

☆ inTouch

THE SCOTTISH LOVE IN ACTION NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2010
No.07



TEN YEARS AFTER

A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN TEN YEARS.

Scotland can get itself a government. Rugby can go professional. Facebook can take over the world. And SLA's Development Manager, Colin McRae, can change from a carefree young student into a responsible family man!



In my case, a visit to rural India with the QII youth group in 1999 can kick-start a career in international development. A return to Edinburgh allowed me to become a SLA Trustee and, this summer, to join SLA's Development Manager Colin McRae on a return visit to Tuni ten years on.

More importantly, it let me meet again the fabulous people in our partner organisation, NASA, whose incredible hard work continues to give all the children a chance to escape poverty and burst into adult life.

To be honest, I was prepared to be a bit sceptical. I had seen some of the most committed, professional and effective development organisations in action. I wasn't sure how SLA and NASA would measure up. I couldn't have been more wrong!

The first thing that struck me was the physical changes. In 1999, there were a couple of halls which doubled as places to sleep, eat and teach, plus some wee offices where NASA staff worked. The rest was barren land and long grass.

Fast forward a decade and there are proper classrooms, toilet blocks, a road between the boys' dorms and the main campus with street lamps, classrooms, rooms for children to sleep and study safely, and a medical clinic—facilities where children can live and learn.

I soon realised that the other impressive thing was the dedication and professionalism of the NASA staff.

I hadn't realised just how well organised they were, how they were constantly finding ways to improve the home and school, how thoroughly they tended to the needs of every child, and how much effort they made to develop their own skills.

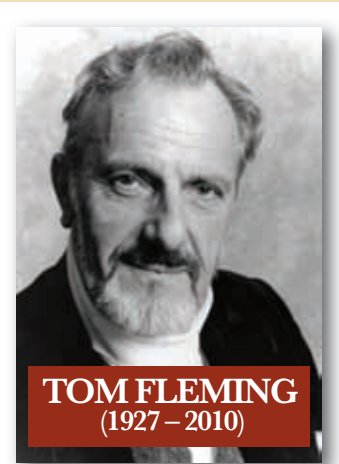
And the kids – WOW! – the kids. In 1999, they were pretty timid, and I think they found the school a bit of a drag. But this time I was struck by their confidence and individualism, which helps explain why they are achieving such great exam results and thriving in further education (details on page 2).

They look out for each other too. Some of the older children who played with us ten years ago still return from college as "big brothers and sisters", role models for the younger ones.

But some things remain the same. The kids still demonstrate their resilience and energy, despite traumatic and impoverished backgrounds. The staff members are still passionate about making a difference to children's lives.

SLA's support - your support - is still vital to providing the basic resources. And the kids still love screaming out "The Music Man" and doing all the actions – partying like it's 1999!

Malcolm Jack, SLA Trustee



TOM FLEMING
(1927 – 2010)

Tom Fleming, SLA's first and only Patron, is greatly missed. He was a unique and loving character, a real gentleman who deeply enriched the lives of countless people with his honesty, warmth, almost shy sense of humour and genuine interest in all whom he met.

We can still hear in our minds his resonating, dignified and inimitable voice famous to so many people all over the world, especially when commenting on the grandeur of Royal occasions and the thrill of the Edinburgh Tattoo. Tom was never proud, nor did he seek acclaim. Instead he was modest about all that he achieved.

How privileged we were that Tom was so willing and happy to be our Patron. By giving this gift he gave us a dignity and a credibility right from the start. Tom was passionate about the children of SLA and took a keen interest in the growth of the charity and our adventures in Tuni. We were so proud to call him Patron and Friend during this first decade. We are full of thanks and deeply grateful for his life and example. How we shall miss him.

Gillie Davidson, Chair and Founder, SLA



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CALL: 0131 629 9112
Email: enquiries@sla-india.org

Meet the children



SLA IS ALL ABOUT THE CHILDREN:

Young lives touched by past tragedy but now so brimful of joy, love and laughter. SLA would like you to meet more of them, and know their stories.



John (6)



John has been at the children's home for four years. He was found begging in a railway station with his mother and his 'second father.' It is believed that his real father abandoned the family after John's birth, or died shortly after. John has no memory of his father. Sadly, John has not had a visit from his mother since he came to the children's home. She was last seen begging in various different places and so it's impossible for the staff to maintain contact with her. Despite this, John is incredibly happy in the home, enjoying school, with 'social studies' his favourite subject. He enjoys playing the board game 'carams' in his free time, or watching some of the older children playing chess. He also enjoys the songs during evening prayers, and a special treat is watching movies some Sundays.


