

The WORTH Trust Story

A saga of enabling the differently-abled



Sriram V





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M.K. STALIN
CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

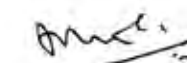


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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to note that WORTH Trust, located in Katpadi, Vellore, has completed 60 years of dedicated service in the rehabilitation, education, training and employment generation for persons with disabilities. To commemorate this momentous occasion, the Trust is releasing a book. I would like to congratulate Thiru. C. Antonysam, the architect of this organization, for his thoughtful and selfless service spanning decades, as well as all those who have carried on this mission over the years.

The Tamil Nadu Government has implemented numerous initiatives in recent years for the welfare and empowerment of differently abled persons, and I am glad to see that WORTH Trust is a key partner in this endeavour. I fondly recall that former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. M. Karunanidhi, engaged the WORTH Trust in 1974 to establish an industrial workshop in Paranur, near Chengalpattu, as part of his initiative to promote livelihood assistance for individuals affected by leprosy. This workshop was inaugurated on 10th September 1974 in the presence of former Prime Minister Tmt. Indira Gandhi and Kalaignar. I commend WORTH Trust for carrying forward this mission with passion and commitment through its unique self-sustaining model and hope that you continue this important work with dedication. I extend my warm greetings to the organisation.


(M.K. STALIN)

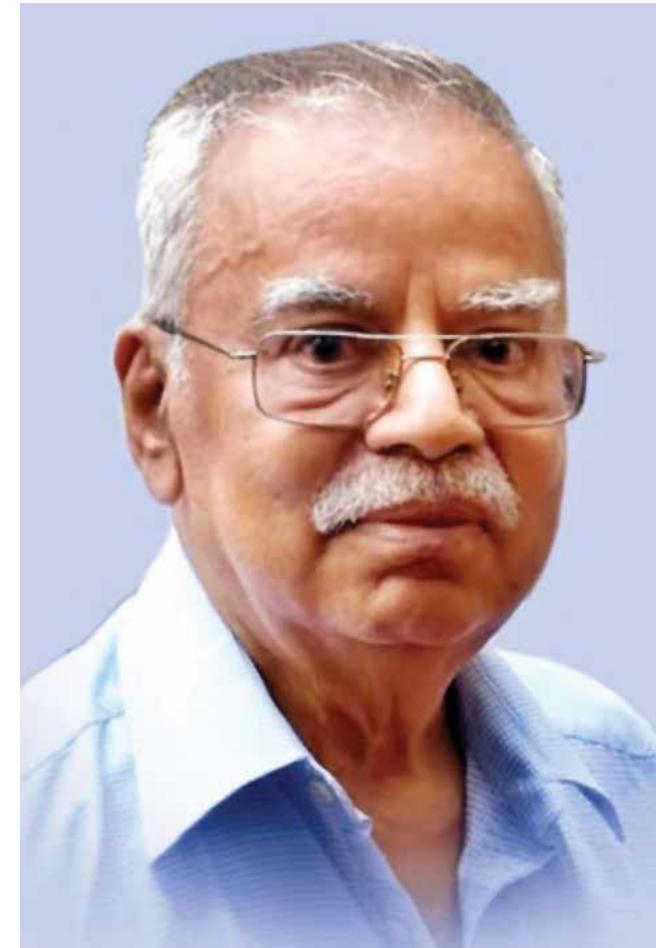
Mission of WORTH Trust

- *To promote rehabilitation and inclusion of differently-abled and people with special needs through outreach programmes, counselling and appropriate intervention*
 - *To create a barrier-free environment enabling the differently-abled and people with special needs to develop and showcase their skills thereby empowering them to be independent in life and socially acceptable*
 - *To promote a transparent organisational culture that encourages ethical conduct at all times and provide a working environment free from harassment of any form and fostering gender parity*
 - *To educate and prepare children with speech and hearing impairment for integration into mainstream schools*
 - *To provide compassionate care, guidance and need based training to children and adolescents with intellectual challenges and multiple disabilities*
 - *To provide need based vocational or on-the-job training to the differently-abled youth, people with special needs and facilitate them in their employment and growth*
 - *To produce and provide quality and affordable mobility aids and assistive devices for the differently-abled and people with special needs*
 - *To constantly explore opportunities to offer quality products and services for sustaining the rehabilitation activities by employing the differently-abled and people with special needs*
-

Vision of WORTH Trust

To rehabilitate, educate, train, employ and empower the differently-abled and people with special needs fostering inclusion and gender parity.

Patron's Foreword



Reflecting on the last sixty years, I am filled with wonder at the impact that WORTH Trust has had, and continues to have on generations of the differently-abled. Many of the visionaries and pioneers, such as Mr Olof Stroh, Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross, Dr Paul Brand of CMC Hospital and Mr Robert Bruce of English Electric, who were involved in the formation and the early years, have passed away. Yet, I am gratified to see that their imprint on the organisation lives on, and continues to provide the guiding light and the spirit of service, that motivates the current organisation.

The chairmen of the Board, such as KV Srinivasan, MV Subbiah and S Viji made key contributions in the initial years. The journey of WORTH starting from the Abilities Trust, to the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries, to WORTH Trust, was made possible through the work of countless colleagues, trustees, advisors, well-wishers, and most importantly the indomitable spirit of the disabled persons.

The world has changed tremendously in the past decades, and WORTH has evolved correspondingly with the changing needs of the disabled. In the early days, our focus was on those affected by leprosy. Those days, the idea that disabled people could be productively employed and financially self-sufficient was still novel. By providing the disabled with training in light engineering, we gave them an opportunity to obtain employment, and to lead lives of dignity, freeing them from the prejudices and the shackles of societal ignorance.

As the nation made progress and leprosy was brought under control, we adapted to administer to those affected by other orthopaedic challenges. The collaboration with the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston allowed us to start assembling the Perkins Braille, for distribution around the world. As the need arose, we focussed on those with hearing and speech difficulties, as well as people with visual disabilities. WORTH has since gone on to include those with intellectual challenges. Thus, while the nature of the challenge may have changed, our mission to empower the disabled has remained unwavering.

We could have easily become a charitable organisation, but we did not go down that route. We charted our own path, providing occupational training to the differently-abled, thereby giving them the confidence and the appropriate skills to be gainfully employed. The ability to earn their livelihoods enabled them to integrate into society, and become part of the mainstream. This was the key to our success.

I am thankful to Mr Karthikeyan for keeping me informed of the developments and progress in the years since my retirement. Our trustees and chairmen have guided WORTH to stay true to its founding mission, and I am confident that WORTH will continue helping the differently-abled in the years to come.

C Antonysamy

Patron and Former Managing Director, WORTH Trust
Vellore, 2025

Foreword



It is an emotionally moving experience for me to be associated with WORTH Trust and commemorate its completing six decades. What began as a humble endeavor has blossomed into a thriving organisation, empowering countless individuals with disabilities. The WORTH Trust has not only provided employment opportunities but has also instilled a sense of dignity, purpose, and belonging in the lives of its beneficiaries.

This book, a chronicle of the six-decade journey, is a tribute to the unwavering dedication of the founders, patrons, trustees, and beneficiaries. It is a testament to the belief that every individual, regardless of their abilities, deserves a chance to contribute to society.

WORTH Trust's journey stands testimony to the power of the human spirit, compassion, and the transformative potential of empowerment through employment for ensuring parity. Over the years, the WORTH Trust has evolved and adapted to the changing times, always staying true to its core mission.

Not many companies last for 60 years, so it is a remarkable achievement for a Trust to celebrate 60 years of dedicated service. WORTH Trust's approach transcends traditional charity models, instead focuses on empowering individuals with disabilities through gainfully employing them in manufacturing activities. This model of providing livelihood to people with disabilities through employment and generating profits on the businesses to provide and expand compassionate care to

people with special needs, is unique.

Throughout this book, you will discover the remarkable narratives of resilience and achievement that define WORTH Trust. I extend my gratitude to all those who have played a role in bringing this book to fruition. Special thanks to Sriram V for his dedication in chronicling the history, as well as to our staff and employees whose commitment continue to inspire. This book not only serves as a record of WORTH Trust's past but also as a beacon for future endeavours in social welfare.

As we look to the future, WORTH Trust remains committed to its mission of empowering people with disabilities by expanding its reach, creating new opportunities, and making a lasting impact on the lives of those it serves.

I hope that readers find inspiration in these pages chronicling the journey of compassion, empowerment, and providing livelihood. Let us together celebrate the past, embrace the present, and shape a brighter future for all.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Harish Lakshman

Chairman, WORTH Trust

January, 2025

Author's Note



It was through Harish Lakshman, presently the Chairman of WORTH Trust, that I first got to know about it. I was fascinated by the model on which it functioned, namely using manufacturing, by the differently-abled, as a revenue generator to support welfare measures for the same community. This placed it on a pedestal—it was not the run-of-mill social welfare organisation which depended on charity, though that model too has been hugely beneficial in general elsewhere. I therefore readily agreed to document the story of WORTH Trust and got on with the task.

During the course of the work I had the pleasure and honour of interacting with captains of industry in South India and also several others who have left their impress in the field of social welfare. Above all, I cherish my interactions with Mr C Antonysamy and his wife Susheela, which helped me gather vital information, not usually available from printed sources.

Visiting WORTH Trust was always an uplifting experience. It was due to the kind efforts of R Karthikeyan, CEO and Myke Nunes, these visits were planned like clockwork with no time wasted. Beginning with the welcome by Revathi at the reception, all was organised. Every document and artefact was made available and it was a joy to be walked through the picture gallery at WORTH and see its history through the medium of well-framed large photographic displays. I must also acknowledge that the availability of most of the annual reports was most beneficial in chronicling WORTH.

At the risk of repeating myself, I place on record my amazement at the way the manufacturing units of WORTH are run. I could have been in any high-quality production facility of a large industrial house, such being the efficiency, systems and procedures followed. Going to the Day Activity Centre and the Early Intervention Centre was a moving experience, as was interacting with the parents, teachers and students. The memory of a mother distributing sweets, her face radiant with joy because her son had learnt to respond to his name will always remain with me.

Apart from the records and documents with WORTH, I must thank many of its past and present Board members who readily shared their experiences with me. I also acknowledge the archives of the Rotary Club of Madras and *The Hindu*, which helped in getting information to connect the various dots.

In putting this book together I express my thanks to Lashman, my research assistant who interviewed several people, helped transcribe the audio recordings and also mined the annual reports for stories that deserved inclusion. I thank Rukmini (Minnie) Amirapu, my trusted colleague on many books, for editing and proofreading the manuscript and the book as it went to print. Malvika Mehra, my other associate of many years standing, has done the design and I thank her for bringing to the task her usual creativity, efficiency, energy and thoroughness. I place on record my appreciation of Sudarsan Graphics who have printed the book.

I trust this book will add information to the vast history of social welfare in India.

Sriram V

Chennai

January 08, 2025



A Sixty-year Journey of Inclusion



*Leprosy work is not merely medical relief;
it is transforming the frustration in life into the joy
of dedication, personal ambition into selfless service.
If you can change the life of a patient or change his values
of life, you can change the village and the country.*

Mahatma Gandhi

Chapter 1

A Scourge as Old as Creation

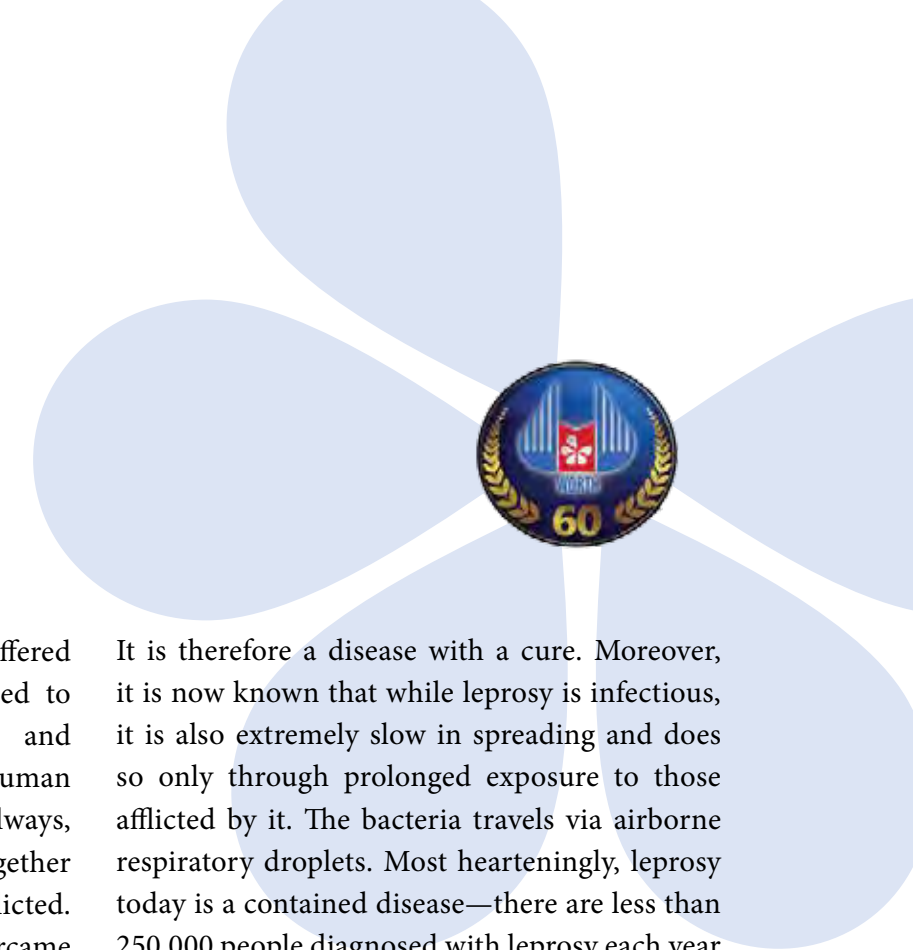
Humanity, through the ages has suffered numerous scourges that have led to devastation, social inequities and isolation. They have struck at the roots of human endurance and tested its resilience. As always, individuals and communities have come together to give succour and support to those afflicted. The scourge of leprosy is one such that overcame its dark chapter in history through solidarity, innovations and development.

Leprosy is one of the oldest diseases to be documented. The World Health Organisation today defines it as follows –

“Leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*. The disease affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes. Leprosy is known to occur at all ages ranging from early childhood to old age. Leprosy is curable and treatment during early stages can prevent disability.”

It is therefore a disease with a cure. Moreover, it is now known that while leprosy is infectious, it is also extremely slow in spreading and does so only through prolonged exposure to those afflicted by it. The bacteria travels via airborne respiratory droplets. Most hearteningly, leprosy today is a contained disease—there are less than 250,000 people diagnosed with leprosy each year across the world. The realisation that it is curable, though its visible effects are not reversible, has led to greater understanding about the need to rehabilitate those afflicted by it and treated subsequently. Leprosy in short is not the scourge it was once considered to be.

Contrast modern emancipated thought about leprosy with what was the situation till around forty years ago. The very mention of the disease evoked horror and revulsion. Those afflicted with it were termed lepers, which word by itself became a pejorative term. They were required to be isolated in the belief that allowing them



A Disease since Ancient Times



The term leprosy occurs 68 times in the Bible—55 in the Old Testament and 13 in the New. The jury is still out on it but it is very likely that leprosy as defined in the Good Book meant skin infections of all kinds, including Hansen's Disease, which is what we now understand to be the disease proper. This is probably because for long, from Biblical times, it was believed that leprosy was an affliction of the skin while we now know of it to be a disease that affects nerve endings and destroys sensation of all kinds.

Though the Bible was the cause of much of the myth and ignorance that surrounded leprosy, Christianity also showed Jesus Christ curing those afflicted with it. It therefore became a calling of sorts among the devout to dedicate themselves to mitigating the suffering of those afflicted by the disease. And it was because of this that

Lazar Houses came into existence. The name comes from the Biblical Lazarus, the beggar whom Jesus healed of leprosy. Lazar Houses became the place where victims of leprosy were confined. Beyond this nothing much was done.

It was not as though it was only in the Abrahamic religions that leprosy was written about. In Hinduism it was one of the frequent curses and here too, as is evident from the legend of Nalayani, it was associated with infidelity—in short, synonymous with venereal disease. In Varanasi, those affected by the disease were not allowed to be cremated at death. Instead their bodies were set adrift in the Ganga. And in India too, just as it was in Italy, leprosy victims were shunned with nothing more to be done with them. It was the same in other ancient civilisations as well—China and Egypt have similar histories. In short, the life of a leprosy patient was tragic in every way. It was no wonder that most were reduced to begging and died lonely deaths.

to be in touch with others could bring about a pandemic of sorts. It was believed that anyone coming into contact with a leprosy patient would be infected by the disease. No treatment of any kind existed and the most that society did was to move them all to leprosy camps, which were known as Lazar Houses. That term by itself has Biblical origins and shows us how far back in time leprosy was diagnosed, though a cure for it was sadly long in coming. But it was the visible aspect that was frightening—disfigurement of skin and bones, twisting of limbs, the clawing of the hand and the collapse of the nose. In the last case in particular, leprosy seemed to mimic the symptoms of syphilis and in an era when diseases were treated for symptoms and not the cause, this similarity was unfortunate. It was believed that leprosy came to those who were of weak moral fibre. This only added to the stigma attached to those suffering from leprosy.

Matters changed for the better in the 19th century. In 1873, the Norwegian physician Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen isolated *Mycobacterium leprae* as the causative agent of the disease and with that the journey began for seeking a cure. And almost simultaneously, there was a concerted move worldwide to improve the lives of leprosy victims.

The Madras Presidency was one of the hotbeds of leprosy and therefore it is not surprising

that research into the disease and efforts to rehabilitate patients began early in the 19th century. The Madras Leper Hospital (MLH) was established in 1814 as an independent institution chiefly because, at the Madras Native Infirmary, established in the 18th century, patients suffering from other diseases expressed fear of being infected owing to proximity to the leprosy-afflicted. It was at the MLH that William Judson van-Someren, the Superintendent in the 1860s, did much to dispel the notion that leprosy was hereditary. He also wrote on the inflammatory character of the disease and its close affinity to tuberculosis. He went to the extent of speculating that leprosy was owing to an infection in the blood.

By the 1860s, many districts in the Madras Presidency had a leprosy clinic/centre. The oldest of these was the Government Leprosy Hospital which grew out of the Madras Leper Hospital referred to earlier. By 1864, it was located in Chengalpattu and from 1874, it began to work closely with the Mission to Lepers (today the Leprosy Mission Trust India) founded that year by an Irishman, Wellesley Cosby Bailey, in Ambala, Punjab. Named the Lady Willingdon Settlement in the 1920s, after the wife of the then Governor of Madras and later Viceroy of India, it was declared a sanatorium instead of a settlement, and post-Independence, changed its name to the Central Leprosy Teaching and



(Above Left): Church and Auditorium at the CMC Vellore, courtesy Wikipedia and (Right): Dr Ida Scudder

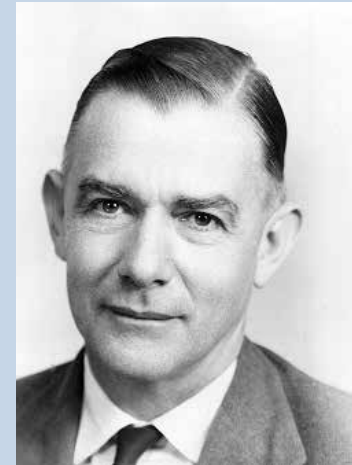
Research Institute (CLTRI), a Government-run institution that still functions.

Closely allied to the CLTRI was the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, founded in 1900. It began as a single-bed hospital run by Dr Ida Sophia Scudder, the daughter of second-generation American missionaries settled in



India. Under her, the hospital grew and today is a full-fledged teaching and research institution. In the 1940s, the CMC had Dr Robert G Cochrane as its Principal and it was he who steered its attention to leprosy care. That the North Arcot district, of which Vellore is a part, had a high prevalence of the disease must have been a factor. He began experimenting with DDS (diamino diphenyl sulfone) drugs for treating it and came to the conclusion that while they did delay the spread they did not effect a cure. With the arrival of new drugs, work at the CMC continued on leprosy treatment but more importantly, attention shifted to hands,

Dr Paul Brand and His Pioneering Work



Dr Paul Brand

Like Ida Scudder, Dr Paul Brand too was born to missionary parents. They worked in the Kolli Hills area of present-day Tamil Nadu and this was where Paul was born, in 1914. He was initially educated in India and at the age of nine went to the UK. On completing school there, he trained as a carpenter and later qualified as a doctor and surgeon at the University College Hospital. It was in the London Blitz that he gained the maximum experience in surgery. In the 1940s, he came back to India and worked at the CMC Vellore and there, under the guidance of Cochrane, became interested in the treatment of leprosy.

He however, began to focus on how best to help Hansen's Disease (leprosy came to have this name by then) victims by helping them maximise the use of their limbs. He realised that the loss of peripheral parts was chiefly due to pain insensitivity—the nerve ends lost sensation and so rats nibbled away at fingers and toes while patients slept. They lost sensitivity to heat and cold and when they came into contact with anything sharp or scalding hot, suffered grievous injuries. Thus the bacillus caused the disease and as a aftermath had a horrific impact on the human body. Dr Brand began work on reconstruction of the limbs impacted by means of tendon transplants. Donations led to the establishment of the New Life Centre in Vellore which worked on rehabilitating Hansen's Disease patients.

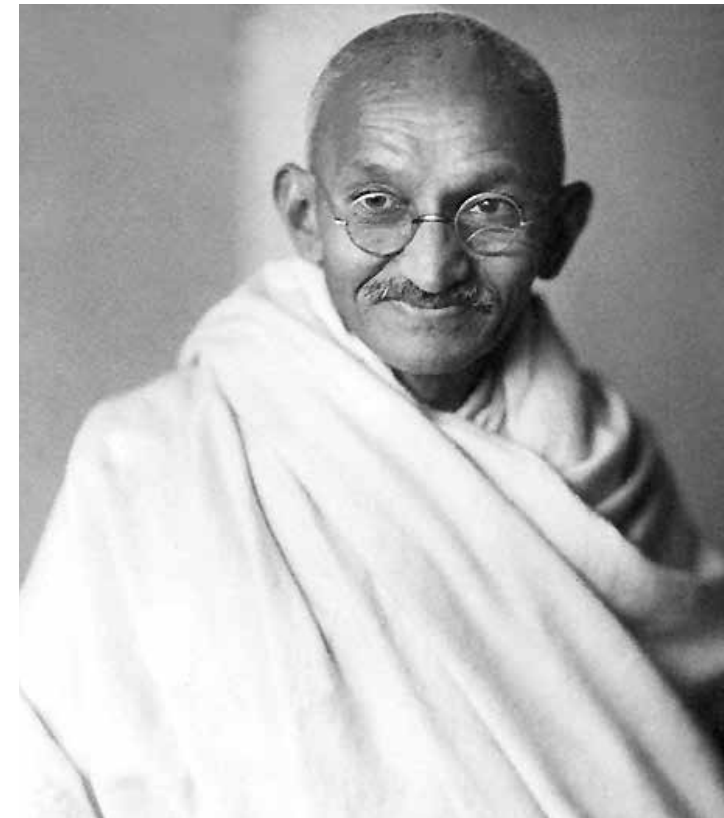
limbs and tissues of affected persons. This was carried forward with momentous results by Dr Paul W Brand.

