

### Q&A with Sathiyaseelan, Regional Program Manager at Integrated Development Trust

#### How long have you been working on these projects?

This is my 11th year of working with Assisi Aid Projects supported projects and completing my 5th year with Integrated Development Trust in Tamil Nadu, India.

After completing my master's degree in social work, I joined the Assisi Farm and Training Center as a Documentation Officer. Since 2013, I have continued to work as Regional Program Manager for the projects.

#### What are the best things about the program?

The realistic approach: This program approach starts to develop individuals from their family and cultural environment by working through community-based groups. It is holistic in nature.

Improving women's skills: The program improved women's ability to overcome gender barriers and financial instability in the family. The enhanced awareness among women about their rights, gender equality, financial literacy, and government programs has helped them to stay strong. At Village Development Committees and village level meetings they are now able to discuss equally with men and express their concerns about their rights and needs.

The Velicham Federation acts as an excellent platform to streamline women's efforts in the project. Networking programs with different Federations allows the women to share their learnings and resources and helps them advocate for their rights at the state level.

Quality Education initiatives: The students from tribal and rural areas have fared well in academics and extracurricular activities with active participation and support from parents.

Efforts to address the COVID crisis: The relief work has supported families to ensure food security. The ongoing awareness campaigns in the program on wearing masks, hand washing and social distancing have had



Regional Program Manager, Sathiyaseelan (bottom left) distributing relief packages. Photo credit: IDT 2020.

a positive impact on the community, and beneficiaries are now better equipped.

Disability inclusion: The program includes people with disabilities and addresses their needs where ever possible by creating awareness on their rights, assisting them to obtain Government welfare schemes and providing financial assistance for business opportunities.

#### What changes have been needed due to COVID?

The project has continuously raised awareness about COVID safety measures, which are an integral part of all activities. Many parents have started small businesses with project support, which can help balance family income if they lose their regular job due to COVID.

Since girls and women are spending more time at home, it is important to focus on strengthening safety measures and counselling processes.

Despite the closure of schools, the program has made excellent efforts to improve children's knowledge through home-based activities and with some COVID safe group activities.

# Q&A with Elizabeth Morris OAM, President of Assisi Aid Projects



## What is your connection to Assisi/IDT?

I am the current President of Assisi Aid Projects. For those who haven't met me I've had a diverse career working in the government, private and not for profit sectors. I am passionate about Assisi's programs because they focus on women's social, economic, and political empowerment and making positive changes to people's lives. I feel deeply privileged to be entrusted with the role of President and to work with our dedicated and compassionate team of staff, committee members and importantly our volunteers.

## How long have you been part of Assisi/IDT?

I joined Assisi in 2019 after reading about its overseas programs that support women and girls especially those from the most marginalised communities. Initially I was a member of its strategy and programs committee,

however, my interest in broader issues helped me appreciate the well designed and effective programs and the dedicated and hardworking team in Australia and overseas. I have seen firsthand the value of Assisi's programs and the transformation they achieve.

## What are the best things about the program?

The program is practical, and Assisi's partnership in India is built on trust, collaboration and respect, and that makes everything we do at Assisi possible. Our supporters know their contribution is not a form of welfare. Their contributions are meaningful and are responsive to the needs and interests of the communities where we work in partnership and encourage self-help and self-reliance.

## What changes have been needed due to COVID?

India urgently needs support to respond the COVID pandemic. Our team have adjusted programs to provide urgent assistance to vulnerable families including food supplies. We have been raising awareness of COVID-safe behaviours including the use of masks and social distancing. We have also found innovative ways to deliver our programs in a COVID-safe manner.

## What would you like to let Assisi supporters know about the program?

The projects we fund are practical and delivered by a small but committed expert team in India. As we are not a large organisation, we are uniquely positioned to respond quickly to the unfolding COVID crisis.

A project participant receives soap and hand washing instructions as part of the COVID prevention campaign. Photo credit: IDT 2021.



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## Do you have a message for Assisi Aid Projects supporters?

Working on this project is my passion. I have seen how contributions have helped our community over the past 11 years.

The program has given recognition to single women-led families and they feel empowered and have begun to fight against gender discrimination and overcome financial instability in families.

The relief supplies provided during the first wave of COVID, greatly helped families and it gave them hope to overcome the crisis.

With the second wave of COVID in India, the needs of the community have increased. The generous support from Assisi Aid Projects and their supporters, and this assistance will greatly help us to continue our service in the communities.