Yaminey & Bhargavi (6)



The twin sisters are in their first year at the Light of Love Home. They are both in the lower kindergarten class (LKG), with Yaminey liking her ABCs, while Bhargavi prefers her 123s! They came to Tuni after their mother died from malaria. Their father, a local labourer, is believed to be alive, although his whereabouts are unknown. The girls' uncle is now their legal guardian, although he cannot afford to support them without the help of the children's home. They enjoy visiting their uncle and extended family back in their village during school vacations. When they are not in class, the girls enjoy playing hopscotch, joining in with many of the other younger children.



Students Top their Class

As Malcolm Jack has testified on the previous page, we can only marvel at the giant strides made by our partners in India since 1999. Nowhere is this more dramatically illustrated than in the children's exceptional educational achievements. 

There may be lies, damned lies, and statistics, but some numbers speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

Just look at the graph below showing the percentage of the children passing their 10th class exams in the last five years, graduating from secondary school and so ensuring that they are considered literate by the government and can go to Intermediate College (i.e. sixth form).

It's an incredible success story, and even more so when you consider that in 2006 only 10 students sat 10th class exams whereas in 2010 there were double the number of children. And 19 of them passed! Even more impressive, nine of them got A-grades. Congratulations!

Now, out of a total population of 519 children 27 are studying at Intermediate College, 3 are studying at Polytechnic and 22 are in higher education proper, studying everything from engineering and computer science to nursing.

Just seeing them beaming proudly with their textbooks and grown-up college clothes brings huge smiles to our faces and lumps to our throats.

These children, prior to coming to our Home-cum-School, were often denied education, in some cases worked as bonded labourers, house servants or beggars and had no hope of a future without exploitation, poverty and rejection. Now their dream and ours of liberation is becoming a reality.

"Many of our children in the home are able to compete with the so-called better brought up children in private, fee paying schools." says our partner NASA in its most recent report.

Meanwhile at the other end of the school, English Medium classes (the 'gold standard' in India) have spread from kindergarten up to fourth class (about 7 years old). Incredibly, by 2016-2017 the whole school will be English medium.

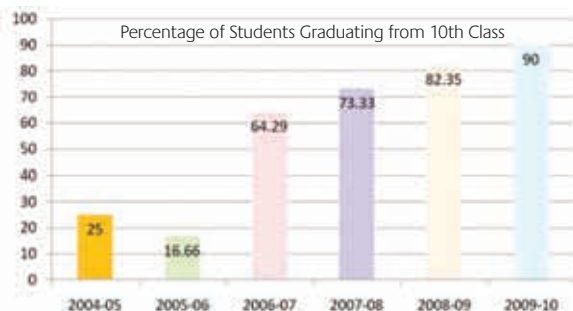
These successes are thanks to the dedication and determination of the teachers in the school.

And so on September 5th Indian students honour these efforts on Teachers Day—boisterous, joyful occasions when children swap places with their teachers and lampoon them mercilessly!

This year the day was rounded off with cricket, volleyball and, the hilarious highlight, teachers' musical chairs! There's nothing like seeing your maths master hit the dirt!

As Malcolm says, it's not just the new medical clinic, the modern generator, or even the science lab equipment that is the biggest transformation. It is the change in the children themselves.

Just consider that two of the older boys—Kumaraja and Nagi—can now take blood samples from their brothers and sisters and do diagnostic tests. Ten years ago that would have been unthinkable. That is the power of education. We can't wait to see what the next generations will achieve.



"Many of our children in the home are able to compete with the so-called better brought up children in private, fee paying schools."



SLA 10TH

BIRTHDAY PARTY!

Children’s birthday parties are such a delight; a chance for family and friends to celebrate young lives and encourage the exuberance, adventure, generosity and sheer joy of youth. It was that open-hearted, youthful spirit—nurtured by Gillie Davidson and Brian Barron—that transported the QII youth group to India in 1999 and gave birth to SLA a year later. It was that spirit that we celebrated as SLA reached double figures in September.



As with all good children’s parties, our 10th birthday bash at the Rudolph Steiner School featured cake, candles, decorations and dressing up, plenty of entertainment and lots of scrummy food. And we are happy to report that there were no tears before bedtime.

Barbara Watts and Susan Inch organized an army of volunteers to transform the school hall into an Indian home from home, with the ladies resplendent in saris and salwar kameez, and the tables groaning with finger food generously donated by Akil Aslam of InDelhi restaurant.