However, there was opposition to having such a facility in the midst of Vellore and so the search began for a more isolated spot. What happened next is described in Usha Jesudasan's book—*A Place of Hope and Healing, the Karigiri Story*.

After many inquiries, the Collector of North Arcot District offered a piece of land near Karigiri village, at the foot of a hill, far away from habitation. The land that was offered was an isolated stretch of wasteland that no

one else wanted, three kilometres from the nearest travelable road. Dr Cochrane, though disappointed that it was not closer to the Christian Medical College decided to accept the land and make his vision a reality. Part of the land was given as a gift by the Government; part of it was bought at a very nominal rate by the Mission to Lepers for leprosy research.

Thus was born the Schieffelin Leprosy Research Sanatorium at Karigiri. It took its name after WJ Schieffelin, the chairman of Schieffelin and Co in the US who headed many charitable organisations there including one



Mahatma Gandhi who had a major impact on the rehabilitation of leprosy-cured patients

for eradicating leprosy. His funding enabled the Karigiri project in a big way. In 1955, the Schieffelin Leprosy Research Sanatorium, Karigiri consisted of a small hospital with seventeen beds, a research laboratory, a few staff houses and cottages for patients. The purpose of the institution was to observe, study, and investigate various types of leprosy, to treat medical and surgical complications and to train workers for full-time leprosy work.

It was at Karigiri that Dr Brand continued his work till 1964 when he left India for England and later migrated to the United States. Hansen's Disease remained a matter of lifelong interest for him and his services were recognised. A book, *Ten Fingers of God*, by Dorothy Clarke Wilson was written on him and his work. He passed away in Seattle in 2003. By then, the Karigiri institution had more or less fulfilled the purpose for which it had been created. The incidence of leprosy had reduced significantly and while the hospital continued with its work on the disease, offering reconstructive and other rehabilitation facilities, it went on to general surgical services in keeping with what was in demand from the community.

Hansen's Disease has however, not vanished. Improved hygiene, better nutrition and greater awareness have seen the affliction reduce and India in 2005 declared itself leprosy free. However, that seems to have been a mistake for with reduced funding to fight the disease, detection too tapered off and there has been a resurgence in recent years. What has however changed, though here again there can be no room for complacency, is that the stigma attached to the disease has reduced.

Throughout the long fight against the disease, caring for and rehabilitating its victims, occupied several social workers and savants. Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the best known. He first became aware of the disease in South Africa in 1894 and thereafter made service to its victims one of his life's missions. He included it in his 18-point programme for a free India and even today, Leprosy Day in India is observed on January 30, the day of his martyrdom. Several others, such as Baba Amte and Mother Teresa made caring for leprosy

The HKNS



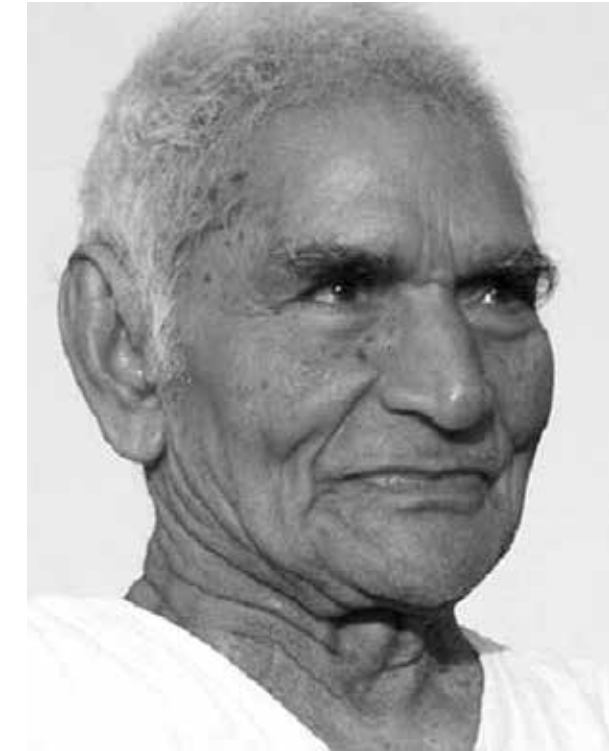
The Indian Journal of Leprosy has a detailed note on this organisation and is worth quoting from –

Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh (Indian Leprosy Association) is an old and prestigious body of people committed towards treatment, rehabilitation of leprosy patients and elimination of leprosy from India. Abbreviated as HKNS, Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh was founded on January 27, 1925 with the name Indian Council of British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA) with three objectives: (i) to carry out research on various aspects of leprosy; (ii) to provide short courses of training, treatment of leprosy; and (iii) to carry out propaganda. When the Indian Council of BELRA was established by His Excellency the Earl of Reading the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, there were two headquarters, one located at Indian Red Cross Society

Office, New Delhi, functioning as Administrative Office and the other working as a Technical Office situated at the Department of Leprosy, School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Calcutta under the leadership of Dr Ernest Muir.

After the independence of India, the Indian Council of BELRA was renamed as Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh (Indian Leprosy Association) and registered in 1950 under the Registration of Societies Act (XXI of 1860) with the President of India as the President of the Sangh and by its constitution, the Chairman, Honorary Treasurer and Organising Secretary all being nominated by the President. (Late) Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the then Health Minister of India was nominated by the President as the first Chairperson of HKNS. Thus, the Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh (Indian Leprosy Association) came into existence on August 19, 1949. Prof TN Jagadisan, Honorary Secretary of the Kasturba Kusht Nivaran Nilayam, Pazhavanthangal was the first Organising Secretary of HKNS. It was the pioneering and painstaking efforts of Prof Jagadisan that the HKNS (Indian Leprosy Association) spread throughout India to become the foremost association of leprosy researchers and activists in India.

After the inception of National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) in India, HKNS (Indian Leprosy Association) has played a commendable role in the dissemination of information about the NLEP through its 17 State branches and sub-branches. The HKNS and its auxiliary branches acted as catalysts in accelerating the pace of the public health awareness programme and rehabilitation of dislocated leprosy patients.



Baba Amte

victims a part of their activities. And above all, there was the Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh, a truly historic body that has had a momentous impact in the fight against the disease.

All of these, outstanding in their own way aimed at serving the afflicted and giving them a life of dignity. To make those afflicted a part of the mainstream was also one of their avowed objectives and they did achieve it to a great extent. But one such attempt stands out for its uniqueness, for it combined rehabilitation



Mother Teresa

with an economic purpose, run on the spirit of enterprise. And that was the WORTH Trust, whose story will unfold in the following pages.



*I took up leprosy work not to help anyone,
but to overcome that fear in my life. That it worked out
good for others was a byproduct.
But the fact is I did it to overcome fear.*

Baba Amte

Chapter 2

The Genesis

“The story of WORTH Trust is the story of C Antonysamy,” says S Viji, eminent industrialist and former Chairman of WORTH Trust. And there can be no truer statement than that. It is the vision of Antonysamy that WORTH Trust embodies and so it is best that we begin the story with the voice of Antonysamy. We meet him at his simple and elegant residence in Vellore, where interspersed with tea, coffee and snacks supplied by his wife Susheela, we interview him. Antonysamy is well into his eighties and has physically slowed down but the sparkle in his eyes is undimmed. And it grows in brightness when he talks about his life’s work.

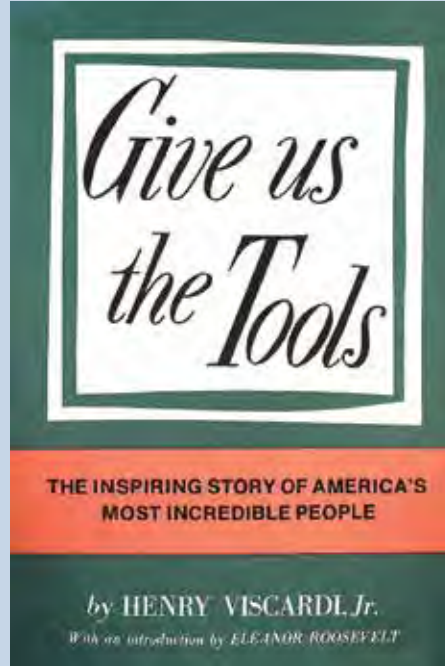
For the record, Antonysamy came from a family in Tiruchirappalli. His father was in the judicial services, and they lived a highly principled life. Antonysamy himself was inspired by social service from the time he was very young. He had determined very early on that he wanted



C Antonysamy

to involve himself in helping the disabled and in this he was encouraged by his parents. At the same time, conscious of the fact that he needed to be qualified, he enrolled himself at the Madras

Give Us the Tools



The book which was to transform Antonysamy's life and eventually lead to the establishment of the WORTH Trust, was *Give Us the Tools*. It was written by Henry Viscardi, whose life would be an inspiration to anyone. Born in 1912, without legs, he had to manage with the crude prosthetics of that era. A supportive mother made all the difference and Viscardi grew up, qualified, and eventually acquired a proper pair of well-designed artificial legs. The surgeon who performed this miracle refused fees and suggested that Viscardi do something for people with disabilities instead.

During the Second World War, he joined the Red Cross and worked with amputees. And after that, he had a successful career, married and raised a family. In 1949, Viscardi joined what would today be called an NGO—Just One Break—which worked to place the disabled in various jobs. This led to his forming, at the suggestion of Eleanor Roosevelt, Abilities Inc, with eight thousand dollars that he borrowed. This eventually expanded to become the Viscardi Centre. By the time he died in 2004, Viscardi was the voice of the disabled but with a difference—here was not a man asking for kindness, charity and donations. He wanted the disabled to be given equal opportunities. “No donations, no charity, just a chance to compete on the open market,”—that was the *New York Times* quoting his mantra in its obituary for him. In many ways, Antonysamy would bring the same philosophy to India.

Institute of Technology and graduated from there in 1961. He then underwent training at the Standard Motor Products of India for a period of six months and then applied to universities abroad for his post-graduation. Many found his requirements baffling—he wanted to pursue post-graduation in engineering and also work with the disabled. He was offered admission to Purdue and Oklahoma State Universities and chose the latter, keeping financial considerations in mind. “Those were days of stringent foreign

exchange controls,” he smiles. “And I opted for what was affordable.”

At the University, his resolve to work with people who had disabilities puzzled his professors as well. He recalls an interview with one of them, a Prof Torgerson who asked him about his interests and aspirations. Antonysamy was upfront about his desire to serve the disabled. Torgerson was taken aback but impressed by his intent, advised him to pursue subjects that would help him in his objective. It was also at this time that Antonysamy

read Henry Viscardi's book, *Give Us the Tools* and it left a lasting impression on him.

After finishing his Masters, Antonysamy returned to India. He expressed a desire to see the country and his father was most encouraging. After this, while he was staying at his grandfather's residence at Thanneerpalli, Karur district, his father arranged for a meeting with a friend, Ayyasami Chetty, who at that time was a legal advisor at TI Cycles. Now a part of what is called the Murugappa Group, this was the first major step that the conglomerate took in



Antonysamy as a young man

manufacturing, though it already had a couple of such initiatives under its belt. In collaboration with Tube Investments UK, the Murugappas were getting into cycle manufacture with a large plant in the Avadi-Ambattur area.

When Antonysamy expressed his wish to work with disabled people, Ayyasami Chetty revealed that the executives of TI Cycles were indeed thinking of organising a workshop for the disabled, aided by the US-based Abilities Trust. He made Antonysamy's interest well-known among the executives. Someone suggested that he meet Dr Paul Brand, who was performing path-breaking interventions in the field of leprosy, at Karigiri. Though excited to meet Brand, Antonysamy confesses that he did not have a great opinion of Vellore at that time. Having grown up in the fertile Kaveri belt, he viewed the Arcot region as a dry, cheerless, lowland. But he did make the journey, driving his car all the way. He vividly recalls his meeting with Paul Brand at Karigiri, a meeting that would influence his life profoundly. “His coat was covered with blood,” he says. “And right away he invited me to witness a surgery that he was performing on the hand of a leprosy affected patient.” Antonysamy had found his calling. And in Brand he found a true mentor.

At around the same time, given his familiarity with the industrial developments around his alma mater MIT, Antonysamy also established

A Changing Cityscape



An early view of the Guindy Industrial Estate, courtesy The Hindu

Though it was in Vellore/Katpadi that Antonysamy would go on to set up his path-breaking venture, it was the city of Madras that would have the maximum impact and influence on it. This was because the early 1960s were when the cityscape was changing like no other. An industrial revolution of sorts was taking place, with K Kamaraj, R Venkataraman and C Subramaniam in the State and TT Krishnamachari at the Centre. Several manufacturing entities were coming into existence where none existed previously.

While earlier established units such as those of Amalgamations Limited were coming into maturity, several new ones were being inaugurated. There was Standard Motors which made cars, the TI Group into cycles, and which also promoted Carborundum Universal, the Rane Group, which was into auto components, Enfield which made two-wheelers, the TVS Group which was into a clutch of auto products, Halda which was making typewriters and Ashok Leyland which was into heavy vehicles. It was to some of these that the newly established light engineering unit of the Swedish Red Cross would turn, for support.



Lal Bahadur Shastri visits English Electric Co, Pallavaram in the 1960s, courtesy The Hindu

contact with English Electric Ltd, which was a plant making relays and switchgear. Robert Bruce, later Lord Balfour, and who was then a career executive at English Electric, met Antonysamy at this time. He was to become a lifelong friend and suggested that Antonysamy work at English Electric as an apprentice for a year, since the disability workshop that was being planned by TI and other companies was still very much in the future. Even if the workshop fell through due to some unforeseen constraints, he would still have the experience of working at an engineering firm said Bruce. Antonysamy started his apprenticeship at English Electric at Pallavaram, finding shared accommodation at Chromepet. Throughout his apprenticeship, he would make multiple visits to Karigiri to meet with Brand.

Antonysamy remembers his time working at English Electric and shares an experience that affected him in a deeply profound manner. He remembers when Kalyanaraman, Chief of Contracts, found that one of his subordinates had been sacked without any notice or fair investigation, or without consulting him, he submitted his resignation instantly



Olaf Stroh, Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross

as a mark of solidarity, standing up for his own ethics. He then moved to Srirangam and worked in a gurukulam as a teacher. Incidents such as this would shape Antonysamy's own professional values.

Around this time, following the contacts established by Paul Brand, representatives from the Swedish Red Cross were visiting Vellore, because the number of leprosy patients were largely concentrated in this area, and it was the locus point for leprosy treatment and research. Through Brand, Antonysamy met Olaf Stroh, the Secretary-General of Swedish Red Cross, and Erland von Hosten, President of International Red Cross. This visit to Vellore helped the Swedish Red Cross understand the social conditions in which a leprosy patient was forced to live. One of the key suggestions they made was that the doctors should go in search of patients and not vice versa, so that unreported cases could be detected early.

Within a year, Antonysamy was completely involved with the leprosy patients and was working for their betterment. His father was supportive of his decision, although he had spent a fortune in getting his son educated. The Swedish Red Cross suggested that a factory, utilising light engineering equipment, be opened to rehabilitate those patients who have been treated, so they become independent with some social standing of their own. Thus, a factory under the name of the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industry was founded in 1963, and later renamed as the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust.

The new factory was supported by the Swedish Red Cross, but not without a set of firm conditions. The factory had

Some Early Benefactors



Prof TN Jagadisan

There were willing hands to work on the project, to assist Antonysamy in making it a success. The representative of the Swedish Red Cross in Madras/Vellore was CB Agartz who was a member of the Rotary Club of Vellore. Given the amount of coordination work he had to do in Madras, he was a regular attendee of the Rotary Club of Madras meetings. In 1965, he was invited to give a full-fledged presentation on the work being done for leper rehabilitation including the setting up of industries for them. At the end of it, he made a powerful appeal to the Rotary Club of Madras to help the light engineering unit get machining work from industries in the city. Many of the members came forward to help—Rayala Corporation, English Electric, Standard Motors and Tube Investments being the first. It was a start and by the time Agartz left India at the end of the five-year period that the Swedish Red Cross was to handhold the fledgling idea, many Rotarians were committed to its well-being.

Another person who rendered great help was Prof TN Jagadisan. An ex-leprosy patient himself, he had suffered the ignominy of being removed from his teaching job for having contracted the disease. An introduction to the Rt Hon VS Srinivasa Sastri led to his meeting Mahatma Gandhi, who induced him to set up the Kasturba Kusht Nivaran Nilayam in 1946. Jagadisan proved to be a livewire. He was unstoppable in his fight against the disease and more importantly, the stigma attached to it.

As early as in 1946 he, with Gandhi's support got a conference of leprosy workers going. He later became a good friend of Paul Brand and worked with him as well. It is interesting to note that Prof Jagadisan too addressed the Rotary Club of Madras on leprosy and rehabilitation. He was to work closely with Antonysamy and became a member of the Board of the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries and its successor, the WORTH Trust and served as such until 1976.



(Above Left) The Rotary Club of Madras newsletter recording a talk by CB Agartz and
(Right) The workshop at Katpadi, in 1963



to be completely self-sustaining. The Red Cross would support the operation until it became independent and then remove itself from the organisation. In fact, it was stipulated that the term Red Cross had to be removed even from the name of the foundation, once that state of self-reliance was achieved. There was yet another rule—products manufactured at the factory should have “nothing to do with the army”.

With the funding from the Swedish Red Cross, an empty building was purchased for the establishment of the factory. Olof Stroh was keen that a Board be formed at once. This was so that there would be a body to guide the new initiative as and when the Swedish Red Cross withdrew after stabilising operations. And so Professor TN Jagadisan was brought on board. Likewise, CB Agartz, who was the representative of the Swedish Red Cross, was included. Other members were drawn from the industry. The Indian Red Cross too played a pivotal role.

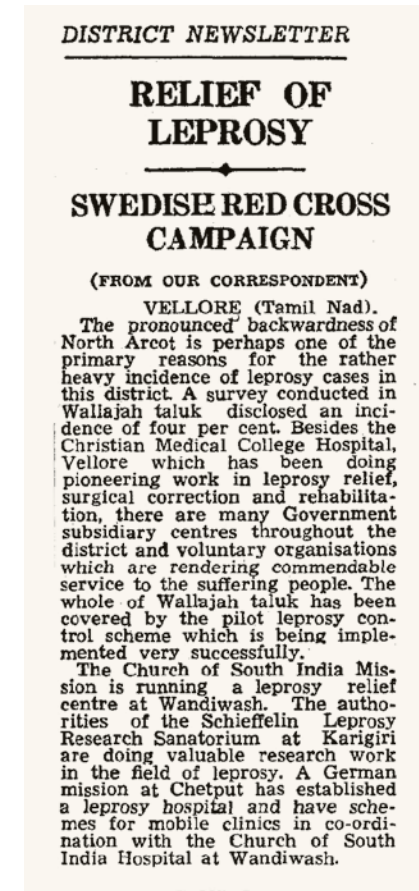


*The biggest disease today
is not leprosy or tuberculosis,
but rather the feeling of being unwanted.*

Mother Teresa

Chapter 3

The Project Takes Off



Reminiscing about those early years, Antonysamy recalls the manner in which the Swedes planned the whole project. “It all began with a series of articles in the Swedish newspapers about the plight of leprosy patients in India,” he says. “They also used the radio extensively and I am not sure if television, then in its infancy, was involved. The campaign was a huge success. And the Swedish Red Cross, which spearheaded the media blitz, received abundant donations—it was the equivalent of Rs 30 lakhs, a big sum for those days.” He also recalls that Paul Brand was a part of this campaign too and when it reached a satisfactory fund position, Vellore was a natural choice for the next step.

It was decided that the money, as related in the earlier chapter, would be invested in a workshop that made light engineering components. “It could not be heavy engineering as leprosy-afflicted people cannot use their limbs to the

extent we can,” says Antonysamy. “But this presented another challenge—light engineering work was sophisticated, and the bulk of the leprosy-afflicted was from the poorest of the poor. How was this to be overcome? However, in the face of many other immediate challenges, this seemed manageable.”

The Swedish Red Cross decided that it would help the new project financially and technically in the initial period, which it estimated would be five years. A technical expert, namely Agartz whom we met earlier was sent to set up the place and it was expected that Antonysamy would manage it thereafter. He therefore had the tough task of making the light engineering workshop viable in the long term, after Swedish assistance had run its course.

The shed was in place though there were murmurs of discontent from neighbouring facilities. Common canteens could not be availed of by the Swedish Red Cross unit, for instance. But a

The Madras Government Lends a Hand

At the outset however, the locating of a suitable industrial shed was imperative. Those were years when the Madras Government was in the vanguard of a huge industrialisation initiative. It was identifying suitable tracts of land which were then converted into industrial estates. Entrepreneurs could apply for allotment and based on their requirements, plots were leased out, on which sheds of suitable sizes could be erected. In some places, the Government themselves constructed the sheds. As Antonysamy remembers, this was an idea far ahead of its time and estates, especially outside the capital city of Madras, went a begging. And so, in his search, he identified two sheds that were practically derelict and applied to the Government for them.

“This was where we hit upon a major roadblock,” he says. “The Government rules forbade any facility in an industrial area from employing the leprosy-afflicted. We could hire those with orthopaedic challenges, speech, vision and hearing impediments but not those who had recovered from leprosy! I decided to appeal to the then Health Minister of Madras, Lourdammal Simon and she promised to help. She approached the Industries Minister, R Venkataraman and said that since the sheds were anyway vacant, our request could be considered. He kindly gave his assent.”

