

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE BELAKU TRUST



July 2013 – Oct 2013

This period was one in which the contributions of our volunteers stood out and we would like to dedicate it to the many, many people who have helped Belaku carry out its work. We have gained enormously from their presence and are happy that they seem to feel their time with Belaku has also been of use to them.



Much time during these months was devoted to fundraising and also helping the women's groups with sales. With so many holidays and festivals coming at this time, a large part of their income is generated during it.

United Way organized the Joy of Giving Event this year in Oct from the 2nd to the 8th. We put up colourful 'Wish Trees' at select corporates like Mindtree and Northern Trust and at boutique stores like Cinnamon and Serenity. The students at Stonehill International School almost had a stampede trying to pick the best wishes that they could fulfill. To all of them, our sincere thanks. As part of this event, we were also given the opportunity to showcase handmade products of the women's groups, *Kirana*, *Deepa* and *Ushe*, at the 'Genero-City' event on the 5th of Oct.

With this kind of spread all over the city, we would never have been able to handle it without the enormous contribution of many volunteers. Ragini Mukund, Prathima Gokhale, Manisha Nagaich, Srilakshmi Divakar, Nadia Mancion, Clarice Mancion, Rebecca Poston, Vinalini Mathrani, Nandita Urs,

"Though I have been with Belaku for the last 7-8 years, this year was a great experience to be a part of the sales of the women's groups and to do the actual selling of the products. It was a different kind of satisfaction where you feel that you have done something to empower women who are struggling to be financially independent and cater to their daily needs."

*Pratima Gokhale,
volunteer from Bangalore*

"As a volunteer at Belaku I helped to organise the summer camps for the children in the villages. After much hard work it was so rewarding to see the children engaged and enjoying the activities we had planned. It was a great experience and I'm really happy to have been a part of it!"

*Cassandra Martin, Volunteer
from Australia*

Nikhil Saldanha, Stephanie Volpini, Alagammai Meyyappan and Gayathri Devadasan were all invaluable in making the fundraising event a success.

Reports and Media

Letting more people know of our work is important to us and we have tried to get the word out in many ways.

The gelathis (village preschool teachers and health facilitators), women from the Income-Generation groups and the staff at Kanakapura and Bangalore all got the opportunity to display their acting prowess in a film made about Belaku! Girish Karnad and Arundathi Nag generously donated their time for directing and dubbing the film respectively, and Haridas and team shot it beautifully. We aim to have it up on the net soon so those who want to “pay a visit” but haven’t been able to come in person yet, can get an idea of our work and the villages.

The Hindu carried an interview by Aliyeh Rizvi in July, which covered Belaku’s work <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/guiding-light-to-better-health/article4930241.ece>

Dr. Jayashree Ramakrishna is the Professor and Head of the department of Mental Health Education at NIMHANS; more significant to us is her long standing support for Belaku. She and Dr. Ganapathy submitted a note on birth practices in Karnataka for a BIRTH BOOK to be brought out by the White Ribbon Alliance; this is to be a collection of stories and accounts from all over the world, “affirming the depth of our common humanity through the universal significance of pregnancy and birth”.

Staff, Visitors and Volunteers

Baneen Karachiwala, who had been with Belaku for 6 years carrying out a research project and leading the income generation groups, left Belaku after she got married. We were sad to see her go but we know she will continue to be closely associated with Belaku and its work.

Raji Mohan, who had been volunteering with us, has joined us part-time in August and is now working with the income generation groups.

Samuel Monteiro from France joined us in June as a volunteer and was a tremendous help with crunching numbers for our Income-Generation programme. We hope to see him back soon!

The talented Cassandra Martin, a volunteer from Australia, who helped us with reports, proposals and the summer camp, left to travel around Europe before going back to university.

To allow for better supervision and enhanced activities, we have hired 2 new field co-ordinators at Kanakapura. After rigorous interviews Ashwini K. and Sunitha J. were selected.

Malini Vasudevan from Kuala Lumpur along with Mr. Raja Warriar paid us a visit and Mrs. Vasudevan made a generous donation in the name of her late mother, Mrs. Vanaja Madhavan. Peck Hoon from Singapore also visited and we look forward to continued associations with all.

A group of pediatricians and other health care providers and interested persons from the UK and Australia visited the villages. From them, as with all our visitors, we got to see our work through fresh eyes and rethink our approaches.



Other work continues as ever – a few new developments we are happy to report are:

- The women of income generation groups are slowly taking on more of the running of their groups and have been generating their own vouchers.
- Jogi Siddegowda, who has paraplegia and for whom we have been arranging surgery and physiotherapy, has graduated from high school and has joined the women's group Ushe – the sole male member of the groups! It was their decision to help him this way and he is proving quite adept at sewing.



- Livestock loans were made once more in July. This is the fourth such disbursement and we were able to fund even more thanks to a donation from our trustee, Mrs. Sadiqa Peerbhoy. Seven cows and four goats were bought by the women, who will repay the loans over two years, after which the funds will be rotated to others.

We end this newsletter with our thanks for your support and our best wishes for the holiday season and a fulfilling 2014 to all!!