There was sitar and storytelling from our dear friend Birim Rongong who took us on a wonderfully evocative, dreamlike journey from Scotland to India, and a delightful medley of Bollywood and traditional dance from our Hyderabad friends Rosie and Srinu.

And for our guests of honour, the Indian Consul General and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Anand, there were lovely gerbera garlands, so kindly donated by Thomas Maxwell of Flowers by Maxwell and presented by Lucas (10), Emily (7) and Tai (2½).

We were also treated to some Western music too: some soothing Mozart from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra quartet and sax from Mike Brogan, who also presented us with a tantalizing glimpse of “Everything is New”, the film by the artists group Transgressive North that stars the children in India and Dr. Premdas.

It was enormously exciting to see their smiling, beautiful faces as they performed so naturally and we can’t wait to see the finished film!

Above all, there was a genuine, heartfelt coming together of the SLA community to rejoice and to salute the efforts of donors, volunteers, and fundraisers, but above all the extraordinary achievements of our Indian partners NASA and the children themselves.

The highlight of the evening was a special video birthday message for SLA from the director of the Home-cum-School in Tuni, Sony.

He spoke movingly about how SLA is “making an immediate difference in the lives of each and every child here,” and our hearts swelled to see him and some of the children playing in the background.

“SLA is our strength in our trials,” he said. “Your commitment and dedication to the future of the children encourages us all the time. Your support makes everything possible despite the economic distress we currently find ourselves in.”

To celebrate, all the children in Tuni had a special treat: chicken biryani followed by fire crackers and birthday candles for each and every one of them.

They lit the candles one by one, and in Scotland we lit candles too, not just to celebrate but also to symbolize how the work of NASA and SLA embodies the proverb: it is better to light a candle than blame the darkness. If you’d like to light a candle too, you can get an SLA Light of Hope candle from our new online shop (details on page 5).

Leading the candle lighting was our chair and founder Gillie Davidson, who spoke with great passion and verve about the children’s extraordinary resilience, love of life and each other.

Colin McRae, SLA’s Development Manager, then told us just how far and fast SLA has come in its short life, particularly in terms of educating so many of the children up to college level.

Notwithstanding SLA’s wondrous progress, it remains a child compared to many of the big name charities that demand our attention. It still needs encouragement, nurture and love from its family and friends. Children are resilient, but they can also be fragile.

Above all, SLA needs support for its mission to care for the children in India, it needs the collective strength of the SLA community to reach out across the thousands of miles from Scotland to India.

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SLA’s 10th birthday party was a great success, a happy time for us and our supporters that will spur us on towards even greater efforts for the children. Thank you one and all and Happy Birthday SLA!
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Irvine Welsh Novel Competition

As you will have read in our Spring newsletter, one of our most stalwart supporters of late has been Scottish cult author Irvine Welsh of Trainspotting fame. Irvine has travelled the world and India with UNICEF and seen child poverty, oppression and deprivation up close for himself. And so it has been fantastic that he has backed SLA so wholeheartedly.

Pictured (l-r): Gillie Davidson, Irvine Welsh, Al Cameron (Dominion Director)



This summer he came up with a brilliant, unique plan to help raise funds for the children of SLA.

Irvine would immortalize one SLA supporter in print: he would use his or her name for a character in his next novel, the hugely-anticipated prequel to Trainspotting, called Skagboys.

The lucky winner will be rubbing shoulders with Renton, Begbie, Spud and the boys, and if the book gets turned into another film, they could be name checked on screen!

People entered online or by text, pitching their names into the prize draw that ended October 30th. It was such a thrill! Everyone wants to be immortal, after all.

This marvelous new twist on 'name dropping' grabbed the attention of Stephen Fry no less who tweeted about the competition, attracting even more entrants.

The Daily Record, Scottish Sun, and the Scotsman all ran stories about the prize. Word even spread as far afield as the India Times and Florida Today!

As part of the build up to the prize draw, SLA, Irvine and the Dominion Cinema in Edinburgh put on a special screening of Trainspotting. One pair of Irvine Welsh fanatics had travelled all the way from Ayr after reading about the event.

Irvine joined the throng of over 200 film fans and before the movie rolled made a passionate appeal on behalf of SLA.

He was cheered onstage by an audience well-lubricated with the usual SLA helping of fizz and

Scottish finger food. Everyone was dying to ask him questions about both Trainspotting and Skagboys.