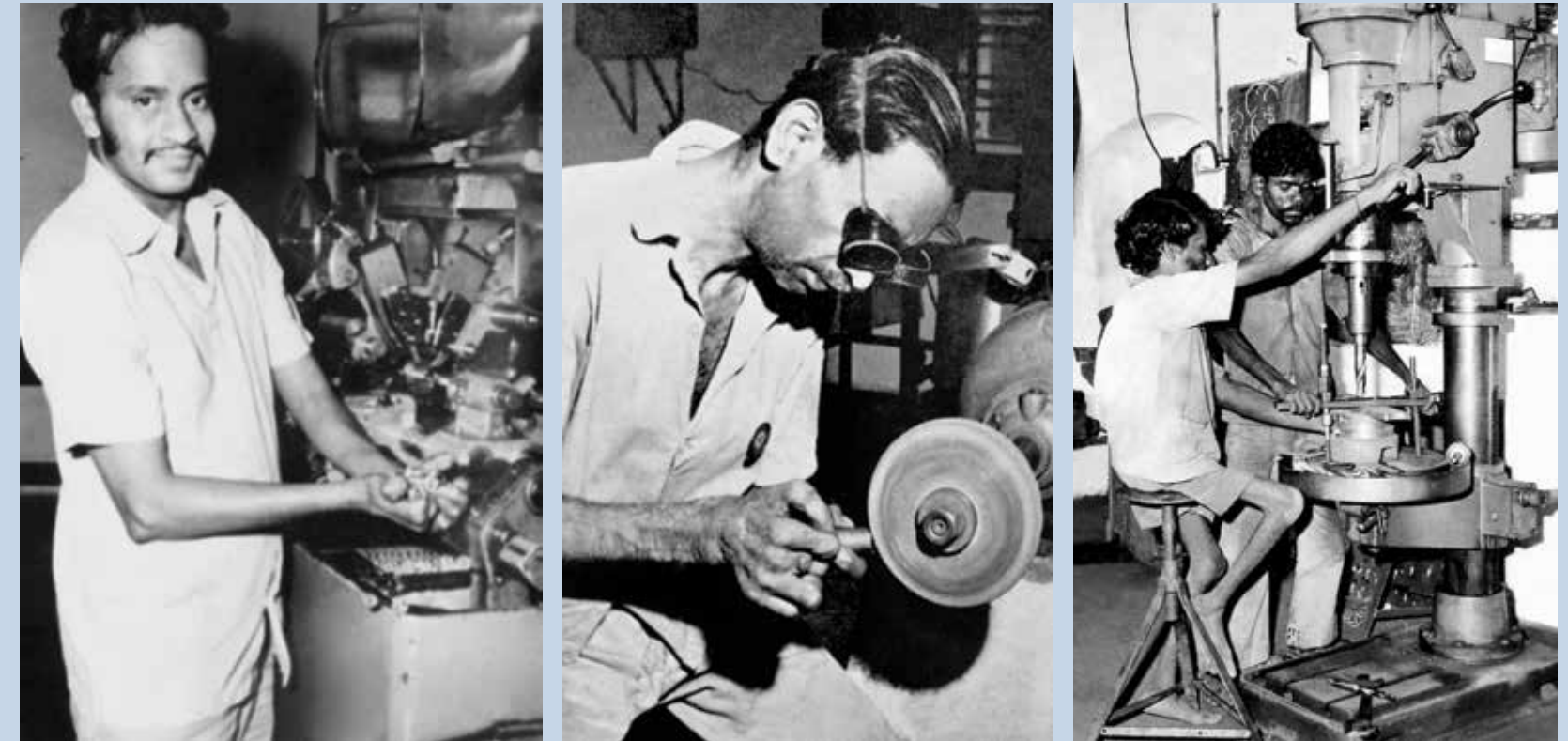
bigger problem lay in hiring co-workers. “We had decided that not everyone could be an ex-leprosy patient as we did have requirements that they could not have handled,” says Antonysamy. “We ought to have expected it, but we were taken aback when not one physically-afflicted person would accept our invite to join. We then decided to recruit people who were practically destitute—orphans and those who were without familial support. They were happy to come on board. Soon we had a team in place.”

Training was the next requirement and to facilitate this, some inexpensive local machines were procured from Madras, and a few other industrial centres and the recruits were made

to work on them. “Given the background of the those recruited and their physical condition, it seemed a daunting task,” says Antonysamy. “And so, I sometimes wondered at what training we could give. But I soon learnt that it was not physical abilities but what the mind dictates which defines a person’s skills. For instance, we had a worker whose hands had been badly deformed by leprosy. He turned out to be the best when it came to grinding work. As you may know, holding the job on the machine can be quite a tough task even for a normal person and yet here he was, excelling others.”

As the newly established workshop filled with people and began churning out samples under

Work Begins at Katpadi Workshop



(Here and in page 24) Employees at the Katpadi workshop in the early years

Recruitment of trainees began as an organised process—all of them with disabilities. Right from the beginning, people with multiple disabilities, people cured of polio, etc., were present along with the leprosy-cured employees. The point made by the Swedish Red Cross was that, in addition to making these individuals independent and self-reliant, a sense of community had to be cultivated amongst them, as they suffered from severe social ostracisation. What better way to accomplish this feat than congregating disabled people of various kinds for this purpose?

The first of the units to be set up was the Katpadi Workshop, in 1963. An annual report later describes this place as “the experimental ground where new ideas were tried, giving us valuable experience and the base to start other centres”. And with that, the project to rehabilitate leprosy victims and those with other disabilities slowly got off the ground.



Agartz's watchful eyes, it was Antonysamy's task to take what had been made and meet prospective customers so that he could get regular orders for real requirements. At most places he was viewed as some kind of a curiosity. Many whom he called upon, suggested, with the best intentions that he would be better off publishing a souvenir for raising funds for his 'charity'. They assured him of monetary support as well but no orders. It must have been very tempting to give up what seemed an uphill task, but Antonysamy was not the kind to leave because of perceived hurdles. And sure enough, his perseverance was rewarded. The first break came from Carborundum Universal, a constituent of what is now the Murugappa Group.

"It was a meeting with Mr RK Verma, who was then Purchase Manager at CUMI, that set the ball rolling," says Antonysamy. "I called on him without an appointment. He was somewhat taken aback and said so, stating that I was calling on him out of the blue, talking about a manufacturing facility where leprosy-afflicted people were being rehabilitated and asking for orders. CUMI, he said was a big company and decisions like this could not be taken in a day. He asked me to come after two months. I left feeling that this was the last time I would get to see him and yet I could not have been more wrong. At the end of two months



An early view of the campus



C Antonysamy at the tenth anniversary of WORTH Trust

he was true to his word. He called me and when I met him, he had a component/part for which he was ready to place orders on us. Not only that, he had the schedule of deliveries and committed a certain offtake. I was delighted. Mr Verma became one of our greatest supporters over the years.

Another person from the same company was Mr AR Lakshmanan. He too became deeply interested in what we were doing. On one occasion I recall he was going to release an order on us when a colleague of his remarked that they had in-house capabilities to manufacture the same. Mr Lakshmanan was unmoved. He declared that he wanted us to take up the task and that was that. I did not even have the machines for them, but I said yes and we were eventually successful.”

By 1969, with the workshop on a more stable footing, it was necessary to restructure the ownership. Thus far it had been under the Swedish Red Cross but with Government of India rules being very tight at that time, on foreign investment no matter that this was a charitable activity, it became necessary to form a local body that would take on the running. Thus, on August 25, 1969, the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust came into existence. The list of trustees gives us an idea as to how much the project of rehabilitation had progressed and what support it was receiving from captains of Indian industry in Tamil Nadu (the State had changed its name from Madras a year earlier).

The machines received from Sweden were housed and assembled by Antonysamy and a dedicated band of co-workers. Slowly orders began trickling in. And supervising the production and later delivering them to the customers was Antonysamy’s task. He was after all the front person for the entire activity. He invariably took all the components to the customers by car. And it was while delivering the first consignments that he faced the next of his challenges.

The First Trustees



KV Srinivasan, first chairman of the Trust. Photo courtesy Gayatri Sriram

The Secretary-General, Indian Red Cross (ex-officio) led the rest of the names. And Antonysamy, together with a JH Savarirayan constituted representatives of the Swedish Red Cross. Dr JKG Webb, who then headed CMC Vellore was on the Board, as was Dr ABA Karat of the Schieffelin Leprosy Research Sanatorium, Karigiri. There was Prof TN Jagadisan whose career in leprosy rehabilitation has been chronicled in the previous chapter. He was by then quite a mentor to Antonysamy.

The rest of the names need no introduction as they were all stalwarts in the world of industry. SL Chitale, given the Rotary connection mentioned in the previous chapter and by then a close friend of Antonysamy’s was there. E Peterson, a career executive and an expatriate, represented the Western India Match Factory. WIMCO was a hallowed name in Madras industry, having been set up with Swedish knowhow in 1923 for making matches. The company has since changed hands and moved away from matches but in its time, it was big, meriting a WIMCO Nagar railway station. Representing Carborundum Universal was MV Subbiah, then a young scion of the Murugappa family and later to become the Chairman of the eponymous Group. We see the name of KV Srinivasan who was then the Chairman of Standard Motor Products of India, and who too had become interested in the Trust thanks to Rotary.

Another name from Rotary and who was to play an important role in terms of orders was MR Pratap, who ran the Halda Typewriter Company located at Guindy. His line of business was ideal for the kind of light engineering that Antonysamy desired. Also on board was Gosta Rundberg, a Swede who was running another of Pratap’s creations—Facit Asia which was into calculating machines. Another name on the list is that of TT Vasu. The son of former Union Industries and Finance Minister, TT Krishnamachari, he was a part of his family’s TTK Group and was married to a Swede. Many of these connections that Antonysamy made at this stage would span multiple generations—with the descendants of some of these original trustees taking on the task of sustaining and giving direction to the Trust in later decades.

There is just one more name before we move on to other matters—JH Jesudasan of the NTTF Tool Room Centre, Katpadi. This was a Swiss initiative and has had a long existence in India. In 1959, Dr Heinrich Hellstern, Director of Swiss NGO HEKS, initiated the establishment of a technical training institute in Nettur, Tellicherry, Kerala. This led to the formation of the Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF) in 1963. Over the past 65 years, NTTF has grown into a leading institution, receiving technical support and knowledge transfer from Swiss industry and training institutions. The Katpadi arm proved to be a boon for the Swedish Red Cross for it trained technicians and also aided in the development of tools for projects as and when they came in.



New knowledge takes time to soak into the consciousness even of the specialists. But for over two decades the facts of leprosy have been throwing a continual challenge and engaging men's minds towards a revolution in their attitude to the disease. The revolution has come.

Prof TN Jagadisan

Chapter 4

“Never with a Begging Bowl...”

Antonysamy reflects on what made the rehabilitation project a success right from its inception –

“One of the primary factors that contributed was the firm emphasis that we laid on making a surplus and channelising that into the growth of our activities. It was never with a begging bowl. This I think was a key differentiator. We learnt to be self-supporting from the start. The next was that we believed in integrating ex-leprosy patients with those with other challenges. That way, the victims, who had been living in isolation became part of the mainstream. So our workshop was open to all categories of disabled people. Surplus was important but at the same time we had some firm beliefs—we could never make any product for the armed forces, given that we were promoted by the Red Cross. In fact there is an interesting story I need to relate on how important this principle was. Olaf Stroh, the Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross would visit us every year

and he would bring some toys for the children. One year, he entrusted the task of buying these to someone else and when he found that what had been bought were small cannons, guns, etc, he refused to distribute them! I followed suit. And we incorporated the clause of not supplying to the army.”

He also draws our attention to what are referred to as the Purposes of the Trust. (See box)

The principles were no doubt very sound but putting them into practice was tough and as we saw earlier, Antonysamy had quite a task on hand in convincing industries to release purchase orders for the manufacture of engineering components at the workshop of the Swedish Red Cross. One of the early breakthroughs as we saw was at the TI Group. Another was at Halda.

“I was introduced to MR Pratap of Halda Typewriters by SL Chitale, thanks to the Rotary Club of Madras connection,” says Antonysamy.

The Purposes of the Trust

The Trust deed is a treasured artefact at WORTH and it makes for interesting reading –

- To promote rehabilitation of the ex-leprosy patients with the disease arrested, and other physically handicapped, by training and or employment and to spread information about this activity
- The organisation and running of training schemes for the ex-leprosy patients with the disease arrested and other physically handicapped in India and to encourage others to do so
- The major aim of this project is to give an example of methods which can contribute to the rehabilitation of ex-leprosy patients with the disease arrested and other handicapped and to make it possible for them to find a useful place in society
- To arrange for lectures, seminars and conferences to create interest amongst others for rehabilitation of the physically handicapped
- To establish and run similar rehabilitation industries or businesses subject to the approval of the Swedish Red Cross
- To support the maintenance of any rehabilitation centres or medical institutions or charitable purposes for the ex-leprosy patients and other handicapped as the Board of Trustees may consider desirable, subject to the approval of the Swedish Red Cross



The deed for the formation of the WORTH Trust



Two of the early benefactors (Left) SL Chitale and (Right) MR Pratap

“Pratap in his characteristic fashion, was cautious. He made enquiries, asked me in detail about the nature of our work and convinced himself about our credentials. That he too was running a plant in collaboration with the Swedes no doubt helped. And once he was clear in his mind, there was no stopping him. The first order we received was for a small component called T 2022. It involved drilling and threading. The taps for threading had to be imported and when in the 1970s, following serious tightening of foreign exchange, many imports were stopped, we could still get the taps via the Swedish Red

Cross. In fact they were somewhat puzzled when I kept asking for taps as they assumed I needed water taps! But they did help and what was more, we got them for free. We continued with our supplies to Halda.”

The taps were sensitive tools and broke often, as Antonysamy remembers. That meant frequent replacement which thanks to the Swedish Red Cross was not a problem. But an investigation was launched on why the taps wore out so quickly. “The initial line of thought was that this being a sensitive tool and the operation being somewhat

tricky, we could not give it to those whose hands had been affected by leprosy. The job was given to those with orthopaedic challenges, namely the polio-afflicted and also those with hearing, speech, and some vision impediments. All these people consistently turned around a 1,000 components per tap. But then there was Nachan, who always managed to extract 3,000! This was a farmhand, disfigured by leprosy with very badly damaged limbs. And yet he did better than anyone else. It was a lesson to us.” Antonysamy continues to muse on Nachan. “Do you know



(Here and in following pages) Employees at the Katpadi workshop

he joined us as a gardener? He volunteered to train in machining and became a success. He also continued to tend to the garden. And there again he stunned all of us because, contrary to what the best nurseries will tell you, he proved that dahlias could be cultivated by grafting! We finally decided to pay him the same salary as a foreman! This caused some controversy. A rumour spread that because I was fond of gardening I had favoured him. I had to explain to these people about his skills in machining. And would you believe it, Nachan was illiterate! He referred to taps as *oosi* (needle)!”

Pratap became a close friend of Antonysamy and stood by him through thick and thin. “I became a familiar figure at Halda, delivering the components in my Volkswagen car,” says Antonysamy. The first supplies were however, not without drama. The workers at Halda flatly refused to touch components made by ex-leprosy patients! “They kept the products in a separate place with a placard saying that they were made by lepers and so ought not to be touched.”

We need to turn to Ranjit, MR Pratap’s son, an industrialist in his own right and later the Chairman of the WORTH Trust, to know what happened next. “I was then apprenticing at Halda, my father wanting me to learn the ropes,” he says. “I can still recall the way Antonysamy used to drive in, bringing the machined components

Sensitising People on Leprosy



The sensitising sessions on leprosy played an important role in people shedding their preconceived notions. “We had to go about this rather carefully,” says Antonysamy. “And in religion we found a ready source of help. You see, leprosy struck across all religions and those afflicted, often reduced to vagrancy and begging, found their way to the doors of temples, mosques and churches in equal number. These people sought alms and on receiving them immediately went to buy food with it. If the collection was good, they exchanged their coins for easy-to-store currency notes. Now, if leprosy was to spread by mere touch, all of us would be afflicted by it, given the way coins remain in circulation. And yet we

did not. We were able to thus prove that leprosy does not spread this way.”

He recalls how he was greatly assisted in this task by a driver who worked for him. “This man would quote his personal example—he had worked with us for so many years and still not contracted leprosy. He would also deliver products and when the workers at factories saw him do this, they became more confident. It also helped that he was an excellent communicator in Tamil, brimming with revolutionary ideas and so was very useful.”



The Katpadi Unit



Halda's typewriter factory in Guindy which was one of the early customers

himself. I was curious. After all, which vendor would deliver parts in a car? On asking my father I was told that I ought not to treat Antonysamy like any ordinary supplier. Father not only traced Antonysamy's ancestry for me but also gave me a short account of what kind of noble work he was doing. I remember the big fuss that took place when he delivered the first set of parts. The workers at Halda threatened to go on strike if they were asked to handle the components, such being their fear of contracting leprosy. There was no use in telling them that their fears were

“NEVER WITH A BEGGING BOWL...”

unfounded. Father in his usual fashion, never to shy away from a confrontation, was all for their going on a strike but wiser counsel prevailed. I remember Antonysamy was asked to come and address the workers on leprosy and how it spread and how it did not. They were finally convinced and even became enthusiastic supporters of the cause.”

But he still remembers the manner in which the Halda Works Manager, an Anthony by name, reacted when Antonysamy took the first samples produced at his workshop and placed them on his desk. “Take them away,” he screamed. “Don't you know that I can get leprosy?” I reported this to father who burst out laughing.

It was not long before Antonysamy was able to get introductions to many of the large industrial establishments of Madras. One of these was Best & Crompton. This was a historic British business house of Madras which was once into trading under the name of Best & Co. Crompton Engineering was an independent entity that specialised in electrical projects. The two had merged in the post-Independence era as Best & Crompton and the combined entity was trying its hand at manufacturing, with not much success. KRN Menon was a senior executive and he became a good friend of Antonysamy's. He was surprised at the low cost at which the Swedish Red Cross was turning out its products. A team



Employees at Katpadi handle components

of senior managers from Best & Crompton was sent to study the reasons for this. “We got our machines free of duty owing to our charitable purpose,” says Antonysamy. “That was an important factor. Secondly, our salaries were low. Lastly, we were exempt from sales tax too.” The study did not amount to orders per se, but it did lead to another opportunity, which proved sadly short-lived mainly due to extraneous circumstances.

“Best & Crompton wanted to hire three of our lathe operators, and take them to Madras,” says Antonysamy. “It was a dream come true. In fact, I saw in this the fulfilment of our mission.

With three people placed in a reputed company, we could not only take on three others to replace them but also take this model to other organisations.” And so Best & Crompton hired three men who moved to Madras.

As soon as they joined, there was the usual opposition among co-workers. At the end of the first shift, someone placed a notice on the lathes that the new recruits had been working on stating, “Handled by Lepers”. The message was that anyone who worked on them subsequently ran the risk of infection. Antonysamy swung into action with his usual sensitising workshop,



Selling *Vadais* for a Cause



It was Olaf Stroh, Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross who came up with an idea for integrating the workshop with other units in the Katpadi industrial area. In the initial days this was still tough, and people tended to shy away. Olaf Stroh quoted the example of the Trojan Horse in the Greek myths. He felt running an industrial canteen at subsidised rates would make a big difference. And so Antonysamy set it up at the Katpadi premises. “Our first product was *vadais* at three paise when it cost ten paise elsewhere,” he says. “People were initially reluctant but then someone made the first purchase and found them very tasty. Word spread and we had a successful canteen that brought people to us. We ran it for six years and then closed it—it had served its purpose.”

training the executives, and they in turn sensitised the workers. And it worked. But only too well.

Those were the heydays of unionism and soon the three recruits became so well-integrated into the workforce that they became belligerent union members. The Management did not like this, and Antonysamy was called in. “We too by then had a union but it was essentially co-operative and so I did not face much trouble. But I did know of what other industrial units were going through and so I called the three of them and counselled them. It worked with one who resigned and went off to his village to become a milkman,

which in a way was a negation of all the training we had put him through. Another too left. But the third man proved intractable and had to be sacked. I recall Kuttappa, who was the Works Manager telling me not to bring any more workers. It was a sad end to the experiment.”



*I seek opportunity, not security.
I will not trade my dignity for a handout.
It is my heritage to think and act for myself.*

Henry Viscardi

Chapter 5

Expanding the Footprint

One of the important factors that Antonysamy attributes to the success of the Swedish Red Cross project was the manner in which machines were adapted to suit those with challenges. “The Swedish machines were adaptable in the first place,” he says. “But I did have to make some changes to suit ground conditions. For instance, in a turning operation, where the operator needed to use both hands, I introduced a lever and a pulley, so that the person at the machine could use his legs. But more than me, with my industrial engineering background, it was the workers who made many changes. I can never forget how an operation that required two hands was managed by a duo—each with one functional arm. They sat on the same bench and worked the machine as one person!”

Antonysamy remembers the way he badgered English Electric, the electric switch gear company where he had trained in Pallavaram,

for orders. The staff there were most reluctant, but he was not one to give up. “I recall how Chakravarthy, the Purchase Manager, who knew me well enough, kept offering donations which of course I refused,” he says. “Finally, possibly with a view to discourage me, he and his colleague Raja gave us some hylam plates to be drilled. They were so heavy but then I had an ambassador car which could handle such things and we brought them back to Katpadi. In those days, we operated only one shift, but I drove straight to the workshop, and showed the team what was expected of us.

The supervisors and workers were so enthused that we set to work right away and by night had completed the task. The next morning, at 8.00 am, I was at the gates of English Electric. Chakravarthy could not believe his eyes. When I asked him for further plates to be threaded, he said what we had completed was a month’s requirement!”

“We similarly scored a success at Oldham’s, the company that made miners’ lamps,” continues Antonysamy. “This was a brass component that was being imported and then machined by a supplier in Kerala. There was a strike there once and those components could not be delivered. We were asked if we could help, and I am happy to say we did. We were also far cheaper. Soon Oldham’s were so impressed that they decided to divide their orders between

us and the vendor in Kerala. They were kind enough to place the orders at the same price as they did on the other party and so we were able to make a good surplus as well. The success at Oldham’s led us to approach TI Miller of the Murugappa Group, as they were making cycle lamps.”

In this manner, the workshop prospered and soon was employing around 100 people. Recognitions were not far in coming. In November 1973, the then Rotary District 323 conferred its award on the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries as the entity was then called, at an event held in Vellore. Rotarian District Governor CV George conferred the recognition, with Antonysamy receiving it on behalf of the workshop.

Silently, Antonysamy and team had notched up a first for India—it was not the kind of record that would make news but when the country was going through a very tough phase, this was exactly the sort of development that was laying the foundation for a great future. In his speech on the occasion, Olaf Stroh noted that “India was probably the only country which provided the scope for cured leprosy patients to work hand-in-hand with normal people under the same roof”. It was really a welcome breakthrough in the context of the war waged to wipe out prejudices against those affected by



One of the reasons for WORTH’s success was its ability to create prosthetics and tools to enable execution of light engineering work

Ten Years of Service

The year 1974 saw a major landmark—the completion of a decade of this rather unique experiment. Speaking on the occasion of the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Industries, Count Levenhaupt, Swedish Ambassador to India, described the project as a true and compassionate undertaking, in conformity with the ideals of the Red Cross to be in the forefront of the humanitarian movement to bring relief to suffering people. Commending the valuable contribution made by the Swedish Red Cross Industries at Katpadi to the global effort in rehabilitating the physically-challenged people, he said the project symbolised excellent Indo-Swedish cooperation. Referring to the notable work done by the Indian Red Cross Society in the sphere of rehabilitation of disabled persons, he said the Swedish Red Cross worked in close cooperation with the Indian Society in its efforts to fight leprosy.

Olaf Stroh, who also participated in the function said that India had the proper climate for starting rehabilitation industries in view of the response from the people and also the authorities. He recalled how a band of workers including Dr Paul Brand, formerly of the Christian Medical College hospital, and TN Jagadisan of the Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh made efforts to make



(Above) HE Count Axel Levenhaupt the Ambassador of Sweden to India and (Right) A report of the tenth anniversary celebrations that appeared in The Hindu

the project a success. He presented medals and plaques on behalf of the Swedish Red Cross to the Board of Trustees, the District Collector and others who were associated with the project. Earlier, Count Levenhaupt gave away presents to the workers who had completed 10 years of service in the project.

It was also in 1974 that the Trust acquired land in Katpadi. Around six acres were purchased on April 23rd. Antonysamy recalls how this came about – “In the Katpadi industrial estate we first took on rent from the Government of Tamil Nadu, a shed. Soon our growth needs made us buy the adjoining shed. We were looking for our own campus outside the industrial area also.

