couple who adopted me split up when I was six. So it was a broken home and I really had nobody that I was close to parentally. I looked for parental idols in teachers, scout leaders, friends' parents, but they never really filled the gap. I guess that means that I know the power of a lack of identity.

Have you ever tried to track down your biological parents?

I didn't want to at first, but once I got married [to Emma] and had my own kids [Ellis, Rae and Ezra] I realised that I had created a history. It started with me. But I felt like I had no history of my own, so I started to make investigations. I now know a bit about my mother and where she has lived. It's fairly patchy and I am not sure about the idea of trying to find her. We'll see. I have no idea who my biological father is and my experience of growing up has made me realise just how crucially important the role of the father is. I used to see that all the time with the lads I worked with. No male role models.

Getting back to your work now with foster care. You have fostered in the past?

Sort of. We did respite care.

And what is respite care?

It's where you give someone a break by looking after their foster child for a short period of time. And then we were supported lodgings carers for over five years. That is where you look after 16-18 year-olds, preparing them for adult life.



Blair Mortimer

All useful experience for this job?

Exactly.

And now the foster care agency is fully up and running and very well respected, what would you say is your vision for it?

I would say, and I am sure Adrian and Pauline would agree, that we want to be a hugely reliable asset to the local authority and to be an organisation of excellence at every level. From the way we structure our forms to the way that we care. Our focus is very much on 'care' rather than just 'accommodation', and as a result we place a great value on supporting and encouraging our carers. You have to look after the carers as much as the kids in many ways. It has a huge impact.

And are you achieving that?

I think we are. We seem to be well liked and are winning more contracts, particularly working with asylum-seeking youngsters.

And you're enjoying the job?

I'm doing what I love the best which is assisting young people to offer them better futures. Giving them the best chance to be able to start good lives.

Thanks Blair for talking to us

My pleasure.

(Any chance you would change your name to Cameron if the other lot won?)

Let's not even go there.

Contacting PCC

WE HAVE A NEW AND IMPROVED WEBSITE!

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