Finally, I would like to thank Assisi Aid Projects and its supporters for their continued support and encouragement.

# Assisi Aid Projects News

## In June 2020, 2,463 families across five districts received

- 17,000 kg of rice and lentils
- 6,620 cloth face masks
- 2,463 bars of soap

COVID is having increasingly acute impacts on the communities that we support. Assisi Aid Projects is committed to continue to support the rural and tribal communities of Tamil Nadu. The projects have been delivered with adjustments made for participant and team safety.

Supported by generous donors, Assisi Aid Projects provided food and essential items to 2463 families impacted by the first COVID lock down in June 2020. In response to India's second COVID wave, we are working with our local partner organisation in preparing for another relief distribution in the coming months.

## Danika's business success

*'I am thankful for the project that helped me to start this business and my family is happy with this income now'* - Danika\*, a 26 year old widow, from Abiramipuram hamlet.

Danika is an active member of the parent's group in the children's project. She has struggled to earn enough to support her two children since her husband died two years ago. Project staff spoke to her to help restore her confidence and encouraged her to start a business. With the project's support, Danika started selling dried fish in her local community, supported by a loan of INR. 10000. Her business has continued throughout the pandemic while following COVID-safe methods. She now is able to earn an extra income to support her family.

\* Name has been changed



Above: Danika's dried fish business. Photo Credit: IDT 2021



Above: Tom Dumaresq.  
Photo Credit: Dumaresq family

## Life membership

Tom Dumaresq OAM JP is a founding member of Assisi Aid Projects, and its longest standing committee member. President of Assisi Aid Projects from 2002-2008, Tom is active in the community, being a founding member and president of numerous environmental and community groups. He has won several awards for his community service. Tom received an Order of Australia Medal in 2008 for his support of humanitarian aid projects, and for his contributions to environmental, church, education, and emergency services groups. Tom has visited our projects which has deepened his commitment to the organisation.

In awarding Tom a Life Membership of Assisi Aid Projects, the Committee of Management acknowledge the enormous contribution he has, and continues to make, to the organisation.

# Q&A with Sister Piusha and Mercy, from Integrated Development Trust

**Mercy** is the Project Coordinator for the Single Women project, as well as the Secretary of the Velicham Federation of Women's Groups.

**Sr. Piusha** is the Managing Trustee of Integrated Development Trust, which implements projects supported by Assisi Aid Projects in Tamil Nadu.

## How long have you been working on these projects?

**Mercy:** I have 31 years of experience in the field of social work and this is my 11th year in this program.

**Sr. Piusha:** I have been associated with Assisi Aid projects for three years and have been the Managing Trustee of Integrated Development Trust for the past two years. From 1997-2011, I was working in the projects.

## What is the most important outcome of the projects?

**Mercy:** We have assisted widows access a lot of Government welfare schemes. Additionally, the program helps people with disabilities to access Government assistance, become beneficiaries of the program and provides opportunities to start businesses so that they can improve their livelihoods.

I consider it a great achievement that women who have been subjected to so much oppression have come out today and become members of the Velicham, the Federation of Women's Groups. It has been providing



Sr. Piusha distributing masks in the community. Photo credit: IDT 2020.

wonderful services with a network of other like-minded organizations at the state level.

**Sr. Piusha:** These programs address the real needs of vulnerable families in tribal and rural communities. The Women's Program has significantly benefited female-headed families who are now speaking out for their rights, excelling in business activities, and have increased access to loans and government programs. The Education program has improved the learning ability of children and has brought about positive changes among tribal children.

## Do you have a message for Assisi Aid Projects supporters?

**Mercy:** What I am happy about in this project is that, being a single woman, I help organize other single women in this project. The training from this project helped women take leadership. A woman has won as a ward member and has been able to speak boldly with men in the village about the needs of the village. Her leadership ability has grown. This change is because of this project.

**Sr. Piusha:** I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Assisi Aid Projects and its supporters for their continued assistance to India. The programs have made a real difference and empowered people to break down gender and financial barriers.



Mercy checks the temperature of recipients during relief distribution. Photo credit: IDT 2020.



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Assisi Aid Projects is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development Code of Conduct, which defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability for non-government development organisations. Our voluntary adherence to the Code of Conduct demonstrates our commitment to ethical practice and public accountability. Assisi Aid Projects has DFAT accreditation and complies with DFAT policies. REG: A0006479K ABN: 5651 1265170



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