In 1948, one Sudarsan Oil Mills had been started by B Gopala Reddy who later became a Minister in the Government of Madras and the Government of Andhra Pradesh. This had folded up due to labour problems. The campus with extensive grounds was auctioned by the courts and was bought by the Tantia family of Calcutta. The factory was not working and the owner kept the land and buildings unoccupied for many years.

We contacted the Tantias and negotiated with them. By then all the equipment had been disposed of and even the roofs of most of the buildings were taken off and sold. The campus was acquired by WORTH and during the power cut years of the 1970s, the workers utilised their free time by setting right the place.” This would become the main campus of WORTH, with the administrative office on the opposite side of the road.

Work of Red Cross at Katpadi Praised

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE, Jan. 12.
Commending the valuable contribution made by the Swedish Red Cross Industries at Katpadi to the global effort made in rehabilitating the physically handicapped people, Count Levenhaupt, Swedish Ambassador to India, described the project as a true compassionate undertaking in conformity with the ideals of the Red Cross to be in the forefront of the humanitarian movement to bring relief to the suffering people.
Speaking on the occasion of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Industries, held today, he said the project symbolised the excellent Indo-Swedish co-operation.
Referring to the notable work done by the Indian Red Cross Society in the sphere of rehabilitation of disabled persons, he said the Swedish Red Cross worked in close co-operation with the Indian Society in its efforts to fight leprosy.
Mr. Olof Stroh, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross, Stockholm, who also participated in the function said that India had the proper climate for starting rehabilitation industries in view of the good response from the people and also the authorities. He recalled how a band of workers including Dr. Paul Brand, formerly of the Christian Medical College Hospital, and Mr. T. N. Jagadisan, of the Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh, made efforts to make the project a success. He presented medals and plaques on behalf of the Swedish Red Cross to the Board of Trustees, the District Collector and others who were associated with the project.
Earlier, Countess Levenhaupt gave away presents to the workers who have completed 10 years of service in the project.
Mr. Olof Stroh, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross Society, told THE HINDU that the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust would shortly start a full fledged school having facilities for technical training for the benefit of all types of physically handicapped children. The school would mainly impart employment-oriented education.
The trust, in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Government had embarked on a project for starting a rehabilitation industry for the benefit of members of the beggar home at Hatanur in Chingleput district. Building work for this project had already started and machinery ordered for the steel fabrication unit to be located there. If this pilot project proved successful, rehabilitation industries would be started in other beggar homes also in the State.
India was probably the only country which provided the scope for cured leprosy patients to work hand in hand with normal people under the same roof. It was really a welcome breakthrough in the context of the war now waged to wipe out prejudices against those affected by this disease. Many other countries had followed the example of the Katpadi Industry, he said.



DK Oza (left) and Antony Samy

the disease. Many other countries had followed the example of the Katpadi industry he said.

The 10th year celebration was also the occasion for the announcement of a major expansion plan. Olaf Stroh, in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross Society informed the Press that the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust would shortly start a full-fledged school having facilities for technical training for the benefit of all types of physically-challenged children. The school would mainly impart employment-oriented education.

The Trust in collaboration with the Government of Tamil Nadu had embarked on a project for starting a rehabilitation industry for the benefit of members of the beggar home at Paranur in Chengalpattu district. Building work for this project had already started and machinery ordered for the steel fabrication unit to be located there. If this pilot project proved successful, rehabilitation industries would be started in other beggar homes also in the State. It was a very important step forward.

There is no doubt however, that it was the Paranur facility that garnered the maximum publicity. This came about because of the people involved—the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M Karunanidhi and the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.

Oza on the Swedish Red Cross Project



Towards the end of his career in the Government, DK Oza became a consultant to the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries and its 1976 avatar, the WORTH Trust, but he was a great source of support even from the early years. In *Madras Meanderings*, the blog that he maintained, Oza shared his admiration for the organisation. “He (Antony samy) has been doing this work with those with physical disability—missing leg, missing hand, very dim vision, etc... The work involves organising them, giving them necessary training to do whatever work they can do. This training is quite scientific and is done step by step. Over the last few years, he must have trained dozens of boys and girls to do useful work which they would not be able to do otherwise—but for the training. This for him is a life’s mission.”

Of the physically-challenged trainees, he mentions, “They not only earn from the technical training but also acquire a good deal of self-respect and become an example to others.”

And he adds some details on what he did – “I got interested in this because any specific training for someone with physical disability takes time, but it is not at all difficult over a period of time. The trainees are very keen to learn for two reasons—they earn and get self-reliance. I have been with WORTH Trust for a little over five years as a ‘Work Planner’”

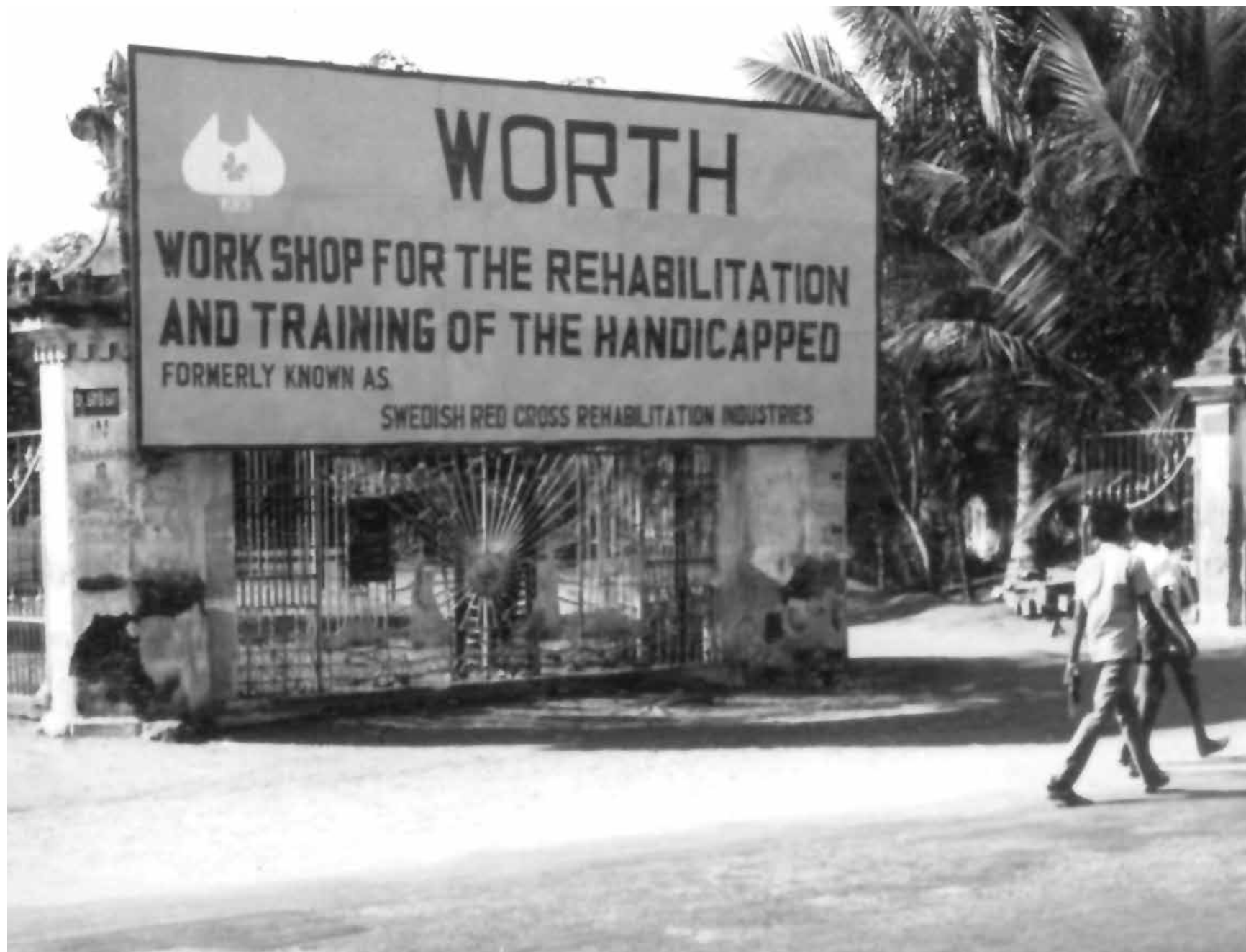
That a humble but praiseworthy initiative at Katpadi should have come to the attention of such heavyweights, requires some explanation. By the early 1970s, the good work that Antony samy was doing was noticed by DK Oza, an officer of the Indian Administrative Service attached to the Tamil Nadu cadre. He was then

Director, Employment and Training and it was he who had spoken about the Swedish Red Cross initiative to the Chief Minister.

The year 1973 to 1974 was when the 50th birthday of the Chief Minister was being celebrated across the State. This included construction of commemorative arches and



St Joseph Industrial School at Trichy which was handed over to WORTH Trust, 1973



A signboard records the new name—WORTH Trust

their inaugurations, such as the one in Saidapet, Madras. It was DK Oza who suggested that the Government did something in favour of the physically challenged. He was by then a firm votary of the initiatives of the Swedish Red Cross in the cause of leprosy patients and had helped Antonysamy on multiple occasions where the Government was involved, including facilitating the receipt of grants. And there was that one occasion when what could have been an embarrassing moment had been turned to the advantage of the physically challenged in general. Antonysamy recalls what happened—“We had a fairly aggressive driver who one day was ferrying finished products in one of our vehicles, which was an imported Volkswagen. He disliked anybody being ahead of him on the road, particularly if they were slow. It so happened that on that day he found a car taking its time to cross the narrow Palar bridge. He hooted repeatedly and finally overtook the vehicle. It was our misfortune that the car in front happened to be that of the RTO of Vellore. Offended at our driver’s behaviour he noted the registration number and made enquiries. We received a demand for some taxes with retrospective effect. It was quite exorbitant, and I represented the matter to Oza. He got an order that all vehicles in the service of the physically challenged would be freed of road taxes with retrospective effect.”

When Oza suggested to Chief Minister Karunanidhi that the Government opens a home for the leprosy-afflicted, the latter’s response was nothing short of a cheerful—“Why open one home, when we can open ten?”

It was decided that the first of these would be at Paranur, in Chengalpattu District, which as we saw in Chapter 1, was a hotbed of leprosy. Additionally, the plan for a factory within the property was also laid out. This would employ leprosy-cured persons, and its establishment and administration were entrusted to the Swedish Red Cross. Without much time to prepare as the impending birthday celebrations were round the corner, the Paranur centre was built, consisting of a hostel, training centre and a factory, in a matter of three months. Additionally, a staff quarters was also constructed. And it was for the inauguration of this facility that the Prime Minister of India was invited.

It was a mega event as we shall see in the following chapter.



The Trichy unit broke fresh ground in employing women



A Footprint in Trichy

The Paranur, Chengalpattu project was however, not the first instance of the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries expanding out of Katpadi. A year earlier, in 1973, a similar exercise had taken place in Trichy, where Catholic priests ran a technical training centre, St Joseph Industrial School, which provided training in disciplines such as carpentry, foundry, auto servicing, turner, etc. The school was not entirely successful chiefly owing to very few applicants and obsolete equipment.

The priests eventually decided to shut down operations and approached Antonysamy with the proposal that he takes over the space and conducts industrial training. He had only one condition on his side—the centre would exclusively train the differently-abled, which the priests agreed to. In 1973, the industrial school in Trichy was officially resuscitated as the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries' unit. The Trichy centre ran as a production-cum-training facility and was revolutionary for being the first in India to provide light-engineering training to physically-challenged women.



*Concentrate on the abilities your disability doesn't hinder
and don't dwell on the things it interferes with.*

Be disabled physically, not in spirit

Stephen Hawking

Chapter 6

Becoming WORTH Trust



An advertisement in The Hindu on the inauguration of the Paranur facility

The Paranur inauguration was accompanied by all that is associated with a VIP visit. The Chief Guest of the inauguration, Ms Indira Gandhi was put up in one of the staff quarters—an illustration of the simplicity of the times. The security however, was at its peak. Eighteen ‘socialists’ were taken into preventive custody as they resisted the visit by Ms Gandhi. Therefore, the restrictions were so rigid that even the Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust representatives were not invited for the opening. Special permission had to be obtained to finally enable them to do so.

From the outset, the Paranur Home was envisaged to provide training in the engineering trades, to leprosy-cured inmates drawn from the different leprosy rehabilitation homes run by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Since the trainees were not qualified for the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) programme, they were given on-the-job training in turret, drilling

and tapping work. The training was mainly to inculcate regular work habits and to subject them to the rigour and discipline of industrial work. At the completion of the two-year training period, they were helped to find employment in open industry. During the training, the Government provided them and their families, accommodation and board. Part of this stipend they received, was deposited in the bank to be used when they entered regular industrial employment. The unit began producing components for cycle dynamos, pumps, shock absorbers and automobiles. The earning from the products just about covered the training costs.

Despite the high profile beginning, the going was not so easy. As the Home was being run by the Government, the Trust could not exercise full control. Only the factory and training centre were under its supervision. The hostel was allotted to leprosy-cured individuals, among whom, only a minority were employed in the Swedish Red



A High-Profile Inauguration



Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M Karunanidhi at the inauguration of the Paranur Unit

There was widespread publicity for the inauguration of the Paranur Home. The Trust itself released an advertisement in *The Hindu* dated September 10, 1974, a rare instance of spending on non-core activities. The inauguration by the PM was reported in the Press and it contained very important messages to the country as regards leprosy—which was of immense significance at a time when awareness was still low. The PM stressed the need to create confidence in people that leprosy was curable, so that those who had the initial symptoms would come forward to take treatment. Inaugurating what was christened The Leprous Beggars Rehabilitation Home, Mrs Gandhi said those who had suffered from the dreaded disease must be given a new life. It was possible to cure most leprosy cases, but more work had to be done to detect the disease at an early stage. Unfortunately, people tried to hide the disease, she said. It was in this context she noted that the Government of Tamil Nadu's scheme to rehabilitate leprous beggars was commendable and she was glad that in this good work they had the Swedish cooperation.

Mrs Gandhi recalled a suggestion of the President of the World Leprosy Association when he was in India a year earlier, that there should be medical check-ups in all institutions where large numbers of people worked or gathered. She hoped that the country would be able to eradicate leprosy soon. The Chief Minister M Karunanidhi welcoming the Prime Minister explained the State Government's steps to improve the lot of the poor and downtrodden and to rehabilitate the challenged and beggars under a scheme launched two years earlier. Ten homes for beggars afflicted with leprosy had been started where nearly 4,000 persons were rehabilitated. The modern workshop at the Paranur Home costing Rs 8 lakhs, started with the cooperation of the Swedish Red Cross, was the country's first industrial training centre for the leprosy-afflicted he said. The Social Welfare Minister CVM Annamalai proposed a vote of thanks. The PM later went around the Home in an open jeep.



Antony Samy with guests at the inauguration ceremony

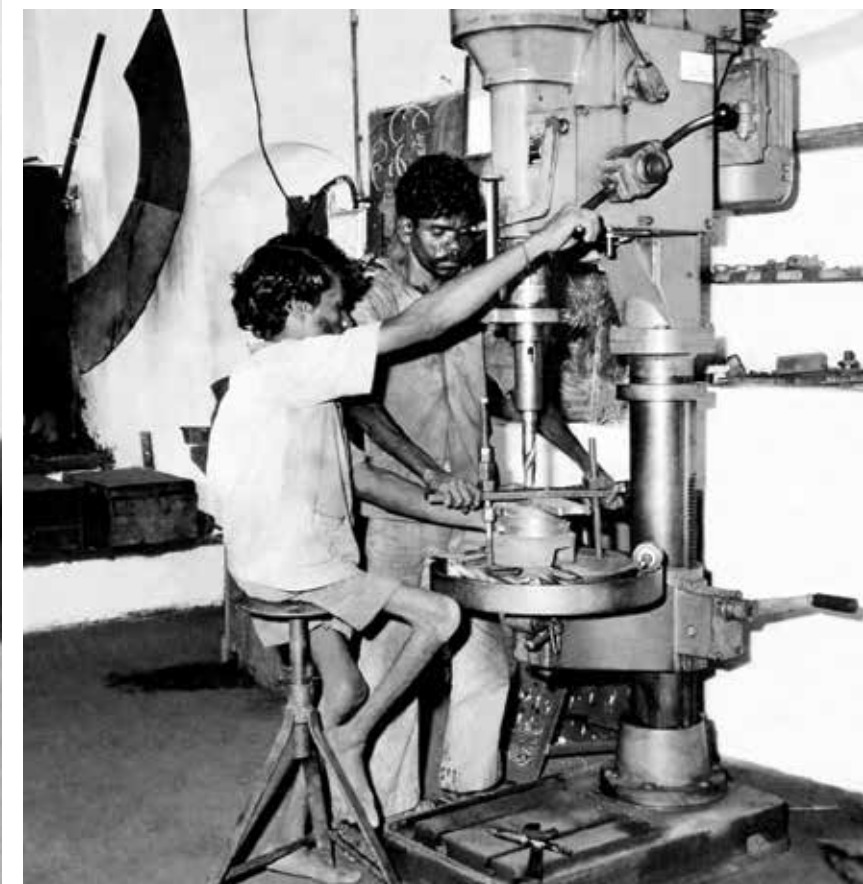
Cross factory. There were therefore, economic disparities which caused much friction. Although started with the best of intentions, the inmates of the hostel ever so frequently found themselves in conflict with fellow occupants. Therefore, the management of the centre quickly got out of hand, but the factory did function as a production unit for some years.

Despite these turbulences, as the annual reports record, by 1975, the Trust employed across all its units 253 individuals, out of whom 231 were physically challenged. This was a remarkable feat, considering the fact that the social condition

of the times dictated only few options, mostly strenuous and inhuman, for disabled people, particularly those affected by leprosy. Those leprosy-cured individuals working at the Trust, gained for the first time, a way to lead their lives with dignity, and the confidence that came along with it.

The year 1976 was monumental in the history of the Trust with much expansion and development. To start with, the Technical Training Centre in Katpadi was allotted its own building. Originally a part of the Katpadi Production Centre, it was established in 1972 as an independent unit, to impart intensive training without the interference of production schedules, and to facilitate placement of trainees in open industry. This residential centre now came to be situated in a spacious campus owned by the Trust. Well-equipped with machines and staffed by qualified persons, it was recognised by the Government of India for imparting training in the turners and machinists' trades under the NCVT programme, which it had instituted in 1956.

The Technical Training Centre began with 12 trainees in each branch every year, for the two-year course. The applicants had to be physically challenged, in the age group of 18 to 26, and have studied up to Class 10. Admission was by a written test and interview conducted in July every year. The centre also provided non-formal



(Here and Opposite) Views of the workshop and training facility at Katpadi in 1970

A First Step in Education



Children at the School for Orthopaedically Challenged, 1976

In 1976, a co-educational residential primary school for 50 orthopaedically challenged children was started. Several of these, who were unable to attend regular schools because of their disability, were brought here, and if necessary, operated upon in the nearby Christian Medical College hospital and provided prosthetics or walking aids. Formal education to bring them to as near a level as was expected at a given age, and physiotherapy, were provided during the necessarily prolonged period of treatment.

The ultimate aim was to integrate the children into regular schools, nearer to their homes where they rightfully belonged. The care and the

comparatively lower expenditure at the early stage helped the parents to save and thereby benefitted the community and the country a significant amount by way of outlay on rehabilitation.

The school began functioning in a specially designed building where new architectural ideas to suit the physically challenged had been adopted. This was thanks to architect SL Chitale, who brought to the project his customary thoroughness and creativity. It had a physiotherapy section to take care of the needs of the children. Care was taken to see that the children maintained ties with their families. This building still stands today and currently houses the Trust office.

training to about 12 boys who were not eligible for the recognised course. They were trained in fitter, turner and machinist trades. All the trainees received stipends. Right from inception, the Technical Training Centre was housed in a rented building, adjoining the production centre. Now, in 1976, it was shifted to the Trust's own building in Thiruvalem Road, Katpadi.

It was also in 1976 that the Trust began work in rehabilitation using opportunities in agriculture and dairy sectors. Free spaces in the Katpadi centre were ploughed and planted with vegetables

and Napier grass. The grass was fed to the thirty animals present, which were later milked. The centre turned self-sufficient in its need for milk and vegetables. The excess was even sold to workers and stores outside.

But the most significant stride of the Trust in agriculture actualised in Trichy, and that was in 1977. While an idea to use farming as a field for rehabilitation existed for some time, it received impetus from Mr Santiago of the Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS), which was established in 1961 in India. The IGSSS itself

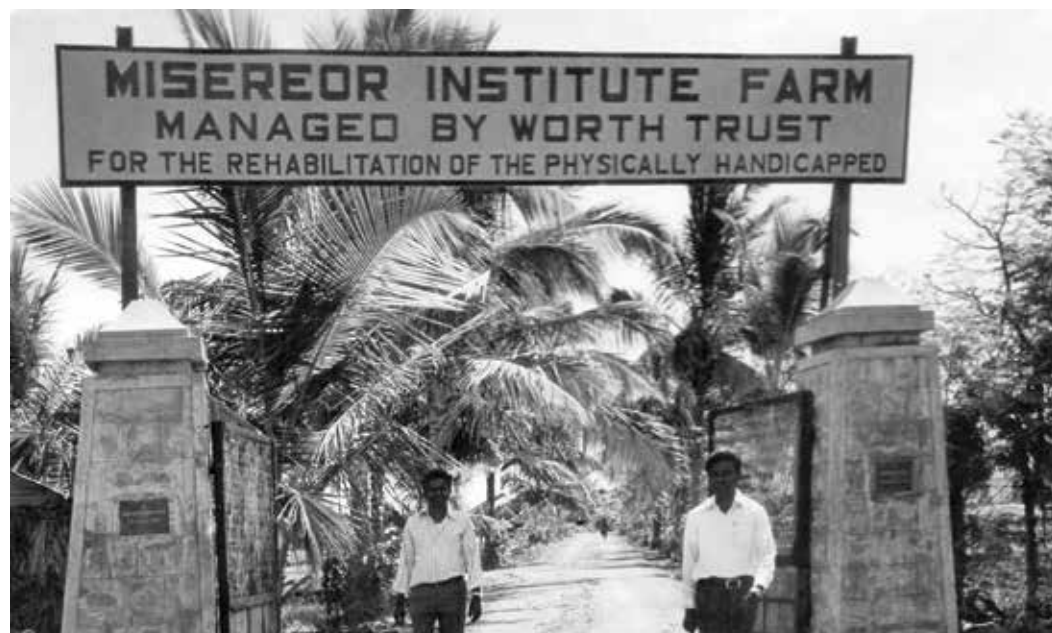
Becoming WORTH Trust

With significant progress in the fields of engineering, production, education, agriculture and dairy, the Trust had one more reason to celebrate the year 1976. The Swedish Red Cross, which laid the foundation for the organisation and was a key contributor to its success since



The old and the new. Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries becomes the WORTH Trust

the beginning, stepped back, as per their agreement that they would only support the organisation and its workings, until it found its footing firmly and was able to support itself. The Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Trust was renamed the Workshop for Rehabilitation and Training of the Handicapped (WORTH) Trust. A new Indian Board was formed with KV Srinivasan (of Standard Motors) as the Head. The new name and logo was designed by Avinash Naiksadam, a differently-abled person. The symbol was taken from one end of a spanner signifying the specialisation in the area of engineering industry. Looked at more closely there were two hands protecting a flower with a missing petal. That piece of symbolism was to denote the challenged.

