

1. History and Background

Sylvia is from Leeds and attended Lawnswood High School. She left at 16 and trained as a nurse at Leeds General Infirmary, then as a midwife at Hyde Terrace Maternity Hospital and then managed District Nursing for an area of Inner City Leeds.

Later she became Senior Tutor in General Nursing, District Nursing and Health Visiting at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Eventually she became uncomfortable with what she saw as her privileged lifestyle

In 1982 she sold her house, furniture, car and jewellery, cashed in her pension and went to India (after some consultation with Mother Teresa)

She has worked ever since in and around the town of Thiruvannamali in Tamil Nadu.

It is a very poor area with no Industry - Most people work on the land, live in one room houses with no facilities and earn very little - Life is hard, especially for the sick and disabled and those who care for them.

Sylvia started with a mobile clinic and trained a few helpers and also trained village women as health animators.

There have been many developments since - including:

- 1985 - Opened a small hospital
- 1996 - Built a school for profoundly deaf children
- 2001 - The school for deaf children was substantially extended
- 2002 - A new, larger hospital with 180 beds was built replacing the old
- 2003 - Opened 2 Day Care Centres for severely mentally challenged & Cerebral Palsied children (80 in all)
- 2004 - Started a Teacher Training Course for teachers of the Deaf (recognised by Rehabilitation Council of India)
- 2006 - Opened a Dialysis Unit – later expanded to 25 units
- 2007 - School expanded again
- 2008 - Opened a new outpatients clinic – treating 80,000 patients p.a
- 2009 - Opened a Nursing College for 60 students

In 2017 Sylvia withdrew from medical services following improvements in government provision - At the same time she opened a new centre for 100 disabled children

2. Management in India:

All the activities are led by Sylvia as Managing Director.

There is a local management board which is legally responsible – the RMRS – (Rangammal Memorial Rehabilitation Society)

The society is registered and is similar to a UK registered charity
It has 12 members

- Ex Policeman
- Ex School Inspector
- Lawyer

Accountant
Insurance manager
Shopkeeper
Restaurant owner
Gas distributor, Etc.

3. The Sylvia Wright Trust

The Sylvia Wright Trust (SWT) was formed in 1982, shortly after Sylvia went to India - It is a UK registered charity, based in Leeds and raises money to support all the activities in India.

Trustees visit Sylvia from time to time – at their own expense - there are no paid staff and expenses are less than 3 pence in each pound collected

Specific responsibilities include

Accounting
Publicity – Media/Web site/Newsletter etc.
Talks
Schools
Sponsorship
Visitor management
Audiology
Coordination of mentors
Gift aid
Mailing
Etc.

Money is raised from:

Sponsorship
Standing orders
Talks
Schools
Events
Collections
Grant Making Trusts
Sale of Christmas cards
Gift Aid
Etc.

A support Group with around 20 members meets in Leeds 3 times a year - In total there are about 600 loyal and very active supporters.

Encouragement and practical support and advice is given where appropriate, whilst trying to avoid interfering in day to day activities.

The Trust organizes talks and events and runs a sponsorship scheme for the children and also manages nursing and further education bursaries.

Publicity materials are available in the form of brochures, newsletters, web site, photograph boards etc.

4. Costs and funding

Total running costs in India are now around £ 300,000 p.a

From local sources/charges £ 100,000 p.a

From The Sylvia Wright Trust £ 200,000 p.a

The Trust has also funded virtually all building and equipment costs - since 1982 the Trust has sent around 7 million pounds.

5. School for the deaf

Background / History:

There is a big problem of deafness – caused by difficult births, infection and intermarriage.

1992 – District Health Officer asked for help

1994 – Sylvia opened a school in a rented building

1996 – Built a residential school

2001 – School expanded

2007 – School expanded again

Pupils and staff:

There are 200 children – all severely or profoundly deaf - most board

Around 20 new children come in each year – starting at age 4 to 5 get early speech/signing/social skills

Class sizes have to be small - there are 24 classes with around 8 children in each and there are 32 teachers plus 32 domestic staff

There are also two small early intervention classes of 3 and 4 years olds who attend with their mothers. These are non residential.

Both pastoral care and education are first class

Education General

The standard Indian curriculum is followed

"A level"/"GCSE" results are top in the area

Education - IT

A Computer Laboratory was opened in 2014 with 30 computers - The A level stream also have government provided laptops - there are three IT teachers.

Children from the youngest upwards are being introduced to IT with a view to success in the state exams but especially to give them life skills and improve their employability.

Two digital classrooms were set up in 2016 to support a screen based link to the main curriculum and there is good internet access.

Education - English

Regular English classes were introduced in 2013 including all the children from entry.

It is planned that all children will be able to read and write English accurately by the time they leave school, again with a view to enhancing employability.

For the first time, in 2014, the GCSE class sat the state English exam and all have passed since then.

