

Peter Hill tells how a GP's dream led to a remarkable partnership

A tale of Two Sams



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Six years ago Sam Mutheveloe, a GP in Milton Keynes, invited Sam Thevabalasingham to come to the UK to recuperate after a further outbreak of violence in Colombo. It seemed ambitious, but they sensed God could use them to bless war torn Sri Lanka and also Southern India. They prayed and discussed and soon Homsa (Hope Outreach Ministries of South Asia) came into being.

Then in 1999, a UK fact-finding group toured Sri Lanka to look at Homsa projects. Sam Thevabalasingham wanted to provide some medical help for the desperately poor local population. So he arranged for two doctors on the trip, together with a local colleague and his team, to do a one-day clinic. Starting at 9am and finishing at 10.30pm, 350 patients were seen. There was certainly a need. Since then three expeditions have taken place.

Key principles

The clinics have developed a number of principles. They aim to work in a way that reflects Jesus who came as a servant, healed and preached. At our first site, local pastors assist with the running of the clinic and minister to some patients by counsel and prayer. Through their involvement, a number of people have become Christians and one new congregation has been established.

A further principle is partnership. The aim is always to compliment, not supplement. We only go where invited, work within existing structures and respond to the lead of locals. Another aspect is education. At the hill country site we teach and provide equipment for the local practitioners who are only trained to the level of medical assistants. The clinics play their part in reconciliation being completely open to all sides of this fractured community. Finally, we believe continuity is crucial. It is planned to do a trip on an annual basis and train up locals to maintain care in between.

At present there are two bases. The first is the site of the rural pastors' training college in the hill country, caring for the desperately poor tea plantation community. The second is in the war-affected eastern area close to Batticaloa. This base

is a Christian orphanage and church complex. The children are lovely chattering companions and the clinics are conducted under palm trees and within earshot of the welcoming Indian Ocean.

The medical clinics have developed a pattern. All patients are registered, weighed and have their blood pressure taken. Proper registration enables us to collect some statistics and undertake limited audit. Some see a nurse who does basic laboratory tests, asthma reversibility tests, inhaler teaching (asthma is a very severe problem) takes ECGs and does dressings. We usually operate with between four and six doctors and non-Sri Lankans need a translator. Twice in the past, we have gone with a dental team.

Moments to savour

It was a special joy to see Mr S, a 28-year-old, on his return to the clinic. He originally came with severe shortness of breath and unable to do a full day's work. He had severe untreated asthma that was managed effectively with the inhaled capsules that we brought and are not normally used locally. Through the clinic he came into contact with one of our rural pastors and was deeply and dramatically changed following the screening of the Jesus Film.

Eight months on, he is able to do a full day's job, given up his dependence on beetle chewing, cigarettes and alcohol and has stopped his wife battering behaviour. The neighbours in the village were surprised at the change in his life, and wanted the same for themselves. Through his witness there is now a thriving home church of 60 persons formerly from the Hindu faith. He was physically, economically, domestically – and more importantly – spiritually restored to wholeness.

The future

God gave a dream to an NHS GP and his pastor friend. The dream is coming true. God-willing we would be pleased to enlist anyone who can spare either ten days or three weeks to join us on subsequent visits.

Peter Hill is a General Practitioner in Birmingham