*The farm at Trichy*

received support from MISEREOR, the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation. A massive farm was established in Trichy. It was made possible because of the generous offer made by Fr Provincial of the Jesuit Madurai Mission and the authorities of St Joseph's College. Previously called MISEREOR Institute Farm and consisting of about sixty acres, with wells and pump sets, a modern dairy building to house sixty animals, and other smaller structures, some of which were crumbling, it was handed over to the Trust to be developed into a farm for the physically challenged. Taking interest in the operations of the Trust, Fr Rector of Loyola and Bro Santhappan SJ, sold valuable animals at a very reasonable price. The Trust also obtained some more cows and heifers from St Joseph's College, Trichy. With these as a foundation stock, a dairy farm was started.

In addition, at the farm, paddy, chilli, groundnut, hybrid cotton, castor and vegetables were sown. The horticulture section had roses, jasmine, and other ornamental plants. The fodder for the animals was grown in-house and the farmyard manure went to enrich the soil. The farm was encouraged to develop systems which could be copied by small farmers, and not rely on heavy mechanisation. In the dairy, crossbred cattle were being raised. The emphasis was to increase and upgrade the stock. The farm and the dairy aimed at providing training in modern methods of agriculture, horticulture and dairy leading to remunerative employment

*Livestock at the Trichy farm*

for the physically challenged in the rural areas and thus preventing their drift to the cities. It was also envisaged as a demonstration centre by employing physically-challenged people in rural occupations.

A brochure brought out in the early 1980s, summed up the journey thus far – "Rehabilitation of the challenged is a social responsibility. They are to be employed, but not out of charity. Many precision parts are made by hands disfigured by disease and accidents, by people who are rejected by most employers, because they are challenged. Through systematic training and

sheer perseverance, they can acquire skills. Trained men sent to industry, have won the appreciation of their employers. The conviction of the Trust, and the determination with which they pursue the cause has been amply rewarded by the success of the project. Industrialists have demonstrated their faith by giving work; and their trust has not been wasted. These centres have succeeded as business ventures. As a humanitarian effort, they have brought relief and solace to over 300 challenged persons. Hard working wage earners, they do not live on charity, but are skilled workmen who pay taxes, and support families. Backed by such traditions and belief, the WORTH Trust is moving with an urgency and determination to expand further in order to serve more and more challenged people."



*Never ignore someone with a disability,
as we don't realise how much they can inspire.*

Sudha Chandran

Chapter 7

Some Hits, and Some Misses

A summary of WORTH Trust's activities, listed in its Annual Report 1977 has listed the following centres:

- Trust and Katpadi Production Centre
- Technical Training Centre, Katpadi
- Tiruchirappalli Production Centre
- School, Dairy and Weaving Projects, Katpadi
- Farm and Dairy, Tiruchirapalli

The origins of all the above, barring the Weaving Centre, have been covered in the previous chapters. The installation of looms did not result in much success but nevertheless it was a diversification that deserves documentation. (See box)

While that may have been a disappointment, the prospect of expanding into the Union Territory of Pondicherry was exciting.

The then Catholic Archbishop of Pondicherry, the Rt Rev VS Selvanather encouraged WORTH Trust to start a vocational training and rehabilitation centre

A Weaving Centre

A Weaving Centre with five looms was started to provide part-time work for the wives of the workers of WORTH Trust. But this proved a non-starter. Although there was enough work and the possibility of earning Rupees 75 per month, it did not attract many.

The Trust's Annual Report of 1977 noted with disappointment that, "Women do not seem to be motivated by the possibility of earning more and seem to be happy with the chance to gossip and be without this extra income. Still, we continue to run it, to help the few who are working regularly." The Weaving Centre closed in 1979.



Technical Training Centre at Pondicherry



Production Centre at Pondicherry

within his diocese. The WORTH Board reckoned that it did not have the money to start a new centre or to purchase new machines. Affordable land was not available in Pondicherry. This was conveyed to His Grace the Archbishop, who readily offered to give land in Pondicherry town, on lease. He said that he would try to arrange for money for building and for machines. However, he had no people, and WORTH would have to manage everything. This was an opportunity, and the Board agreed. MISEREOR, which as we saw earlier was supporting a number of social welfare activities, readily offered to provide the funds for the building and machines.

The Board, after much deliberation, decided to start a centre in Pondicherry. “We have been invited to start an engineering training cum production centre in Pondicherry,” notes the Annual Report of 1980. It is interesting to see that the Board at that time felt that it could replicate the Katpadi experience in Pondicherry as well. “If it generates a good revenue surplus, it can help to start another school for orthopaedically-challenged children,” noted the Board. “With the medical facilities available at JIPMER, the challenged children in Pondicherry can be very well taken care of and helped in rehabilitation.”

Just as in Katpadi, the Pondicherry facility was planned with a production centre, running in tandem with a training centre. The surplus from the former was expected to fund the latter. Trainees would in part be absorbed at the production centre while the rest would be offered for placement in manufacturing industries.

There were however, problems in taking over the land that had been donated by the Archbishop. To avoid any delay

in starting the project, two industrial sheds were taken on rent in the industrial estate at Pondicherry. The training unit started functioning in one of the sheds. “The imported and indigenous production machines are being erected in the other shed,” said the Annual Report of 1982. “While the power connection has been obtained for the training unit, because of the power cut, the production unit has not got power, yet the production unit will start operating from June 1983.”

At that time WORTH had enough orders at Katpadi and part of these orders for customers in Madras was transferred to Pondicherry. The unit also got some work from the industries within the Union Territory. It functioned well but was cramped for space and could not accommodate the workers and the trainees. They were accommodated in the workshop building itself. Food was brought from outside, through a contractor. Within two years a workshop building with a technical training centre, with classrooms and a good hostel were constructed on the land given on lease by the Catholic diocese. Later the unit shifted to its own convenient buildings and the industrial sheds were handed back to the Government.

Given the overall challenges such as prolonged power cuts in the Pondicherry area in the 1980s, and a downturn in the economy that

affected order intake, WORTH persevered and was happy to announce in 1989 that the unit made a surplus that year. Two years later, it made good a promise—a school for polio-afflicted children was opened in Pondicherry with financial assistance from MISERIOR. The then Archbishop, His Grace the Rev Selvanather, blessed the new buildings on April 2, 1991. By 1993, the centre could report that it was able to meet all its requirements and generate a surplus to take care of its technical training centre and the school which were co-located. “Construction of a separate building for the training centre workshop is nearly complete, which would greatly ease the current congested workspace in the production workshop. Addition of a few more machines in the coming year, is being considered. These will balance the capacities of the equipment and thereby increase production.”

The Pondicherry unit was also helped at this time by an industrialisation drive that the Union Territory was undertaking. New manufacturing units were being established in the neighbourhood and these were approached for orders. Many were forthcoming. The Pondicherry unit stabilised thereafter and continues to generate a surplus.

The failure of the windmill project notwithstanding, WORTH prospered. This was a significant achievement, given that the macro environment was not encouraging in the least.

Trying Out Windmills



A windmill installed by WORTH

which also envisaged the training of WORTH personnel included the placing of a Dutch windmill expert in Trichy and was planned to begin in 1980. It was hoped that this would be the starting of a major project to manufacture windmill pumps which would transform agriculture in the Cauvery delta.

Work proceeded very quickly thereafter. Thanks to the technical and financial help given by HIVOS, experimental pumps were installed around Trichy and studied under operating conditions. HIVOS offered to support a follow-up study on the economics of the usage of windmill technology for small farmers, and to improve the product. The pilot project for training the rural challenged for rehabilitation in agro-based occupations was also made a part of this project. A WORTH brochure dating to 1982 gives further details – “In collaboration with HIVOS and WOT of Holland, windmill pumps are being produced in Tiruchirapalli and Katpadi Centres. Some pumps have been erected and evaluation of project reports are under study. Based on the experience gained, improvements in design and material are being introduced. Bulk production of windmill pumps would start from June 1983.”

Two years later however the findings were sobering. “The windmill project did not make much progress during the year,” noted the Annual Report of 1982. “The emphasis was on maintenance work on the erected windmills. The Dutch expert who studied the project felt that it would not help small farmers, but still as a project with a possible future, it could be continued. As part of reorganisation, the windmill unit has been shifted to Katpadi and perhaps during the later part of 1983, increased production will start.” A year later we read about a technical innovation resulting in a windmill unit suitable for high wind velocity areas. However, during the year only three windmills could be installed and much of the time was spent in maintaining the old ones. It was therefore decided that in 1984 a comprehensive study would be undertaken to find out whether the project was at all feasible. A year later, it was decided to wind up the windmill activity.

It was also in the early 1980s that WORTH considered getting into the erection of windmills and the manufacture of windmill pumps. It was perhaps an idea far ahead of its time and as is often the case with such concepts, folded up soon. But it is still worth recording its story. In 1979, Antonysamy visited Europe during August and September. In Sweden, he met and thanked Olaf Stroh and others of the international department of the Swedish Red Cross, whose unfailing interest had led to the establishment of the WORTH Trust. He made a presentation on the developments at Katpadi and gave a short talk at the Swedish Red Cross headquarters. It was an opportunity to meet several old friends who had helped WORTH in its early days.

It was at this time that NC Bose Croos, the Works Manager at the Trichy facility, established contact with HIVOS—the international cooperation organisation for sustainable and inclusive societies, with its headquarters at The Hague. Together with R Engelhard of HIVOS, Antonysamy visited the Technical University of Twente at Enschede, the Netherlands, for further discussions on a windmill project then being spearheaded by the Working Group on Development Techniques (WOT) headquartered there. This resulted in an agreement to produce windmill pumps. The project



The carpentry section at Trichy

The 1970s were plagued by prolonged drought, resulting in electricity shortages which necessitated WORTH purchasing and installing diesel generators. That it could readily afford them is an indication of how carefully its finances had been managed all along.

The labour scenario too was troublesome with 1977/78 being the worst years, when practically every industrial house of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry suffered prolonged lockouts. WORTH itself was not immune to it. There were strikes at the centres and a successive reading

of Annual Reports shows how the Management learnt and changed itself with time.

In 1975, we read of the first sign of trouble. “The satisfactory development of the Paranur unit was marred towards the close of the year by a strike by the inmates of the Home, which is run by the Government. The inmates, with whom our unit is not concerned, prevented our trainees from attending the training centre and the Government authorities did not check them even when they indulged in violence. Sad to say, the unit still remains closed, and we hope that by enclosing the unit with a fence and thus giving it a separate identity, we would be able to continue the development of the unit, when it opens again.” Paranur would remain troublesome and see several disruptions in succeeding years as well.

By 1978, labour trouble had come to Katpadi. The Annual Report of 1979 reads as follows and shows that WORTH was coming to terms with it – “After rumblings of labour unhappiness during 1978, the unit settled down during 1979 to a period of introspection. These depressing problems, initially a shocking experience, are now taken as a price for growth, with the realisation that our challenged workers have matured to be ‘workers’ and so are really ‘rehabilitated’. From the simple joys of birth and rapid growth, we had passed through a period



(Here and opposite) The manufacturing facility at Trichy

of stress, giving us a valuable experience. Now, as we face the future, our enthusiasm is tempered with a sense of reality and confidence, with an awareness of our limitations. This period of retrospection and consolidation has given us the confidence and the insight, to have a constant evaluation of our performance and proposed programmes.”

There was further introspection a year later and a realisation that loss of personal touch could be a reason for such trouble. The Annual Report for 1980 reads – “As the years passed, with more people, the personal contact became less. The fear of the possible loss of employment disappeared, and with it the appreciation of the good things they are enjoying. While some productive workers left, the not so productive ones stayed. Labour laws give them their security and they agitate for unreasonable demands. The unions could promise them the heavens, while we have to wage a continuous battle just to keep the units floating. The Katpadi and Trichy units faced labour problems. Gate meetings, poster campaign, and a dharna organised by the union in Katpadi failed to make any impact. The majority of the workers in Katpadi came out of the political union. In Trichy, the situation did not deteriorate. When the labour problems first struck us, it shocked us into immobility. But now, we are not depressed. It has taught us some lessons, a new experience and added determination to continue on our path.”

Labour trouble diminished by the mid 1980s, but not before one serious eruption at the Trichy unit in 1985, when the foundry was shut down permanently, the willing workers transferred to other units and six people being retrenched. But by then, fresh challenges were already on the horizon.



*It does not matter how slowly you go
as long as you do not stop.*

Confucius

Chapter 8

Changing with Time

In 1988, WORTH Trust celebrated its Silver Jubilee, and traced its origins to the establishment of Swedish Red Cross Rehabilitation Industries in 1963.

The actual event took place on January 8, 1989, at 48, New Thiruvallam Road, Katpadi, which was the headquarters of the Trust. In characteristic fashion, the event was low key, with in-house talents so to speak—the celebrations were presided over by KV Srinivasan of Standard Motors, who until 1983 had been Chairman of the Trust. The Chief Guest was Anders Wijkman, then Secretary-General of the Swedish Red Cross. The function started with an exhibition of the progress of the Trust, in pictures, neatly put together, followed by a public meeting presided over by KV Srinivasan. CA Cornelius and E Petterson ex-Trustees also attended the celebration. Carl Naucclar, representative of the Swedish Red Cross, Dr Bo-Akerren, first Swedish expert, I Bergquist, technical expert from

Sweden and many of the then Trustees attended the function. All of them were honoured. It was a day to recall the Trust's objectives, reconfirm its faith in its philosophy and thank the visionaries of the project.

The Trust said in a statement that, "The philosophy was to rehabilitate the challenged youth and children through medical treatment, technical training and schooling with the funds generated through our rehabilitation industries. What started as an experiment in 1963 had become a model to be emulated."

The Hindu in an article dated January 23, 1987, titled *Model Institution to Rehabilitate the Handicapped*, gives us a comprehensive survey of all the activities of the Trust at this point and said, "given the right training and opportunities, the physically challenged people, be they orthopaedically challenged, deaf, dumb or blind, could very well prove to be as useful and productive as normal people". The placement

A Slew of Products and Services



By the twenty-fifth year, WORTH had a wide range of products and services on offer. The components included automobile spare parts like carburetors and shock absorbers, components of pump and items such as dynamos and starters. The production centres comprised a machine shop and automat section and a fabrication facility. In the machine shop, high precision small components were made. Components similar to those made in the machine shop, but needed in larger quantities, were being produced in the automat section.

In addition to what it was executing for customers, WORTH was also churning out products of its own. Given its specialisation in light engineering, it began producing wheelchairs and tricycles for the use of its own staff and trainees. Realising that these could also be made available to a wider outside market, the Trust began producing them for sale. In 1988, this fabrication unit had the capacity to produce about 500 tricycles a month.

The annual turnover of the Katpadi production centre was then about Rs 45 lakhs. Besides private industries, the workshop secured contract work from BHEL, Ranipet and subcontracting work from the Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF), Vellore, for the finishing of components. The Trichy centre specialised in fabrication and foundry products. Tractor trailers, agricultural implements and rotary crushing machines were manufactured at this centre. WORTH had been recognised by the Government as an agency for the distribution of aids and appliances [like wheelchairs, tricycles and hearing aids] to physically-challenged persons in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. A total of 825 beneficiaries had thus far been supplied with aid from this grant, ever since the inception of this scheme in 1981.

It was time for thanksgiving and the Trust did not fail to remember all the organisations that had helped it in its long journey. The Annual



(Above Top) Production facility for wheelchairs and tricycles at Katpadi and (Above) Some of the products displayed

Report lists all the major customers and it reads like a who's who of South Indian industry. Clearly, the hard work of Antonysamy and his team had paid off. At the same time, it had to be acknowledged that the seed had fallen on fertile ground. The industrialists had seen the worth in WORTH Trust and its professed ideals and had supported it.



Silver jubilee memento of WORTH Trust

services offered by WORTH came in for considerable praise. In the 25th year, a total of 275 trainees found employment.

Clearly, WORTH at Katpadi and elsewhere was a model institution in the field of training, rehabilitation and placement of the physically challenged. The Trust was by then providing schooling, training and employment to nearly 400 physically challenged people. The salient features of the activities of WORTH was that it provided absolutely free training, boarding and

lodging to the trainees at its training centres at Katpadi, Trichy, Paranur, Pondicherry and very recently in Madras. The Trust also provided almost free schooling to challenged children in the age group of four to eight with parents being encouraged to pay any amount they could afford.

The expenses of training and schooling were met from the Trust's earning from its production centres in Katpadi, Trichy and Pondicherry manned exclusively by physically-challenged technicians. The Katpadi workshop had about 90 physically challenged people including paraplegics, orthopaedically challenged, leprosy-cured, deaf, and blind persons engaged in finishing the components used in leading automobile, pump, cycle and other industries.

The 25th year was also marked by some momentous changes within WORTH. It was almost as though the organisation was preparing itself for the challenges of the new liberalised era which was just four years away. There was a shedding of what were believed to be non-core activities. For instance, the dairy and farm at Trichy were handed back to the Jesuits at the end of the lease period. At the request of the Fathers, the Trust continued managing the space for a year more. There was a quest for new products and also a desire to add new courses in training. Thus far, mechanical engineering was the focus but now we see the addition of electronics. (See box).

A Foray into Electronics



Three years prior to the Silver Jubilee, the Rotary WORTH project was started as a result of the combined efforts of the Rotary Club of Madras, and the Rotary District 707, Canada, together with the WORTH Trust. The main purpose of this project was to move into the sunrise sector of electronics. The modus operandi was the same as in earlier projects. The first phase was the establishment of a technical training centre for the physically challenged in the field of electronics. The second phase was to start a production unit or an economically viable unit that would generate enough surplus to sustain the centre after an initial period of three years.

The third phase was to provide residential facilities that could be used as a multiplier effect to start other units of a similar nature and perhaps extend those facilities to other units as well. Most of the students were affected in their legs mainly because of polio and so they could use their hands to execute electronic assembly. The training institute was housed in leased premises at Tondiarpet. There were however, plenty of operational issues and after a few years, the Tondiarpet centre was closed and the training programme absorbed into the Katpadi Training Centre.

(Clockwise from Top) The Rotary WORTH Electronics facility, the Mechanic Training Centre in Madras, and Antonysamy (left) and KRN Menon (in suit and tie) at the Katpadi centre



Children at the School for Orthopaedically Challenged at Katpadi

Facilities were also upgraded. With the building of a new hostel in Katpadi, the students were given better facilities for evening studies. Recreation facilities were also improved. At Pondicherry, a kitchen was put up and the students who were hitherto staying in rented accommodation were brought into the campus. At Trichy, with the

introduction of the welder trade the need for more accommodation was felt and the existing hostel was rearranged to accommodate more students.

For the first time WORTH began to expand its programmes by taking them to a wider community and not restrict it to just those who came seeking help. Funded by the Christoffel Blindenmission, West Germany, a new programme envisaged identifying challenged children in the villages around the orthopaedic school and taking clinical rehabilitation to their homes. From as many as 77 villages, the Trust located orthopaedically, visually, speech, aurally and intellectually-disadvantaged children. The orthopaedically challenged alone were taken care of by the Trust. Children with other disabilities were referred to specialist institutions.

Under the supervision of a senior physio-therapist the children needing help were attended to by village-level physiotherapists who were trained by the Trust. This was also when the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Government of India were paying increased attention to eradication of polio. The Trust became a part of the Operation Polio Programme formulated by the Government of India and implemented by the State Government. It took up in Katpadi district the identification of polio-afflicted children. The hostel building for polio-afflicted children at Pondicherry was also nearing completion at this time.

Model institution to rehabilitate the handicapped

Given the right training and opportunities, the physically handicapped people, be they orthopaedically handicapped, deaf, dumb or blind, could very well prove to be as useful and productive as normal people.

The Workshop for the Rehabilitation and Training of the Handicapped (WORTH) in Katpadi near Vellore stands today as a model institution in the field of training, rehabilitation and placement of the physically handicapped. Founded by the Swedish Red Cross in 1963 as an engineering rehabilitation workshop for the orthopaedically handicapped, it is now administered by the WORTH Trust.

The trust provides schooling, training and employment to nearly 400 handicapped people. The salient feature of the activities of WORTH is that it provides absolutely free training, boarding and lodging to the physically handicapped trainees at its training centres at Katpadi, Tiruchi, Panrur (Chingleput district), Pondicherry and of late in Madras. The Madras centre is fully supported by the Rotary Club of Madras. The trust also provides almost free schooling to handicapped children in the age group of 4-8 (parents are encouraged to pay any amount they can afford).

The expenses of training and schooling are met from the trust's earnings from its production centres. In Katpadi, Tiruchi and Pondicherry manned exclusively by handicapped technicians, in the Katpadi workshop for production centre, about 90 physically handicapped people including paraplegics, orthopaedically handicapped, leprosy-cured, deaf, dumb and blind persons are engaged in finishing the components used in leading automobile, textile and electronics industries. The components include automobile spare parts like carburetors and shock absorbers, components of textile machinery and electronic items like dynamo and starters.

The production centre comprises a machineworkshop, an automot section and a fabrication facility. In the machineworkshop, high precision small components are made. Components similar to those made in the machineworkshop, but needed in larger quantities, are being produced in the automot section. Wheel-chairs and tricycles for the use of physically handicapped persons are produced in the fabrication unit. The fabrication unit has the capacity to produce about 500 tricycles a month but the actual production depended on the orders, which was about 300 tricycles per year, said Mr. N. C. Bose, Manager (training and development). The annual turnover of the Katpadi production centre is about Rs. 45 lakhs. Besides private industries, the workshop secured contract work from BHEL, Ranipet and sub-contracting work from the Netur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF), Vellore, for the finishing of components.

Overhead costs

Mr. C. Antony Samy, Director, WORTH said the trust had proposed to start a plastic injection moulding project at a cost of Rs. 35 lakhs in May this year to improve its income since the trust was finding it difficult to meet the mounting overhead costs. The income from the workshop could not be depended upon for ever due to the increasing competition in the ancillary industry and in undertaking sub-contracting work. As in the case of the workshop, the plastic injection moulding project would be exclusively manned by physically handicapped technicians. About 25 physically handicapped persons are expected to be employed in this unit which would produce plastic components for automobiles besides two-colour mouldings for the key-tops in computers, typewriters and



Finishing and assembling of fuse-carriers by physically handicapped women in the Round Table workshop.

push-button telephones. Satisfied with the results of its first project, the Swedish Red Cross had agreed to finance the plastic injection moulding project, along with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Mr. Antony Samy said.