But first he spoke about Abesh, a 3-year old boy whose mother killed herself and who was abandoned by his father and family. "SLA hasn't abandoned him, nor has it abandoned lots of kids like him," he said, adding how impressed he was with the love and care being shown to the children of SLA.

Then, in an ironic reversal of usual cinema etiquette, Grant Stott, who generously compered the event free of charge, urged everyone to switch their mobile phones on, text their answers into the Skagboys prize draw and enter the competition en masse!

Grant then conducted a fascinating Q&A with Irvine and the audience. Irvine answered questions with great charm and candour, revealing amongst other things that his favourite character was probably the well-meaning but hopeless Spud, and that the monumental Trainspotting soundtrack was probably "the most contentious and hotly debated thing about the whole film."

It was an incredible atmosphere on the night, cheers and laughter rang out at favourite moments of the film. We are so grateful to Irvine for such a generous gift, to all those who came to the screening, and of course everybody who participated in this once-in-a-lifetime shot at literary immortality.

DOING THE BUSINESS



Many different businesses have come on board to help SLA. Here are a few examples that we hope will inspire others.

Amazing Curry

Coriando® is an exciting new range of hand-made gourmet curry pastes, curry powders and ready-made meals, made in Edinburgh using high-quality ingredients.

Company founder Ian McAllister (pictured with SLA Development Manager, Colin McRae) is kindly donating a percentage of profits from sales of the curry paste through shops to SLA. Coriando® also provides gourmet catering services for parties, corporate events, functions, weddings, Bollywood nights and private dinner parties.

www.amazingcurry.com



Dominion Cinema

Over the last two years the Dominion Cinema has supported SLA by helping us to run very successful fundraising events including several Ladies Cinema Nights which have built a large following and introduced many new faces to the work we do. Huge thanks go to the directors of the Dominion and their staff for their invaluable support.



Gift Boxes

Gifts Boxed For You is a new and innovative gift company offering beautiful and unique gifts. Neil Allan from Gifts Boxed For You said "We are delighted to support SLA in their tenth anniversary year. For all items purchased using the code SLA10, SLA will receive a donation of ten percent of the profit on every box you buy."

Visit their website to view the gifts at www.giftsboxedforyou.com



Get Shopping for SLA!

SLA's online shop has been launched! Not only does our new shop enable supporters to buy tickets for SLA fundraising events but also to purchase a variety of different gifts and merchandise. We have some very exciting new gifts ideal for Christmas prezies. **Read on...**

Give-A-Gift Cards

Why not combine giving a gift to a friend or relative with helping to support destitute children in India? Our Give-a-Gift Card scheme lets you do just that. You can choose an educational, medical or food gift: for example a year's medical care for one child, or a month of meals for a child. **Gifts cost between £10 and £24.**

You can buy Give-a-Gift cards through the online shop or through the SLA office. When you go online, simply choose your gift, add it to your SLA shopping basket and complete the checkout details including a different delivery address if you would like the Give-a-Gift card sent directly to your recipient.

Light of Hope Candle

It's better to light a candle than blame the darkness! **At just £5 each** these are the perfect Christmas gift: a scented candle that has a picture of a SLA child on the tin lid. The candles come in three different designs and three different scents: heather, winter berries and cinnamon.

The candle is supplied within a red organza bag with a Light of Hope description card. The idea behind the gift is to enjoy burning the candle and then once it has finished you can use the tin container to collect loose change to send to SLA. **Candles cost £5 plus £1.75 P&P.**

Songs of the Hebrides

Transport yourself to the Western Isles with this CD of traditional Hebridean Songs from the Marjory Kennedy-Fraser collection, including The Christ Child's Lullaby. The songs are sung by long-term SLA supporter Joan Busby with piano accompaniment. This is a new recording of these timeless folk classics. **CDs cost £7.50 plus £1.50 P&P.**

SLA Curry Paste

Fancy a curry? SLA can help out. We are selling our very own gourmet hand-made curry paste, provided by Edinburgh-based company Coriando®. **Each jar costs £3.99** and can be bought through the SLA online shop. But please note the jars are not suitable for posting so once purchased they should be collected directly from the SLA office.

SLA Notelets

For that special or urgent message here is a pack of 8 SLA notelets with four different designs and blank inside. Not only are they very attractive, but they will also help spread awareness of SLA's work among your family and friends. **Packs are £5 plus £1.50 P&P.**



do a little...
change a lot
CHALLENGE

It takes very little on our part to change an awful lot in the lives of destitute children in India. Take inspiration from some of the many imaginative ways SLA supporters are showing their love in action. What can you do?

