

Visit to the Humanitarian Project; YOUTH FOR CHANGE

On 3rd September 2017, Fr. Rajanaygam, the Priest Associate accompanied me from Mannar to Jeyapuram where we met a group of participants of the humanitarian project. They were a happy group of young people who welcomed me and Fr. Rajanaygam with bouquets of flowers. We had a conversation on what they are living as participants of the project. Five of them related also their stories. They were stories of suffering faced with courage and hope. It was sad to see how some of them had faced a series of misfortunes one after the other. One said she had no happy experiences to share. However all expressed their joy of being part of the project.



From there we went for the opening of Mr. Balamoorthi's well-equipped tailor shop in Jeyapuram. He was delighted because his dream came true that day in our presence. Other participants of the project, his friends and his own mother were present for the occasion. It was great to see how the other participants of the project served refreshments while rejoicing because the life-long dream of their brother had come true.



Then we proceeded to Anichiyankulam in Mallavi where we met another group of participants. There once again after a warm welcome with garlands we listened to the stories.



Our next visit was to a place where two brothers affected by war, who were participants of the project, received electrical instruments to improve their carpentry work. They were sure they were going to experience a real change in their lives. They also mentioned that when they came to the project it was not with the hope of receiving material help but with the need to get support and encouragement for their lives. They wanted to join others.



The same day we visited also a little boutique run by a participant Miss.Vijikala with her father. They received a quantity of goods so that they can sell and buy and improve their business.



Finally we proceeded to Therankandal School in Mallavi where all were gathered for the main event of the day. It had many parts.

1. Sharing of experiences by those who participated in the one to one counselling program conducted by Sr.Christobel and her team. Everyone expressed how she/he profited from the counselling. In their own milieus they did not have anyone to whom they could open themselves. But with a group of trained counsellors they got the help they needed. They got healing and also guidance for choices they had to make in life. Sr.Christobel felt, while many were able to work during the time allotted by the project there are others who need continued help and arrangements needed to be made for them.



2. Experience with the youth from the South. They had faced the program with a certain amount of fear since for most of them it was completely a new experience. They mimed their first encounter. There was fear and hesitation yet they walked towards each other. Finally the encounter was a happy one where they exchanged their experiences, did certain games and exercises together and made fun. It was a time of getting to know and building up relationships. They said they parted in tears and the communications continue to this day through social media. They also said they hesitated to take them to their homes since they thought they could not provide sufficient facilities for them. However those from the South were looking forward to such an experience and were a bit disappointed. Now the youth from the North are looking forward to the day when they will visit the youth from South. This part of the project is the responsibility of Miss.Pathma Consecrated Secular member.



3. Exhibition in the school was a real show of talents. What they started doing as recreational activities have become a means of supplementary income. It was colorful with baby clothes, pillow cases, table mats, baskets, and other various hand works done by different member of the project. The sticker “Youth for Change” was attached to each article and the quality and beauty of the work is really praise worthy.



4. The high point was the Cultural spectacle. The participants sang and danced. They communicated their past experience and the hope they carry through drama, dance and a traditional Vilupparudu. Such cultural expressions help them to release themselves and to look forward to the future with hope and courage. At the same time it is a way of channeling their creative energies in a positive way.



My observations

The participants were happy and welcoming even though they carry their painful experiences within them. They are people who can put aside their personal pain and rejoice together. They are in the process of healing and that gives them hope. There seems to be a strong bond among the participants. They can rejoice in one another's achievements. They are very creative in many ways. Their hands were busy knitting while waiting for others to come. They look forward to their meetings on Sunday because meeting and sharing give the energy to continue with life. I constantly heard them saying what they enjoy most is not the material help, but the support they get to build up their own lives. They seem to value their relationships with one another and with the members of our Family who are involved in the project.



An important question

The year is coming to an end. At the end of the year can we say the first year of our jubilee preparation is over and therefore the project is closed? How can we assure a smooth transition so that the project supported by the help of the whole family will become an ongoing self-sustained project. We need to keep this question before us as we go towards the time of the conclusion.