WORTH has been recognised by the Government as an agency for the distribution of aids and appliances like wheel-chairs, tricycles and hearing aids to physically handicapped persons in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The Central Government gave an annual grant of Rs. 1.5 lakhs for this purpose. The trust has requested the Government to increase it to Rs. 2 lakhs. The director said the grant under this head was usually delayed till the lag end of the year as a result of which the trust found it difficult to spend the entire grant within the short period left before the end of the financial year. He would appreciate it, if the Central Government released the grant early, he said. A total of 825 beneficiaries have so far been supplied with aid from this grant ever since the inception of this scheme in 1961. This aid was given to any physically handicapped person earning Rs. 1,200 per month or less. In case of those earning above Rs. 1,200 but within Rs. 2,500 per month, the appliance or aid was given at 50 per cent subsidy, says Mr. N. V. Krishnaswamy, Manager (administration and finance).

Handicapped trainees

The Katpadi training centre offers two-year courses for the turner and machinist trades, taking 12 physically handicapped trainees in each course every year. The draughtsman's course is to be started here from this year. Welding course is to be started in the Tiruchi training centre from this year in addition to the already existing turner's course. The fitter's course is to be started in the Pondicherry Centre in addition to the existing turner's course. A

total of 204 formal trainees and 185 non-formal trainees have so far passed out of WORTH's various training centres. A total of 275 trainees have so far been given employment. This includes 120 trainees who were given placement by the placement officer posted in WORTH by the National Society for Equal Opportunity of the Handicapped (NASEO). The placement officer of NASEO has been posted there to provide placement not only to WORTH trainees but also to all handicapped people in this region, including the mentally handicapped.

Though in a smaller way, the Round Table 23, Vellore is contributing its mite towards the training and employment of physically handicapped women through its workshop started in 1974. Forty women, most of them with paralysed legs are employed in the Round Table workshop located in the SIDCO industrial estate in Gandhinagar.

A visit to the workshop revealed that work included buffing and drilling of components used in automobile, electrical, electronics and textile industries. Mr. J. Dorairajan, Works Manager, NTTF (which provide the major sub-contracting work to the Round Table project) and himself a Round Table said the work turned out by the physically handicapped women at the workshop was quite satisfactory. The workshop made a turnover of Rs. 16,000 to Rs. 17,000 a month. The employees are paid salaries ranging from Rs. 225 to Rs. 400 per month. Nearly 95 per cent of the secondary jobs like cleaning, drilling and buffing of the components are given to the workshop.

The Round Table arranges free tours once a year to employees in the workshop. Except one, all other machineries used in the workshop have been bought by the Round Table, says Mr. K. H. Yunus, secretary of Round Table 23.—Vellore Staff Reporter

While these were in reality organic extensions of what WORTH was already doing, the Trust also realised that the old products and the ways of manufacture would not be suitable for a new era. There were already signs of change in the air. The production of two-wheelers had been liberalised, for instance in the 1980s and there was talk of electronics and computers, both of which had already made their presence in the economy. Plastics and electronics were therefore the ways ahead.

The electronics programme may have tapered off but the plastics venture proved to be an enduring success. In 1987, Antonysamy was quoted by *The Hindu* as saying that the Trust had proposed to start a plastic injection moulding project at a cost of Rs 35 lakhs in May that year to improve its income. The Trust he said, was finding it difficult to meet the mounting overhead costs. The income from the workshop could not be depended upon forever, due to the increasing competition in the ancillary industry and in undertaking subcontract work. As in the case of the workshop, the plastic injection moulding project would be exclusively manned by physically-challenged technicians. About 25 physically-challenged persons were expected to be employed in this unit which would produce plastic components for automobiles besides two-colour mouldings for the key tops in computers, typewriters and push button telephones.

Satisfied with the results of its first project, the Swedish Red Cross had agreed to finance the plastic injection moulding project, along with the Swedish International Development Agency, (SIDA). In many ways, the plastics



Employees at Katpadi

division was the Swedish Red Cross' gift to WORTH on its completing 25 years. The Annual Report of 1988 acknowledges this – “The Swedish Red Cross, Stockholm, to mark the Silver Jubilee of its association with WORTH, donated machinery and equipment to start a plastic injection moulding shop at Katpadi.” Within a year it was being recorded that the plastics production centre at Katpadi was producing injection-moulded components for various reputed customers. And a couple of years later we read that the plastic unit at Katpadi was specialising in components for sanitary ware, domestic appliances, bicycle and watch industries. The principal customers were EID Parry Limited for water cisterns, TI Cycles Limited for cycle pedals, Hydraulics Limited for shock absorbers and Titan Industries for watch straps.

This is when we also hear of what would become a very major project for WORTH in the years to come. In 1994, it was recorded that a mould for making Braille slate was developed on the request of Christoffel Blindenmission, South Asia regional office and the slate had been approved by CBM headquarters in Germany. “This may mean, that we would be meeting the South Asia and Africa requirements of the slate, once the confirmatory orders are received,” noted the Annual Report. WORTH was being cautious but it had every reason to be optimistic.

The Hindu reports on progress at WORTH, including the launch of the plastics facility



*Don't call us people with disabilities...
we have different abilities!*

Edward Barbanell

Down's Syndrome-afflicted American actor and comedian

Chapter 9

A Transitional School Transitions

“The most satisfying part of our work is the school for challenged children. With sixteen children at the end of the year, the school is poised for rapid growth.

Most of them came to us, being carried by their parents. Left in the school, they were crawling. For those who were in need, surgeries were done in CMC Hospital, Vellore, and callipers fitted. The first walk of the child, thrilling even in the case of a normal child, is more so for challenged children. At one time, games could be played only sitting. Now they can stand, walk, even run. What a joy! The teachers have devotedly continued to give them education and look after them during this process of treatment and training. We would soon be able to integrate these children into normal schools.

Medical treatment has been under the able care of Dr Selvapandiyar and Dr Sunderraj. They have operated on the children and provided callipers or braces to those who were in need.

Bro George and Mrs Abraham as volunteers brought sunshine into their lives by screening comic and educational film shows, and special classes for singing and sewing respectively. We already have a physiotherapist working in our training centre. Arrangements have been made to give him training in polio work.”

The above is the 1978 report of what was christened The School for Handicapped Children and which in 1987 came to be referred to as the Transitional School—a term that best defined its purpose. The Trust in its quest to rid the physically challenged of disabilities when it came to leading meaningful lives, had decided to start with the very young. Essentially a school for children with orthopaedic disabilities, it was conceptualised as a conduit to enable them to join mainstream schools after a period of two or three years under its care. In today's world, the very necessity of such a facility may seem unnecessary but in the 1970s this was not so.



MV Subbiah at the inauguration of the new campus for the School for Orthopaedically Challenged Children

Lack of awareness meant parents with physically afflicted children kept them at home, eventually making them completely dependent. Prosthetic aids too were not available the way they are today.

During the time they were at the school, the children were made mobile and taught to manage the activities of daily living by themselves. While this process was in progress, their education was also taken care of. For easier integration into normal schools, the Government of Tamil Nadu syllabus was followed.

The school therefore, ran hand-in-hand with an outreach programme that helped identify children with special needs in the surrounding districts. Those with orthopaedic challenges were brought to the school and at that time, the majority of the children falling into this category were polio victims. Those that had other needs were referred to agencies specialising in those treatments.

In 1978, a year after the school had begun full-fledged operations, we read that it had 26 children. The Annual Report records that, “It is a satisfying feeling, that, of the 20 children taken the previous year, 11 were sent home, on their feet! They were given physiotherapy, and more importantly, formal education, so that they could continue it elsewhere.” In short, the institution had begun fulfilling its objectives within a year of inception.

In 1980, with the first batch having completed two years, as an experimental measure, three children were admitted to a local school in June, even while continuing their stay in the hostel. They adjusted very well to their new environment, but WORTH noted that, “This particular service may have to be discontinued on account of difficulties regarding transport and the need to accommodate other children.” Thereafter, the children were handed back to their parents at the end of the two-year period

The Growth of a Campus



In 1977, the Trust recorded that accommodation for the school was makeshift at best. “The school is situated in an old bungalow in two floors which is ill-suited for the use of challenged children. There is a need for a well-designed building for housing them. We hope this dream will come true.” That wish was fulfilled three years later. The Government of India came forward with a grant of Rs 2.16 lakhs for construction of a residential block and a dining hall. A second donor was the community service organisation Come Noi, headquartered in Turin, Italy, which focused on developing countries, particularly India.

The new residential blocks with accommodation for 50 children were ready in June 1980. The Annual Report for 1980-81 states that, “The highlight of the year was, shifting into new residential blocks especially designed to suit the needs of orthopaedically-challenged children. This took place in October 1980, at the beginning of the second school term. One of the buildings, for which financial aid was given by Come Noi of Turin was declared open at a simple ceremony by Mr Franco Sabille and his wife, representing Come Noi during their visit to Katpadi in November.”



Inauguration of the residential blocks by Franco Sabille of Turin, Italy, along with his wife



Scenes of the students at the school



(Left to Right) MV Subbiah (standing),
C Antonysamy, Ranjit Pratap,
V Chidambaram and S Viji at a
WORTH event

at the school and the choice of mainstream educational institutions was left to them.

What was interesting was the manner in which the school worked on getting children in the mainstream to become familiar with their counterparts with special needs. In June 1980, children of the workers on the WORTH campus were admitted into the kindergarten section. The plan was to keep these children, who were physically able, occupied, till such a time as they were old enough to attend local schools.

In the meanwhile, they became sensitised to differently-abled children. Likewise, children from the Ida Scudder School, Vellore, spent a couple of hours each week at the Transitional School as part of their regular schedule.

In the year 1986, a milestone was achieved in the life of the school. A full ten years had gone by since its inception and the occasion was marked with a celebration. MV Subbiah, the Chairman of the Trust was the Chief Guest and his wife Seetha distributed the prizes. Most of the Trustees graced the occasion, as also ex-teachers, former students, friends, well-wishers and collaborators. By then the school had rehabilitated almost 300 children, most of whom were afflicted with polio. That year, the WORTH Trust took a major step forward with respect to the school. It conducted an orthotic workshop on January 16 to enable the Katpadi production centre to fabricate the prosthetics and also repair them within the campus itself.

Hand in hand with the school was the outreach programme, which had begun, it will be recalled with identifying children with special needs in the surrounding villages. This also became a follow-up service, which started in 1979. Such a service was felt to be essential, as otherwise the effort and money spent on the children who had passed out of the school would be wasted. A questionnaire was prepared and sent to the parents of all old

An Inspiring Teacher



Vasanth Charles, Principal and Teacher

The Annual Report acknowledges an Australian visitor Mrs Spence who took handwork classes from June to October in 1980. Mrs KA Abraham, who is referred to as a “friend of the school”, conducted music lessons for long time. But if there is one person whom everyone seems to recall, it is Vasantha Charles. She was physically challenged, essentially wheelchair-bound, with prosthetic legs that could be used on occasion.

A resident of Vellore, and from an affluent family, she became a teacher at the school. Antonysamy’s daughter Sumeetha recalls how it became a part of her daily routine during vacations and off days to accompany Vasantha Charles to the school. “The classes and the way she handled the children were inspirational to say the least,” she says. Years later, it was common practice for alumni of the school to come to Vellore just to spend some time with their Vasantha Aunty.

students. The response was encouraging and five of these students were brought back as their prosthetics needed changes. From then on, the school remained in touch with all its alumni, which by 1998 numbered 600 or so.

By the 1980s, the Government was taking a keen interest in the rehabilitation of the physically challenged. Foreign aid was forthcoming and the earlier reluctance to accept this was diminishing. Organisations such as WORTH with a good outreach network were brought into the larger scheme of things. The increased interest of the State in the functioning of the school was marked by a visit of Tara

Cherian, former Mayor of Madras and then the State Social Welfare Board Chairman. With greater acceptance of orthopaedically-challenged children in mainstream schools, it was felt that the Transitional School could do better by embarking on an outreach programme rather than bringing children to the campus itself. And this was expanded to include supply of prosthetics and aids to adults with disabilities as well.

With the financial support of the Government of India, 147 disabled persons were met with during 1987, and they were supplied with aids and appliances in cooperation with other



Children at the School for the Orthopaedically Challenged

A Transitional School in Pondicherry

As has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, the WORTH Trust had always aimed to replicate its Katpadi services, at its other centres at Trichy and Pondicherry. It is therefore no surprise that a transitional school on the lines of what was run at Katpadi, was planned in Pondicherry too. That facility was inaugurated in June 1992 by Dr Gudrun Vogel, Consul of Germany at Madras. The buildings and facilities were funded by MISEREOR, Aachen, Germany. Begun with 12 polio children between the ages of five and ten, the school had a strength of 29 children at the close of the year. As an experiment even children 12 years of age were admitted, and whenever possible movement was enabled by strengthening limbs through physiotherapy.

Only when absolutely necessary was surgery resorted to which was performed at the St Joseph's Hospital run by the Sisters of St Cluny. The physiotherapy section was made available to the physiotherapy class of Handicap International, an NGO in Pondicherry. These students had their practical classes twice a week at the Transitional School, under the supervision of their instructors whereas the school's two physiotherapy technicians continued with their work on the other days of the week. This cooperative effort of WORTH and Handicap International helped about 20 polio children during the year to walk with callipers and crutches without undergoing surgery. Sadly for WORTH, the Pondicherry school faced serious staffing problems and could never live up to its promise.

organisations and challenged children in various areas were helped with surgery, fitment of appliances and reintegration. A scheme to reach the disabled children in the surrounding villages for domiciliary rehabilitation was accepted for funding by the Christoffel Blindenmission. Though work began in 1988, it is only a year later that we read that five girls who had passed high school had been recruited from the surrounding villages, trained at the Transitional School on surveying methods for identifying of disabilities and simple physiotherapy, and were placed in the villages. From the rented buildings in the nodal villages, the girls spread out and worked in as many as 77 villages where they identified

children with special requirements and those needing orthopaedic assistance. The first phase was centred around Katpadi and covered 81 villages, and the second phase which began in 1991-1992 was focused on Gudiyattam and covered 94 villages while the third phase which began in 1993-1994 had its headquarters at Paradarami.

Around 400 children with disabilities had by then been identified. But with growing awareness and with Government help and network strengthening, the WORTH Trust decided to withdraw its involvement as it could focus its resources elsewhere. It recorded with satisfaction



The new school building at Katpadi, 1976



A class in progress at the school

therefore, a decision was taken to convert the Katpadi Transitional School into a residential transitional school for children with speech and hearing disabilities. The Pondicherry facility was shut down.

Looking back in 2000, by which time the schools had become transitional for the hearing and speech impaired, WORTH could say with satisfaction that over 600 orthopaedically-challenged children had been rehabilitated through its schools. That year, two students who finished higher education outside, joined BHEL as Purchase Manager and Internal Auditor. It was a huge affirmation of WORTH's good work.

in 1994-95 that the awareness created within the community and the infrastructure that was made available, continued to be utilised by the self-help groups which were by then independently capable of carrying out the preventive and corrective aspects of management of polio.

The 1980s were marked by a serious polio eradication effort launched by the Government in collaboration with Rotary International. Mass immunisation programmes for infants and a determined drive to implement it led to a rapid fall in numbers afflicted, and by the late 1990s, polio was practically off the map. In 1998



Once we accept our limits, we can surpass them.

Albert Einstein

Chapter 10

Expanding Horizons

As noted earlier, in the late 1980s, the chokehold that leprosy had on society, especially in its hotbed, the Arcot region, was gradually loosening. The WORTH Trust had been founded by the Swedish Red Cross with the particular intention of providing rehabilitation and restoration to leprosy patients, but it had all along included within its ambit people with other disabilities. And as we saw in the last chapter, the school run by the Trust had already shown the way—it had moved from orthopaedic challenges to hearing and speech impediments. Nevertheless, and though the reduction in the incidence of leprosy was indeed welcome, the WORTH Trust was met with the challenge of finding a new avenue to continue service.

The WORTH Trust was working hand-in-hand with the Government in multiple areas for the betterment of the physically challenged, as seen in instances before. In 1975, the Government

conducted a wholistic survey of blind, deaf and orthopaedically-challenged persons across the State. The identified persons were given hearing aids, assistive devices and tricycles. Many of them were interviewed and placed in Government departments like transport, printing, etc. Additionally, a training and production facility was opened with WORTH's Katpadi unit as the model. The workers employed in the new unit were trained in the Katpadi and Trichy centres. 180 three-wheelers and 20 wheelchairs were ordered from the fabrication unit in Katpadi and distributed to the needy. A similar operation was carried out in 1983 as well, under the village rehabilitation scheme by the Trust, where nearby villages were scanned for disabled persons and necessary aid was arranged for them.

With several fifteen years of experience, the WORTH Trust was stepping into the eighties with unprecedented growth. "From one unit of six workers and an inexperienced engineer,

International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP)

In 1976, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). It called for a plan of action at the national, regional and international levels, with an emphasis on equal opportunities, rehabilitation and prevention of disabilities.

The theme of IYDP was “full participation and equality”, defined as the right of persons with disabilities to take part fully in the life and development of their societies, enjoy living conditions equal to those of any able-bodied person, and have an equal share in improved conditions resulting from socio-economic development.

Other objectives of the Year included increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of persons with disabilities, and encouraging persons with disabilities to form organisations through which they could express their views and promote action to improve their circumstances.

As part of the activities of the IYDP, the Social Welfare Ministry started a scheme for giving Aids and Appliances to the Physically Handicapped. The WORTH Trust was recognised as one of the distribution agencies for implementing the scheme. “It is gratifying to note that it is an ongoing programme and would not be discontinued after the IYDP,” the Annual Report noted.

*(Top) The physically challenged try out some of WORTH's products,
(Middle) Walkers and (Bottom) A tricycle made by WORTH*



*Wheelchairs and tricycles assembled
at Katpadi*

(the Trust) has now blossomed into six units consisting of a school, training centres, workshops, a farm and a dairy. Today, nearly three hundred challenged people, and over a dozen personnel qualified in accounts, engineering, agriculture, social work, are involved,” records Antonysamy in the Annual Report of 1981.

A village rehabilitation scheme was started in May 1982. The short-term aim was to identify the disabled in a particular area and to help reduce their handicaps, while the long-term aim was to help them become productive members of the community. A survey of Old Katpadi and

Thiruvalluvar Nagar revealed 48 disabled people. Four were given hearing aids. 26 orthopaedically-challenged people were examined, surgery was done on four persons and nine were helped with other aids. It was hoped that during the year 1984, some activity would be started to help them economically. While there is nothing more heard of that objective, the enabling of challenged persons to become useful members of society continued.

As late as in 1996, the Trust was noting that, “The awareness of the community of the needs of persons with disabilities is dismally low. The Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)-sponsored, community awareness programmes, aims at increasing the awareness of community leaders. This project made commendable progress during the year. Working in collaboration with other NGOs and voluntary organisations, a network has been created. The District Collector showed active interest and got the officials involved in this work.” CAPART was formed in 1986 by amalgamating two agencies the Council for Advancement of Rural Technology (CART) and People’s Action for Development India (PADI). It was to work with WORTH for quite a while.

“The technique of our working has two aspects,” noted WORTH as regards its association with CAPART. “They are camps for the disabled and seminars with various groups of people.

Recognition in India and Abroad



Capacity Building Programme for trainees from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia

informal way to rehabilitation centres in India and Sri Lanka. Foreign organisations too have used our services." In October 1986, Antonysamy was invited to West Germany by the German Leprosy Relief Association to help them with the planning of a rehabilitation centre in Visakhapatnam. The Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was interested in working with WORTH to start an engineering rehabilitation centre in Tanzania. Officials from SIDA and Tanzania visited WORTH projects. All of this would result in Antonysamy spending a period in Nairobi, Kenya, where he helped in setting up similar projects.

WORTH also helped MISEREOR and the Catholic Sisters to start rehabilitation services in Bellary. "It would be beneficial if we can strengthen our staff and start regular consultancy services," noted the Annual Report of 1987. "If the funds are available, we can build a training unit in Katpadi, where we can accommodate people, to observe our activities for periods of up to six months and get practical and theoretical training." Nothing much would come out of that idea but over the years international scholars would regularly take the beaten path to Katpadi and

The good work of the WORTH Trust was being recognised nationally and internationally. Antonysamy was invited by the Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh, Haryana, to participate in the Northern Region Leprosy Conference held in Chandigarh on rehabilitation of those afflicted with Hansen's disease. He was also invited by the ILO to present a paper, at the Asian regional training course held at Solo, Indonesia, on management of production and sheltered workshops for the disabled.

In 1987, the WORTH Trust could record with some justifiable pride that with 25 years of experience it could provide both training and consultancy. "As a matter of fact we have been providing this service in an

study what WORTH was doing and take its ideas back to their own country. ILO welcomed a scholar from Malawi for visits to rehabilitation centres in South India. Sometimes they also helped WORTH with, for instance, redesigning the vehicles that it was producing for the physically challenged or for making certain process improvements.

Thus, we read in 1991, of Dwight O Johnson, a Rehabilitation Engineer from the San Francisco State University, California with Mrs Vivian Johnson, working for about 40 days on a new model of wheelchair called the Torbellino 3 at the WORTH Trust Katpadi Workshop and this model soon went into regular production. Miss Carolyn van Hemel an engineering student from the Industrial Design Engineering Department of the Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands spent six months in the WORTH Production Centre, Gandhinagar, Katpadi and developed an appropriate tricycle for challenged Indian children as her overseas project work.



Trainees from Vietnam deputed by ILO/UNESCAP

From the report of 1993-1994, we read that WORTH had been involved in a thirty-month project between the Delft University of Technology, Netherlands and Seeds, Sri Lanka and McKean Rehabilitation Centre, Thailand and had now reached the final phase in the development of a tricycle. The project aimed at designing and developing prototype tricycles appropriate to the individual needs of the disabled in developing countries. We also read of a student from Delft University successfully completing a three-month project on toys for polio-afflicted children.

In the camps we assess the physical disabilities of both adults and children, and try to guide, counsel and assist. In the seminars, groups of up to 50 people, chosen from among balwadi workers, school teachers, panchayat staff, voluntary organisations, community leaders, etc, discuss disability issues. We encourage the participants to express their opinions. These methods have been very successful. Between May 1996 and April 1997, we have conducted 21 camps and 15 seminars. And the evaluation by CAPART, the donor agency was, we understand, very favourable. This activity is an important link in our work, making the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities more effective than before.”

Antonymsamy’s stints abroad also helped WORTH’s management transition. “For years I had been asked to accept assignments abroad by ILO,” says Antonymsamy. “But I steadfastly refused. Finally, I had to give in. I accepted a year-long assignment at Solo, which was the cultural capital of Indonesia. Professor Suharso began a rehabilitation centre there and I was posted to train the trainers. It was a great assignment. WORTH in the meanwhile, was managed by NC Bose Croos, who was Works Manager and now was promoted as Executive Director. He had joined us years earlier from a polytechnic in Gudiyattam from where he brought students over for visits. I had then brought him on board and he played a vital role.

ILO was very happy with what I did at Solo and asked me if I could go to Nairobi. I took the permission of the WORTH Board for the four-year assignment and Bose Croos once again took charge. Here I was the Chief Technical Advisor for a project on Employment of Disabled People involving USD 5 million. At that time this was a project involving the highest volume of funds for any UNDP-ILO project. We had to train the disabled to help them find employment in organisations and more importantly, become self-employed. The project also covered publicity for persons with disabilities.”