NEW

Kevock Garden Coffee Morning

Stella Rankin invites SLA supporters to an exclusive viewing of her beautiful Kevock garden near Lasswade just south of Edinburgh on Saturday April 30th between 11am and 1pm.

Her garden has featured in 'The Garden' magazine and also on the Beechgrove Garden on TV. The nursery has won Best Floral Display for four consecutive years at Gardening Scotland.

www.kevockgarden.co.uk



NEW

Meadows Marathon

If your New Year Resolution will be to get fit then we can help! SLA is looking for runners for the Meadows Marathon in Edinburgh. Don't worry, it's not really a marathon but is in fact a half marathon and 5km fun run which takes place on Sunday March 6. You can take part in either race and you can wear fancy dress if you like!

To sign up, email enquiries@sla-india.org, or phone the SLA office and we can give you all the details you need.

Bridge and Afternoon Tea

Over 100 bridge players packed into Greenbank Church Hall in October for a fun and sociable afternoon of Bridge followed by afternoon tea. Proceeds raised for SLA through tickets sales and a raffle topped £1,300. Thank you to Katy Maguire, Moira Davidson, Helen Aitken and Jean Denison and the catering team led by Liz Smith for all your hard work and enthusiasm in creating such a pleasurable afternoon.

Merchiston School Pentland Walk

Inspired by a talk about SLA as part of the annual World Issues Week, the junior boys at Merchiston Castle School set about gathering sponsorship for their annual walk. An overcast but dry day in June was ideal for the 15-mile walk in the Pentland Hills, and over a hundred boys headed off in small groups clutching their maps. The boys were delighted with their grand total of over £5,000, and were grateful to SLA for giving them the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people in India.

Primary School Football Strips

The girl's football team at South Morningside Primary School got together and organised for their old football strips which they no longer needed to be sent out to the children at our Tuni Home. Thank you from all our Tuni Children to South Morningside Primary School mum Hazel McLachlan and all involved for helping to bring this great idea to fruition.

Musical Recital

Music lovers enjoyed a wonderful recital at the beginning of October at Bo'Ness Old Kirk. Matthew Brown, Maria Wilson and Laura McKinlay, all graduates of the RSAMD in Glasgow, performed a wide range of musical styles from Handel to the Beatles, from Scottish folk music to West End Shows. A big thanks to all involved for giving your talents to help raise funds. All proceeds were divided between SLA and Strathcarron Hospice.

Edinburgh Rat Race

It is amazing how many folk are willing to push themselves to the physical limit for SLA! Sam Paaka, from New Zealand, pit his strength and wits against the Edinburgh Rat Race. We're not talking about outrunning sewer dwelling vermin but an extreme Urban Adventure Challenge! Teams cycle, run, kayak, abseil, navigate and climb against the clock. Sam raised the fantastic sum of £360 for the children of SLA, another great example of our "Do a Little, Change a Lot" motto. Well done Sam and thank you, you did quite a lot!

Helvellyn Triathlon

Dr. Lucy Dickinson raised £400 for SLA by competing in the gruelling Helvellyn Triathlon in Cumbria in September. The triathlon involved a 1-mile swim in Ullswater lake followed by a 38-mile cycle over the Kirkstone Pass—1481ft, also known as "The Struggle"—and finally a 9-mile run up Helvellyn—at 3,118ft, England's 3rd highest mountain. "I was very pleased to be able to support the fantastic work you do for SLA," said Lucy. "It was a hard grind but great to achieve." Thank you Lucy for this fantastic effort, it is very much appreciated.



Good Work Social Enterprise for SLA

George Watsons College pupil George Erlanger decided to help raise funds for SLA through a social enterprise venture. Using his imagination and initiative, George and his team bought soft, colourful pashminas—irresistible to mums—and sold them at a considerable profit. They also targeted a younger age group with smart, personalised pencil cases which were quickly snaffled up as the trend for them caught on in the junior school! This enterprising young entrepreneur and his team succeeded in raising £200 for the children of SLA.

Thank you George!!
We think you will go a long way!

SCOTTISH LOVE IN ACTION ☆ CARING FOR CHILDREN IN INDIA

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PASS IT ON! SPREAD THE SLA MESSAGE

When you've finished reading our newsletter, don't just chuck it in the bin or stick it in a drawer, **Pass it on!** Spread the message to your friends, families and work colleagues. Introduce them to the wonderful, charming, resilient and determined children of SLA. Perhaps ask your doctor, dentist, college or community group if you could leave the newsletter in their public places.