Education - Progression

Almost all the children stay on until "GCSE" and half go on to "A level" - almost all those leaving after A level now go on to college or university (in a hearing environment) and more than 40 have graduated to date.

Popular courses are IT and commerce/business studies - the Trust operates a small bursary fund to help with further education fees.

Teacher Training Course:

Introduced in 2002 – leading to approved rehabilitation teaching certificates.

9 courses have been completed with 240 teachers having qualified - a further two year course with 30 more trainees is in progress – they each pay around £130 p.annum which covers the costs.

Audiology

Until 2014, the children had old analogue hearing aids supplied by the government - these were of very poor quality and reliability and not tunable to specific hearing loss.

The Trust has since procured a good quality digital hearing aid for every child - a sound proofed room has been installed with audiology equipment and 6 teachers have been trained in the basics of testing, tuning and minor repairs.

Some of the hearing aids and most of the equipment was funded by a combination of the Trust and Headingley Rotary - the rest of the hearing aids have been funded by **Hear the World**, the charitable arm of Phonak who also regularly send qualified audiologists to train and to problem solve.

A speech therapist was appointed in June 2017.

Other activities:

There is a dairy herd which supplies all of the projects.

A handful of academically challenged children are taught sewing and tailoring in a separate unit - many of the children send small gifts of embroidery to their sponsors and their skills are highly thought of - cricket is enormously popular among the boys.

Dancing is also very popular and the children are very skilled – they have won the annual state championship competition in Chennai many times.

Training visits have been made to the school by over 1500 teachers from other parts of India

Funding:

Total running costs are c. £140,000 p.a - there are no charges to the children.

The Government pays some teachers and gives a maintenance grant.

The SWT funds most of the running costs and has funded most building and equipment costs since 1994.

150 children have UK sponsors and a few children are now sponsored locally.

Education and maintenance is all provided free - no charges are made to the families.

Audiology developments

The Government has now introduced a scheme whereby certain selected children are given cochlear implants free of cost though the scheme is still in its infancy. Seven of our children have received these implants.

In the UK all children are screened at birth and cochlear implants are offered during the first week / month of life to those who would benefit. This of course is much more beneficial.

6. Nursing College

A Nursing College was opened in 2009 with 20 students undertaking a 3 year course leading to the Indian Nursing College Diploma - the entire course is taught in English.

100 nurses have qualified to date and all have found jobs - the drop out rate has been minimal (3 so far since 2009)

The students live in, study in the college and get practical experience from placements.

Running costs are around £60,000 pa - modest fees are charged which cover the running costs on a non profit making basis - finding the fees is nevertheless a struggle for some families and some students are funded by well wishers or loans or are subsidized by the Trust's own bursary fund.

The capital cost of the college was c.£200,000 - funded by the Trust.

Key values are taught especially respect for the patients.

Hostel capacity was increase in late 2017 and from June 2018 the intake will be 40 each year, in due course giving a total of 120

7. Education and Therapy Day Centres

Disabilities are common among children in the area, both physical and mental - they include Cystic Fibrosis, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Downs Syndrome, severe autism etc. - no other provision exists and the families are very hard pressed.

Two Day Centres were opened in 2003 and these were replaced by a new centre, on the same site as the school for the deaf in 2017.

The new centre will integrate education and therapy and has been championed by Miss Lee Morgan, an osteopath from San Francisco, in partnership with Sylvia - the centre currently accommodates 80 children which will be increased to 100 and the centre will also be used as a day clinic and a base for outreach.

Facilities

Complete wheelchair accessibility

9 classrooms, each with toilet and shower- Some allocated to music, art, sensory etc.

Physiotherapy room, dining room, parents room and staff room

A small, warm water hydrotherapy pool

Individual outside classroom play areas and central courtyard

Education and therapy

Attention is first paid to health screening and nutrition and hygiene.

A number of programmes are then followed delivering education and physical and mental therapies.

Currently there are 20 staff including therapists, basic carers and domestic workers.

At the centres, activities are carefully organised and each child's progress, however small, is monitored and recorded - a number of therapy and hydrotherapy volunteers, mostly from the UK, are making a rolling series of visits to mentor and train.

Parents are encouraged to attend and help and are given advice.

Funding

The running costs are around £60,000 p.a and these are mostly funded by the Trust

The capital costs have been around £250,000 of which a third has been funded by the Trust and two thirds collected by Lee Morgan in the US and in India.

No charges are made to the families.

Results

The results are astonishing. The children's disabilities are distressing and confining. At home, the children are often kept indoors and restrained while their parents go out to work, if they can find it. - in the centre, the children make real progress in their learning and social interaction.

The standard of care is remarkable and the staff is kind and dedicated - parents get some much needed respite and are offered guidance on caring for their child at home - the results are truly humbling !

Quote from one of Sylvia's annual reports:

"Our work is very demanding with many difficulties, but many rewards. The more work we do, the more needs are uncovered, but definite improvements is seen in both the living conditions and health of the people we serve".