A Plastics Division



The plastics unit at Katpadi

In the year 1986, as we saw earlier, WORTH Trust added a plastics injection moulding unit to its retinue of production centres. The Annual Report of that year states that, “During the last few years, sub-contracting work in metal parts has become highly competitive. New entrants with low overheads, have been able to outbid us. So, we have been looking at a more remunerative activity, and industrial plastics was chosen.” N Reguraj, a Trustee at WORTH and MD of NTTF, and Antonymsamy, visited Sweden to finalise the deal with the Swedish Red Cross. Through FIDE, a consulting agency, the Trust was able to locate six second-hand injection moulding machines at good quality. The Swedish Red Cross and SIDA funded the purchase of these machines, including one to make two colour components, ideal for typewriters, telephones and computers. The newly-established plastics unit was ultimately looked at as yet another avenue for the rehabilitation of disabled persons.

The six machines were received at site and were under erection in 1986. EID Parry were the first to place orders, coming forward for requirements of their injection-moulded components. The tools were ordered at NTTF. The parts were made and were accepted by EID Parry.

The manager, staff and the first group of workers soon joined duty. This being a new area, the Trust was dependent on NTTF for technical help and tool room services. This was given by NTTF in good measure. The process planning was done efficiently with the help of Brakes India through their Project Engineer who in the process, taught WORTH Trust a lot more. In conclusion the WORTH Trust Annual Report for 1986 noted that, “The project heralds a bright future, with increased earnings to us, bound all these years to sub-contract work only in light engineering.”

R Karthikeyan now the CEO and MD of WORTH, recalls how he was then in the Murugappa Group and at the instance of MV Subbiah, coordinated a special task force involving WORTH, CIPET and NTTF for indigenising plastic and metallic components. This was an early assignment for him and his first acquaintance with WORTH. A new range of Cascade flushing systems then being imported from Sweden, was successfully indigenised as a consequence, in the mid-eighties.

Further in the 1990s, the Cascade Range of toilet seat covers of Parryware, which were then manufactured at Onyx Marbles factory run by AR Lakshmanan, whom we met earlier, was moved to WORTH Plastics thanks to MV Subbiah and Antonymsamy. This proved a major boost for the operations of the plastics unit.



*With the grace of God, the lame can climb a mountain,
the blind can see all, the deaf can hear
and the dumb can speak.*

Surdas

Chapter 11

Planning for a New Era

By the end of the 1980s all seemed to be going very well for the WORTH Trust. Its good work was being recognised. Applications were full for its various training opportunities as well. As for employment and orders, these were also being received from several organisations in South India. In short, the objectives of founding WORTH seemed to be fulfilled, and it would have seemed reasonable to assume that all could continue the same way for the foreseeable future. But change as they say is the only constant and when it came, it was of so macro a nature that complying with it was the only way out.

It was a shift that the entire country had to go through. India opened its economy in 1992 and began a long process of becoming a liberalised nation. This would pose several challenges and at the same time present exciting opportunities. Not all the organisations that had worked and survived in a protected economy would be able

to make it to the new age. Several new, and unheard-of entities would suddenly come into being and not all of these would survive either. Such a rapid rise and fall was unheard of in the old Indian order. For the first time the country would know what it was to compete against the entire world. Terms such as global recession, quality, certifications, and competitiveness would become commonplace. WORTH Trust too would learn that it needed to take a leap if it had to survive and continue with its good work. And it managed that transformation in the course of a decade.

The eventual success is evident from a note in the Annual Report of 2000-2001 – “The dawn of the year 2000 saw a major shift in rehabilitation services. When we started our operations in the early 60s, our aim was to train as many persons with severe disabilities as possible, especially those who are affected by leprosy and were almost illiterate. We had many

The First Winds of Change

The Trust had already faced its first major business challenges even in the late 1980s. By then, the Maruti wave had swept over the automotive sector and one of the early casualties had been Standard Motors, for long a staunch supporter of the Trust. Becoming vendors to Maruti demanded higher standards of quality, and some of WORTH's customers aiming to achieve that, expected WORTH to shore itself up as well in turn. And as was to be expected, the first wave of liberalisation saw the economy itself in a state of shock, before it propelled itself forward. The Annual Report of 1991-92 reads – “During the year under review, Indian industries were going through a resource crunch. While costs were going up, financial institutions and banks became selective in their lending programmes. The automobile sector was the worst-affected. Consequently, our production centres at Katpadi and Pondicherry, which were mainly manufacturing precision-turned components for the automobile sector were hit badly. Our Tiruchirapalli production centre which manufactures tractor-trailers and oil-crushing machines, sold fewer units consequent to the tighter lending policies of the financial institutions. To keep the workers engaged, the three production centres had to accept jobs at reduced margins of profit. The plastics unit alone fared well as its customers do not belong to the automobile sector.”



Computer Numeric Control (CNC) machines make their appearance at WORTH

imported precision machines, which gave a great technological advantage. Employing persons with severe disabilities, we could make high precision components and serve the sophisticated original equipment manufacturers. Now the manufacturers of original equipment want components made to closer tolerances, which our 30-year-old machines and aged workers are not able to produce. The introduction of special lathes in Paranur and the first CNC machine in Tiruchirappalli remedies this situation. A technological advantage, which we had, and lost, is being regained and thus heralds the dawn of the introduction of new technology in our units.”

This chapter looks at how this transformation occurred, enabling WORTH to remain relevant in a new world.



Some of the trustees in the 1990s. (Standing Left to Right) Col K Radhakrishnan, LM Menezes, Antonysamy, S Krishnan, N Reguraj and Dr Suranjan Bhattacharji. (Seated Left to Right) KR N Menon, MV Subbiah, S Viji and Sriram Panchu

There was also a realisation within, that the machinery itself was getting old and in need of an overhaul. The Annual Report of 1991-92 noted that, “The machines in the Katpadi workshop are old and have to be replaced. Additional machining facilities such as centreless grinding have to be created. New areas of specialisation which provide employment for the severely disabled would have to be considered. A training centre for trainers and classrooms would have to be built at Katpadi. A workshop shed and a hostel for the ITI boys have to be constructed at Pondicherry.” Clearly, there was a lot of work to be done. Fortunately, help was at hand.

S Viji, Managing Director of Brakes India joined the WORTH Board early and remained a pillar of support, becoming Chairman in 2004 on the retirement of MV Subbiah. He speaks of his association – “It was shortly after I returned from the University of Michigan and joined Lucas TVS in 1972-73 that I was invited by Mr MV Subbiah whom I knew very well, to become a member of the WORTH Board. I can still recall the first meeting at Hotel Ashoka where Antonysamy, KV Srinivasan, MR Pratap, KR N Menon, Mr Subbiah and others were present. I was very impressed with the Trust's model of managing through surpluses generated via



R Ramanujam of Brakes India inaugurates a facility

In the 1990s, with focus on quality becoming sharper than ever, Brakes India stepped up its assistance. “We were getting into concepts such as ISO, and then TPM, TQM, etc,” says Viji. “And we were keen that WORTH too followed suit. This was when TL Sankaranarayanan, who was our General Manager, volunteered to help. He played a very important role at WORTH, spending days on end. It continued after his retirement from Brakes and he did it pro bono.



L Lakshman (extreme left) and L Ganesh (middle) of the Rane Group with Antonysamy

The alliance between Brakes India and the WORTH Trust would be long standing. R Ramanujam, the then Managing Director of Brakes India, came to know of WORTH Trust and its activities through Viji. He was concerned about some machines in Brakes India because they caused excessive noise and wanted to discard them. He received a suggestion from one of his colleagues to ship those to WORTH Trust, because they were perfect for utilisation by the hearing impaired. Legal options were analysed to somehow pass the machines to WORTH Trust free of cost, and shipping costs were written off too. Antonysamy recalls working through the loads of paper to make this possible. In his perspective, great quality machinery was received for free. Employees of Brakes India were sent to train those at WORTH Trust. Under the guidance and supervision of Antonysamy, WORTH Trust proved itself splendidly efficient. Ramanujam was impressed and commissioned WORTH Trust to make parts for Brakes India.



TL Sankaranarayanan who brought in systems

WORTH absorbed his travel costs, and we helped with some incidentals. He and Antonysamy got on very well and worked wonders. After Sankaranarayanan grew old by 2012, it was V Raman, Sr General Manager, Maintenance, who stepped in. And when Brakes India got into training and began a centre for this in Porur, it was so successful I was keen that the same benefits flowed to WORTH as well. Rajkumar was the Principal of the school and I sent him to train the trainers at Katpadi Training Centre.”

Viji also recalls that while Brakes India assisted at Katpadi, it was the Rane Group that helped with the Trichy unit in a big way. “Mr L Lakshman of Rane took keen interest on the practical side. And Rane having a presence in Viralmalai meant resources were made available to WORTH. And in this way, both major centres progressed.” Viji also gives much credit to Reguraj of NTTF for the way that organisation helped in getting tools ready for meeting new-age requirements.

The People Initiative

The transformation of machinery and layout was coeval with the Trust paying a lot of attention to human resource development. The Trust realised that this was a sensitive issue, and a warning internal note states that “streamlining of administration is expected to bring some heartburn but after adjustment will lead to much smoother functioning”. Operations began to be computerised in all the units and training of personnel began so that they could handle the new management information systems.

At Katpadi in particular, the issue of an ageing workforce had to be addressed. A voluntary retirement scheme was introduced. The strength of the workers began to come down and the remaining were retrained on new products. One of the major activities for retraining was in plastics. The staff underwent different training programmes, such as constructive discipline, legal aspects of discipline, supervisor development programme, electrical and electronic control, maintenance engineering, Japanese concept of housekeeping, operating and programming CNC machines, etc.

manufacture.” Viji would in 1975 move to Brakes India and that was when his real association with WORTH in terms of its production aspects began. “Initially, when Brakes India was confined to Padi, I did not have much of an opportunity to visit WORTH but when we began our Sholinghur unit I travelled frequently and included WORTH in my itinerary. I felt a lot could be done by way of shoring up their quality aspects and for this we sent our senior executives to guide and assist.”

One of the interesting asides apart from the quality push was the addition of another enduring friendship, with S Raghavan, formerly of the auction house of Murray & Co. It was part of the new standards that WORTH accounted for its scrap generation by weight. The production

centres found it tough to comply with initially. And Viji and Sankaranarayanan asked Raghavan to intervene.

Raghavan, then Senior Partner at Murray & Co, specialised among other things in sale and disposal of scrap and waste material generated by companies during manufacturing. These byproducts served as highly valuable raw materials for other companies. “I was aware of WORTH Trust’s existence even in the 1980s,” he says. “The model of generating income through running of the factory to support rehabilitation activities by the WORTH Trust impressed me. But it was only in the 1990s when Brakes India mandated to WORTH Trust that even scrap from the raw material provided by them had to be accounted for and returned, that I came into



Production Centre at Trichy



The Plastics Production Centre at Katpadi

direct contact with the organisation. In a lighter vein you can even say I was sent as part and parcel of raw materials by Brakes India!”

WORTH Trust found it quite hard initially to deal with this directive from Brakes India. Raghavan helped them set up an in-house unit to sort through the scrap and byproducts. Post retirement, Raghavan continues to help WORTH Trust to this day. He supports and manages the centralised scrap disposal at Katpadi, by visiting every year.

Beginning with 1992-93, efforts also began in phasing out old machines and bringing in advanced equipment. The Annual Report reads – “A majority of the machines are now aged and so reconditioning work in a phased manner is being undertaken and preventive maintenance has been stepped up. However, with the current market requirement of high-quality components, induction of modern production machines has become an accepted necessity.” In 1995-96, we read that, “At considerable cost but with the long-term benefits in view, all plant and equipment in Katpadi, Pondicherry, Paranur and Trichy would be reconditioned to original levels of accuracy.”

By 1999, a new building had to be made to accommodate a giant 550-ton injection moulding machine which was essential for the production of toilet seat covers for EID Parry. We read elsewhere that progress had been made for other plastic products for which orders had been placed



The Hindu reports of the progress at WORTH in the year 2000

by Brakes India. Almost simultaneously, the Trichy unit moved to a new location, thanks to a generous grant from MISEREOR. The first CNC machine was in place there shortly thereafter, with orders from Rane TRW coming in to keep it occupied. On housekeeping, the Annual Report

of 2000 notes that with improved housekeeping all the units were presenting a brighter atmosphere. Much of these rather tough initiatives were at the hands of Col K Radhakrishnan, who had succeeded NC Bose Croos in the mid-1990s. In 2005, he would succeed Antonysamy as Managing Director of WORTH.

In 1998, the Trust achieved a major milestone. On November 4, WORTH Plastics was awarded the ISO 9002 certificate by QAS, Australia, one of the international organisations engaged in accreditation of companies. The certificate was given to Antonysamy, by MJ Reddy, President, NTTF India Ltd, at a function. Mr Reddy gave away prizes on behalf of WORTH Plastics to 33 workers and nine staff members of the company. *The Hindu*, in an article dated September 24, 2000, noted that WORTH Plastics was the first manufacturing facility run by disabled people in the whole of Asia to have achieved this distinction.



*A bend in the road is not the end of the road.
Unless you fail to make the turn.*
Helen Keller

Chapter 12

Working with the Visually Challenged



P Gnanadurai Michael, formerly of Christoffel Blindenmission, Germany

An interesting shift in the history of the WORTH Trust occurred when the organisation was approved for assembling Perkins brailers in 1995.

This assistive device, vital for the visually challenged, was developed by David Abraham using reliable metal components at the Perkins School for the Blind, Boston, to facilitate easy writing of braille. This model designed in 1951 has come to be known as the standard brailer, to distinguish it from the further iterations and innovations of the same device.

Prior to 1995, the brailers were manufactured entirely in-house at Perkins, in the United States. But around this time, P Gnanadurai Michael who was the Christoffel Blindenmission/Christian Blind Mission (CBM) representative for India and South-East Asia had met the other representatives of CBM at their international conference and had convinced them that WORTH Trust in India was quite capable of assembling and even manufacturing the brailers. CBM then approached Perkins to outsource their assembly operations to countries like Brazil, South Africa and India, in view of empowering the marginalised communities. Perkins was convinced with this proposal and started setting up their production facilities in the countries mentioned above.

When it came to India, CBM was already aware of the rehabilitation work done by the WORTH Trust. However, at that stage, it was merely one of

Becoming the Best Brailier Production Centre



Peter Avery and Dennis Levesque of Perkins visit Katpadi

A brailier unit was quickly established in Katpadi. Components and sub-assemblies were received from Perkins and the operation commenced immediately. In order to provide training for the workers at Katpadi, two representatives of Perkins, Peter Avery and Dennis Levesque arrived here in March 1996 and demonstrated the technique of assembly and also the testing procedures. The machines made initially were sent to CBM, Germany, and it was found that besides some negligible corrections, the devices were good for immediate usage. The Katpadi campus was also recognised as an export zone for receiving national and international orders for the brailiers. Each year, the WORTH Trust sent batches of employees to Boston for workshops and advanced training.

Among the various assembly plants that Perkins set up, there was considerable competition between the one in Cape Town, South Africa and the WORTH Trust, as to whose brailiers were superior in quality. Even at Perkins, there were two factions comprising supporters of Katpadi and Cape Town. The employees of the WORTH Trust took this up as a challenge and were determined to establish the supremacy of the brailiers assembled by them.

To settle things once and for all, Leon Murphy at Perkins was appointed to examine the devices made at Vellore and Cape Town. He was presented with two brailiers, without being informed as to which machine was produced where. Upon thorough investigation, the WORTH Trust brailiers emerged superior. The workers at the brailier unit in Katpadi quickly learnt to fix the errors in their operation and through the years, over multiple visits to Perkins, they learnt not just the assembly process, but also every minute detail of the parts, the machines used in the process and troubleshooting mechanisms.

the forerunners among multiple production units that were lined up for the brailier deal. John Gleason and Sarah McPhillips from Perkins visited WORTH's Katpadi centre, and seeing the community service that the organisation was into was very much in line with the values of Perkins, they made up their mind that the brailier project would be entrusted to the WORTH Trust. Their visit to Katpadi was followed by a visit to Madras



Visalatchi monitors the quality process at the Brailier Assembly Unit

WORKING WITH THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED

to meet MV Subbiah, the then Chairman of the Trust and sign the approval for the project.

Earlier the brailiers were assembled one machine at a time by each employee. Now, they follow line-assembly methodology, where each person focuses on one step of operation before passing the device to the next person for further assembly. To establish accountability, each machine is accompanied with a test sheet containing its unique serial number. At every level of the assembly process, the workers calibrate their work with this checklist and it becomes easy to trace exactly what needs to be fixed and at which level, in case of a faulty device. Since the end user is visually-challenged, three visually-challenged workers test each device. R Visalatchi, who is visually impaired, is the head of this quality operation and it is her meticulous examination that each brailier has to go through before being certified ready for shipping.

As time passed, the Perkins brailier assembly units set up in England, Brazil and South Africa shut down business, owing to various technical and logistical issues. Today, the WORTH Trust stands as the only centre which still continues to do the assembly for Perkins brailiers. In other words, every new brailier that is being purchased today, across the world, has been made at the WORTH Trust. And by extension, each of these brailiers have been personally inspected



N Krishnaswamy, Retd IPS

and approved by R Visalatchi, which is quite formidable in its own right. In all, Visalatchi has inspected around 150,000 brailers over three decades and she has been doing this, travelling 40 km one way each day to reach her place of work!

There are a few key factors that have resulted in this continued performance and endurance, and the ultimate superiority of the WORTH Trust over the other Perkins braille assembly units. The other plants predominantly employed able-bodied individuals. Whereas at WORTH,

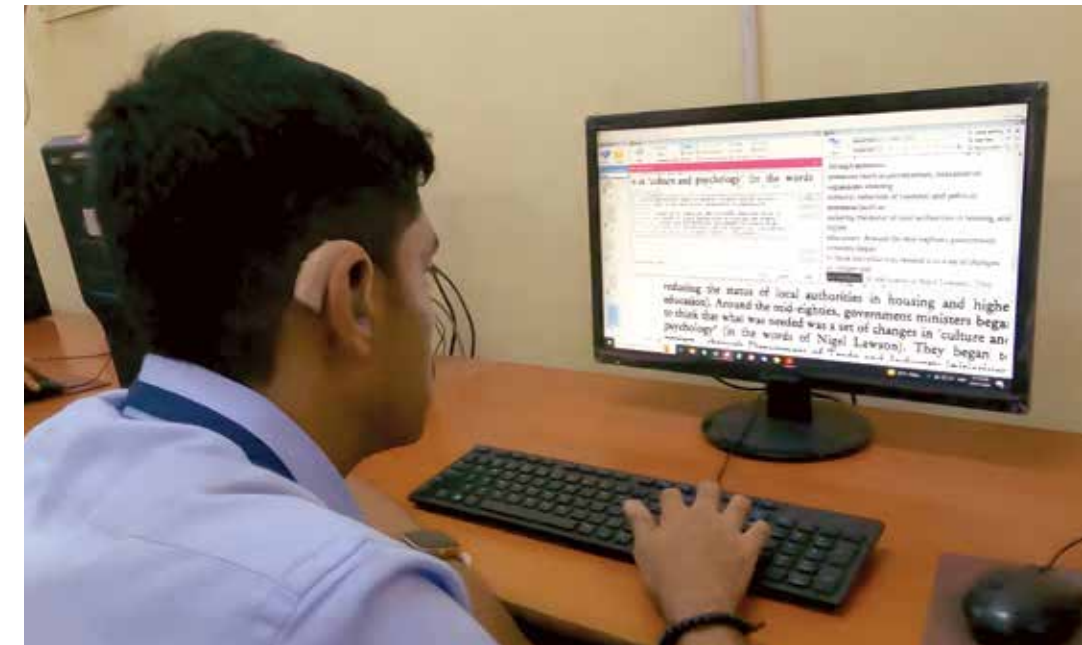
most people who work in the braille unit are speech-and-hearing impaired. This rehabilitation activity itself is the secret for the longevity of the plant, as the assembly procedure is immensely noise-inducing, and it doesn't deter the hearing-impaired worker, therefore not influencing productivity. Another reason is that they possess deep understanding of the manufacturing process.

In recent years, a portion of the mobility unit manufacturing the assistive devices for the visually challenged, and a portion of the plastics unit which manufactures the components of the Universal Braille Kit (UBK) have been integrated into the braille unit at Katpadi. This is with the intention to bring all the units working for the visually challenged together under one roof, and because they all cater to the same clientele.

WORTH Digitisation

The collaboration with Vidya Vrikshah (see page 111) led to the Bookshare Project. Viji Dilip is a resident of the United States. When Krishnaswamy of Vidya Vrikshah visited America, Viji Dilip was one of the people who met him and was left with a profound impact. This led her to found the Vidya Vrikshah, USA, in 2007, with the intention to make available in India the facilities that were already available for the visually-challenged community in US.

Around this time, Krishnaswamy was working with the WORTH Trust to establish a digitisation



The Digitisation Unit

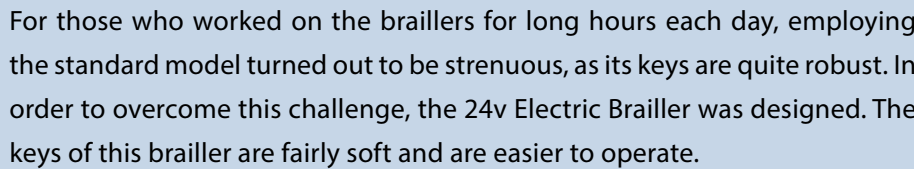
facility in the latter's Chennai (the city had changed its name in 1996) unit. He had the idea to take books that were already available in the public domain, scan them into soft copies, so that these books could be accessed by the visually challenged using the text-to-speech function. The WORTH Trust's Chennai centre kept shifting, not just its offices, but also its services. Though originally established in a Rotary building in Tondiarpet as a Technical Training Centre, it slowly evolved into a tailoring and short-hand training centre for the orthopaedically challenged. In 2007, the centre shifted to KK Nagar, to premises then operating as a computer training centre.

The WORTH Trust was pleased with Krishnaswamy's proposal to convert this centre as a digitisation unit. Krishnaswamy encouraged Viji Dilip to lead the project. Vidya Vrikshah set up scanners at WORTH and also trained the workers on how to digitise the books.

Thus, the digitisation centre came into fruition and started operation immediately. Viji Dilip admits to being apprehensive in the initial days, since English is not the first language for the workers here, and most books set out for digitisation, if not all, were in English. But the WORTH Trust delivered, and misgivings were dispelled. The stakeholders were happy too, since they were able to accomplish the task for a

A wooden banner with a light-colored wood grain, supported by two vertical wooden posts with rounded finials. The banner features the Indian national flag on the left and the United States flag on the right. In the center, there is a logo consisting of two interlocking circles. Below the flags, the text 'WORTH INDIA' is on the left and 'PERKINS USA' is on the right, both in bold, dark blue capital letters. Between them, the phrase 'in collaboration with' is written in a smaller, red, cursive script. The banner is displayed against a plain, light-colored wall and rests on a dark red, textured surface.

The original model of the braille was developed in the year 1951, by David Abraham. He was the wood-working teacher at the Perkins School for the Blind, Boston, the institution which prides itself on being Helen Kellers alma mater. Abraham was not happy with the material used for making the brailers, and was looking for inexpensive but sturdy material to make a new model, that promised longevity of the device, but also facilitated easy braille writing. The Standard Brailier (the Levi's 501 of Brailiers, if you may) was born out of this need for innovation. Seventy years after its creation, and multiple iterations and new models later, this standard brailier is still the one that is most coveted by the customers, for its reliability, endurance and classic attributes.



In 2001, a novel model was designed for the users with sight and hearing impairments. Featuring both regular letters and braille keys on the keyboard, the Tell-a-Touch makes communication much easier between a disabled and an able-bodied person.

The Smart Brailler was developed in 2012. This device also has an in-built speaker, which reads out loud what's being typed in it. The device offers 12 international languages to choose from—including English (British and American), German, French, etc, for the speaker function.

VidyaVrikshah is a Chennai-based non-profit Trust founded by N Krishnaswamy IPS (Retd), former IG of Police, Tamil Nadu. Krishnaswamy was himself the father of a child with multiple disabilities who unfortunately didn't survive. Post his retirement, Krishnaswamy worked ceaselessly for the betterment of the visually-disabled community through his Foundation. He was well aware of the WORTH Trust and its activities.

To perform advanced mathematical lessons like arithmetic and algebraic calculations, the Taylor Frame with Types is provided as a part of the kit. Initially, this is a complicated device to learn. But once mastered, the calculations can be done as quickly as any able-bodied individual.



Project Daisy - Enabling devices for the visually challenged



WORKING WITH THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED

fraction of the cost it would have taken for them to do the same in the US.

Over time, the clause that allowed free sharing of textual material for print for the disabled was added to the Copyright Law, 2012. The Marrakesh Agreement, that promoted sharing of books across borders for the benefit of the visually challenged, was also adopted by India in 2014. This opened the possibility for a deluge of books to be brought in to the WORTH Trust and be digitised. Bookshare became the official collaborator and the digital platform which would house all the digitised books. In the early days of operation, Viji, whenever she visited India, would carry bags full of books that were to be worked on at WORTH. Now, the transmission is much simpler, given that they all arrive in PDF formats, and get converted to Epub.

A wide range of books, from academic textbooks for schools and colleges to material for preparation for competitive exams to fiction and biographies, are worked on in the centre. Seeing the standard of work here, many advanced books, such as higher-level physics and mathematics, involving complex symbols and equations, are now being commissioned for digitisation by Bookshare. As a part of a recent undertaking, books in French, Spanish, German and Latin are also being processed and worked on by the employees of the Chennai centre, which currently operates from Selaiyur.

Now, image description is also provided in the digitised books. IIT Madras has made the text-to-speech option a possibility in Tamil as well. All these advancements definitely have the potential to replace braille education. Despite the progress in the digital space, braille literacy is still important, because if the visually challenged students do not use braille to learn, how can they possibly differentiate subtle differences, for instance, between 'blue' and 'blew', based on the context? This realisation has led to a resurgence in braille literacy in the US. Additionally, one cannot overstate the significance of tactility in learning for the visually challenged. That's why braille and 3D printing and objects like the Universal Braille Kit remain undefeated to this day.

Another breakthrough for this unit was working on a project in 2017. Project Daisy focused on enabling visually-challenged students of higher secondary classes in special and inclusive schools to access textbooks in DAISY format through mobile devices. WORTH digitisation with the financial support of Cognizant Foundation, Chennai, and technical support of Bookshare, USA, digitised various textbooks and uploaded them on mobile phones for easy access for visually-impaired students in various Government and inclusive education schools. This was a pioneering effort which was followed suit by various other organisations and the Government.



*We all have weaknesses or disabilities that undermine
our belief and confidence in our abilities.
Embrace them as opportunities to grow.*

Aimee Mullins
Single-armed American surfer and writer

Chapter 13

Widening the Scope



At the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired

The WORTH Trust had been in rehabilitation and service to the disabled community for four decades by the early 2000s. It had a fantastic track record of service for the leprosy-affected, polio-affected and the speech and hearing impaired. This by itself was a journey of change, even though the Trust had from inception included orthopaedically and speech/hearing impaired people apart from those who had suffered from leprosy.

Offering a new life to leprosy victims was however, the Trust's primary objective but by the late 1980s, the number of those afflicted and needing rehabilitation was coming down. The Trust then moved on to polio and by the late 1990s, this too was on the wane, thanks to mass immunisation. It was time to widen the spectrum and bring the intellectually-challenged community too into the organisation's scope. By then awareness was building about intellectual disability being a bigger challenge than physical,



(Above and Below) At the Day Activity Centre for Intellectually Challenged



because of the lack of cognitive and intellectual abilities in the former.

If society's treatment of the physically challenged was over the centuries tragic, then its neglect of the intellectually-challenged community was far worse. Early medical interventions on children with intellectual disorders were practically non-existent, even in urban areas, making it quite inaccessible in rural areas. The awareness of the condition of the intellectually-unstable individual among their family, immediate surroundings and society was, and unfortunately continues to be apathetic.

Against this very social backdrop the Day Activity Centre (DAC) was founded in 2007 in Katpadi by the WORTH Trust in order to treat, train and care for intellectually-challenged children. The Centre caters to children, with multiple disabilities such as intellectual challenges, cerebral palsy, Down's Syndrome, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Hydrocephalus and more, and includes a wide age category ranging between three months to 25 years. The first batch of the centre contained ten adolescent boys who benefitted from the training here. In a matter of quick progression, the Centre began receiving an increasing number of applications, and even as early as 2011, the Centre had 100 children under its wing.

The DAC is equipped with a complete set-up of professionals—full-time special educators, physio-therapists, speech therapists, vocational instructors and craft teachers, who train the children in an extensive array of avenues. Primarily, an enormous amount of emphasis is laid upon



(Above Left) Snoozelen and
(Right) The Soft Play Room



Daily Living Skills (DLS), such as brushing, bathing, etc. Self-reliance is promoted as an invaluable skill that needs to be cultivated as early as possible.

The children are made to memorise essential details such as their names, the names of their parents, their phone numbers and residential addresses. Later, with the guidance of a speech therapist, the children learn sounds, sequences, rhymes, etc. This is followed by the learning of numbers and so on.

Once they reach an adequate understanding of maths, and necessary intellectual capacity, they are taught to deal with money. Occasionally,

a marketplace is also simulated within the campus premises where the children practise purchasing with the money given to them, a practical and effective application of calculation, and a great tool to enhance cognition. They are also encouraged to try this out at a store in their neighbourhood.

Based on the age, category and the level of intellectual challenges, each child is provided with a curriculum that is tailor-made for them. In addition to these trainings, the centre has specially designed therapeutic areas like Sensory Integration, Soft Play and a Snoezelen White Room which relax the child and help reduce hyper activity, whenever necessary. Children

Training the Parent



One of the key mandates that the WORTH Trust puts forward is the active participation of one of the parents or a caretaker along with the children through the day at the Centre. This move is almost revolutionary by itself. The motive behind this is quite simple. First of all, the parents need to be taught how to raise an intellectually-challenged child. It is also important to ensure that the lessons learnt at the centre are followed by the children at their homes too. In the case of these children, the parents' participation makes or breaks their progress.

But again, there are challenges in this methodology too, as it could be strenuous to

keep up by the parents of the intellectually-challenged children. Firstly, it is most often the mothers who accompany the children in this process. Some of these mothers would have had to quit their jobs in order to be present alongside the children each day. In most cases, they also have other children at home to look after. They have to be willing to face the financial and emotional struggles that arise in such conditions. Some parents do find it hard, self-admittedly. But they also immediately reveal that ultimately none of their struggles matter, as seeing their children's progress has only strengthened their belief in DAC's ideology and methods.

Also, when the parents take part in the programme alongside the children, instead of just dropping them off at school and picking them up later, they learn how their children behave, how to effectively convey various details to them, how to apply what is learnt at the school later in the world outside, etc. To put it simply, this methodology helps the parents become closer to the children and be a part of their worlds.

Raising an intellectually-challenged child can be a deeply isolating journey, as it is a highly specific experience that not many can relate to. By showing up with their children every day at the activity centre, what these parents have cultivated, as a byproduct of being present for the children, is a profound sense of genuine community.



Scenes from the Day Activity Centre



Early Intervention Centre (EIC)



(Above Left) Early Intervention Centre for the Hearing Impaired and (Right) Early Intervention Centre for Autism Spectrum Disorder

In 2008, the Early Intervention Centre (EIC) for children under the age of six with hearing impairment was established. The centre facilitated early assessment and intervention, which enabled children with hearing impairments to be integrated into mainstream schools at the earliest. Early detection was vital for gaining speech and if the crucial age was passed by, it was very difficult for these children to be a part of normal life. Then they would have to rely on education based on lip reading or sign language. Each child was given personalised care and training followed by activities in which they were involved as a group. Besides, the mothers were also taught to train the child at home incorporating what was taught at the Centre. The children were also trained to dance, to take part in sports, and fancy dress competitions. After a period of training, the children were sufficiently well-versed in verbal and auditory skills. Subsequently, they joined regular school at the age of 5 or 6 in Class 1, to attain successful integrated education. WORTH's special educators were sent for training to Bala Vidyalaya in Chennai. It was the pioneering institute of early intervention centres for infants with hearing impairment. In 2012, the EIC was begun in Tirupattur and post trifurcation

of Vellore district into three viz., Vellore, Ranipet and Tirupattur in 2019, on request from the district administration of Ranipet, a new EIC for hearing-impaired children was commissioned in Wallajah near Ranipet in 2022. Along with this came the challenges of handling three District Collectors and district administrations, which the team has been managing admirably well.

In 2018, the EIC for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was started by WORTH Trust with sponsorship from the Tamil Nadu State Commissionerate for the Welfare of the Differently-Abled, Chennai. ASD usually sets in very early in a child's life, and if left without necessary medical, psychological and pathological interventions, can affect the overall cognitive, physical, emotional and social welfare of the child through its life.

In cases where the intellectual challenge of the child due to complications in labour and delivery is detected right at the time of birth, or at very early stages of its life, following the recommendation of the physician, parents admit such children at WORTH's EIC. Parents of many such children are directed to the WORTH Trust by doctors at CMC, Vellore and their psychiatric facility in Bagayam.



The Arts & Craft Centre

These children undergo various behavioural, educational and family/group therapies, which are instrumental in regulating the symptoms and enhance their cognitive development. They are trained by special educators and speech and language pathologists, who are well-sensitised in ASD. These children are later integrated into the Day Activity Centre (DAC) at the WORTH Trust, Katpadi, for further training and treatment.

Some of the children who were admitted to DAC continued to stay well beyond their adolescence and it turned out to be a challenge to keep them as adults. Hence, a new production unit named WACC (WORTH Arts and Crafts Centre) was commissioned during 2022-23, as an extension of the DAC, where boys and girls in their early 20s are imparted structured training in livelihood skills like weaving door mats, making stationery items like files, notebooks, envelopes, etc. This is aimed to provide employment opportunities for these young adults over a period of time to make them self-reliant and resourceful with a sense of pride and self-worth. This unit is in its evolutionary stage and the WORTH Trust is constantly looking for opportunities for new products and merchandising.



Products of the Centre



(Above Top) A class as per the National Institute for Open Schooling Guidelines and (Above) Rajul Padmanaban guiding holistic Development Assessment

with cerebral palsy are treated regularly by physiotherapists. Older children are also taught yoga. Under the guidance of a craft teacher, they learn to make candles, weave baskets and other such products, through which they earn some income.

Many of the children at the DAC have exhibited great talent in arts as well. They regularly enrol in competitions and win prizes in District, State and even National levels for drawing, music, sports and speech.

In recent times the DAC has been restructured under the able guidance of Rajul Padmanaban, former Director of Vidya Sagar, Chennai and former Trustee of WORTH. She has guided the team with the introduction of an Assessment Format which helps in holistic development of an intellectually-challenged child. She trained the staff on assessment and goal setting for each child and this enabled WORTH DAC to bifurcate into two streams— Vocational and Curricular.

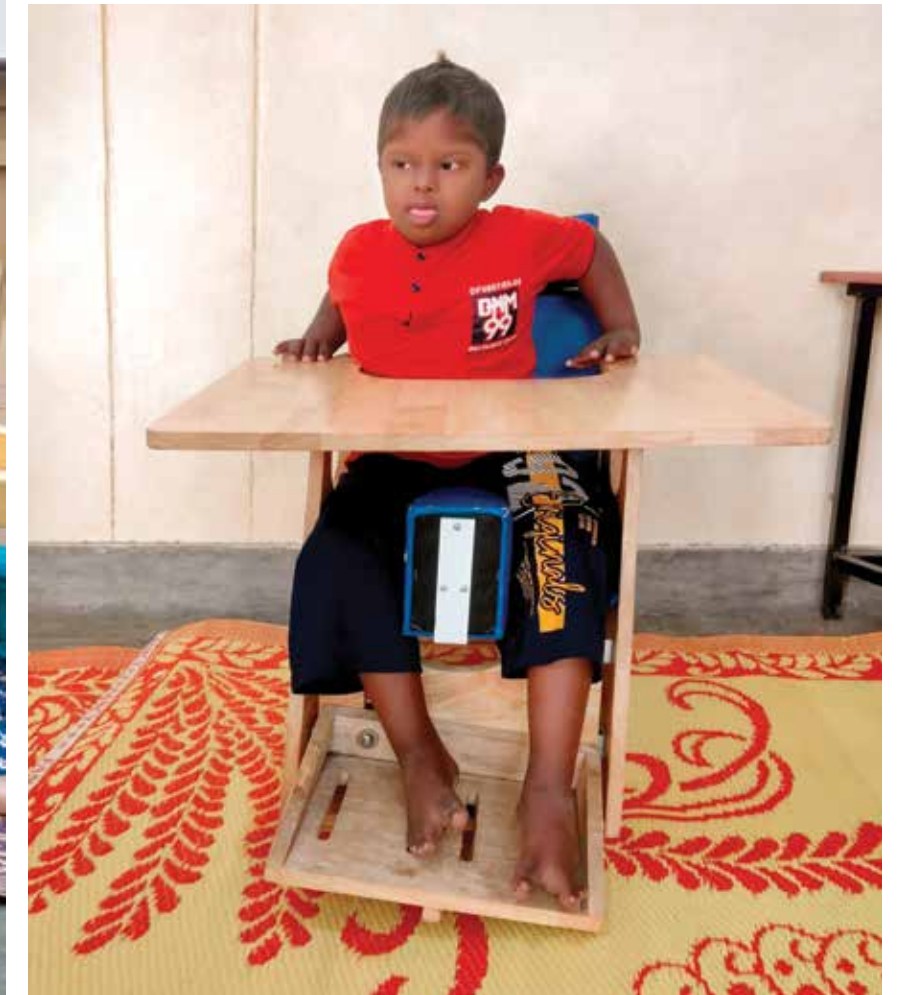
Based on the assessment, few of the select students were recently enrolled for NIOS (National Institute for Open Schooling) for the very first time.

Among various trainings and teachings carried out at DAC, arguably the most important coaching that the children receive is sex education. While it's important to impart it to all children, its indispensability cannot be understated for intellectually-challenged children, who are more vulnerable to instances of sexual abuse. So even in the primary levels, they are taught about good touch and bad touch, with more complex phenomena taught as their intellectual capacity grows.

Protecting themselves from others is one thing. But handling one's own feelings, particularly around the onset of puberty, for instance,



Scenes from the Day Activity Centre for the Intellectually Challenged



is a whole different world altogether. Therefore, it is important that the sex education designed for these children is holistic. Sometimes, when there is a need for additional counselling, the child is referred to the psychiatric hospital at Bagayam.

Although the DAC has been functioning for many years, with a staunch focus on the children's

self-reliance, there are only a handful of students who have found employment. An alumna from the school is now working as a ward boy in CMC. Yet another alumna is working in a department store, and is appreciated for his sincerity and trustworthiness by his employer. Few more of them have landed other decent jobs



(Clockwise from Top Left) Technical Training Centres at Trichy, Pondicherry and Katpadi



too. But these instances are only few and far between. The ideal jobs for intellectually-challenged individuals are in such market places and department stores, according to the people working at the WORTH Trust. They advise the parents to set up a small bodega of sorts, so that the children can work and take care of their own livelihood, even after the time of the parents.

For all the impactful training provided to the intellectually challenged individuals here, and for all the progress they display over time, the bigger question still remains: has the society's attitudes towards the intellectually-challenged evolved?

In the midst of all these new areas, WORTH has continued with its Technical Training Centres (TTC), at Katpadi, Trichy and Pondicherry, apart from the new one at Gummidipoondi. The Trust conducts Industrial Training Institute courses approved by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) New Delhi, exclusively for the differently-abled. The Katpadi ITI trains people in turner and machinist trades, the Trichy ITI, in turner and welder trades and the Pondicherry ITI in the turner trade. The Trust secures placements for its students every year either within its units or outside, in organisations of repute.

Horticulture as an Opportunity



(Here and Opposite) Initiatives of Green Champions

WORTH Trust has plenty of unutilised spaces around its campus which it identified as ideal to be transformed into green belts. In order to utilise these resources and inculcate awareness among the employees and children, an initiative was launched in the immediate aftermath of the COVID pandemic and this later came to be called Green Champions. This created positive energy in the various locations and also promoted healthy competition among them when it came to maintaining their gardens. This has enthused everyone into adding to the green belts around their respective units. In addition, the DAC has involved the special children, especially those that are autistic and mildly intellectually challenged, in horticulture. Senior employees of the agricultural unit have helped in providing the necessary training.

When WORTH began its Gummidipoondi Centre, of which more in a later chapter, it was faced with the need to begin a course in addition to machinist and turner. The horticulture initiative came in handy for this. This was also when it came to light that the intellectually challenged could be trained in this area. Admissions to the horticulture course were thus thrown open to this category. The Centre was soon overwhelmed by the demand. This may well become an avenue for employment and income generation in the future.



*Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame
may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

Hebrews 12:13

Chapter 14

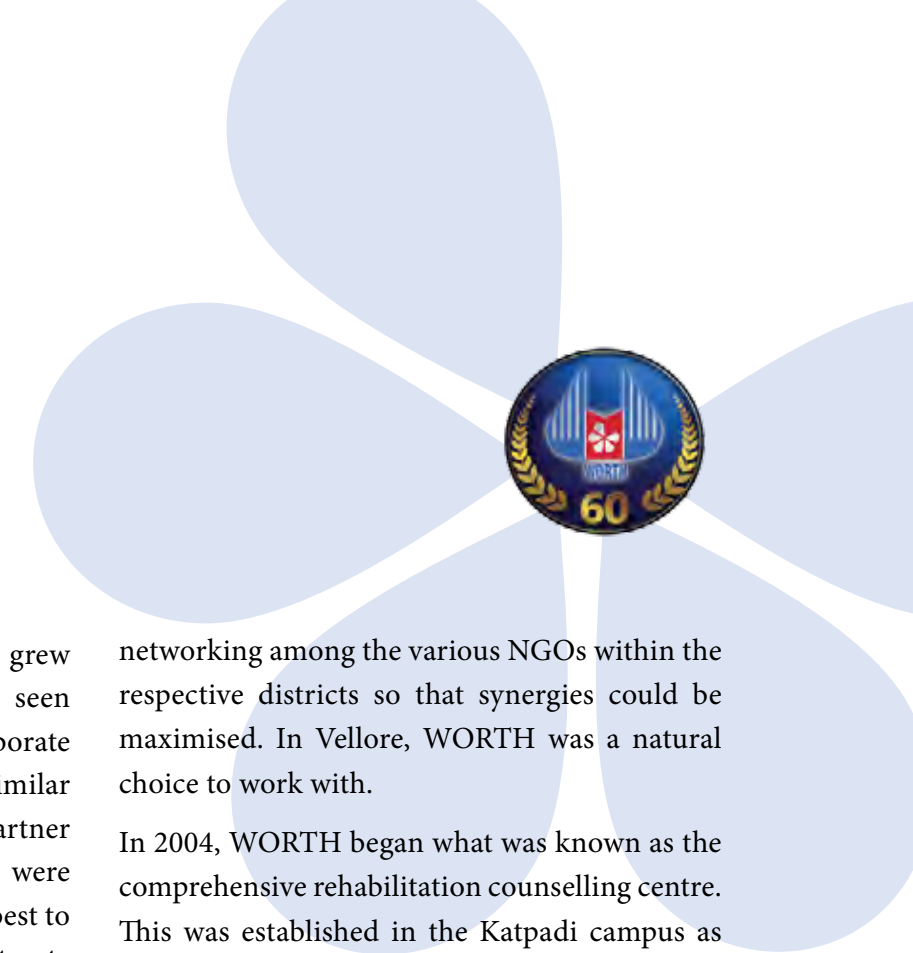
The Golden Jubilee and a Retrospective

As WORTH Trust stabilised and grew over the decades, it came to be seen as a dependable partner to collaborate with by other organisations involved in similar activities. The State itself came to partner repeatedly with WORTH. Perceptions were changing amongst the authorities on how best to deal with the differently-abled. The Directorate for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled was established by bifurcating the Directorate of Social Welfare in 1992 to deal exclusively with the welfare of the disabled. Subsequently, the Directorate was upgraded as the office of the State Commissioner for the Disabled in 1999, as per the provisions in the Persons With Disability Act, 1995. A District Rehabilitation Network was created, wherein the Government, through a State Commissionerate for the Welfare of the Differently-Abled, set up District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRC), each with an officer in charge. These were tasked with

networking among the various NGOs within the respective districts so that synergies could be maximised. In Vellore, WORTH was a natural choice to work with.

In 2004, WORTH began what was known as the comprehensive rehabilitation counselling centre. This was established in the Katpadi campus as part of the activities of the district rehabilitation network in collaboration with the Government of Tamil Nadu. It provides assistance, referral service and counselling to persons with disabilities and their family members.

The Government of India under a scheme, encouraged NGOs to take over the DDRCs and to run them. Vellore District was one of those selected in the State of Tamil Nadu for this. The State Disability Commissioner, Mohan Verghese Chunkath, IAS, recommended that WORTH be handed over the responsibility of running the DDRC at Tirupattur. The Vellore



From	To
Thiru Mohan Verghese Chunkath, I.A.S., Special Commissioner for the Disabled, 15/1, Model School Road, Thousand Light, Chennai-600 006.	The Managing Director, Worth Trust, Katpadi, Vellore District.
Roc.No.1100/RD 2-1/2004, dated.19.4.2005.	
Sir,	
Sub	Office of the Special Commissioner for the Disabled, Chennai-6 – DDRC Vellore – handing over to Worth Trust –information sent – Regarding.
Ref	Your letter dated.24.3.2005.
I invite your kind attention to the reference cited and state that it has been decided to handover the District Disability Rehabilitation Centre, Vellore to Worth Trust by the Joint Director, Office of the Special Commissioner for the Disabled, Chennai on behalf of the implementing agency in the presence of the District Collector on 27.4.2005, Wednesday. I request you kindly to make arrangement for taking over charge of District Disability Rehabilitation Centre, Vellore. I also request you to allot three rooms to accommodate the DDRC in your premises or in a place convenient to the disabled.	
Sd/Mohan Verghese Chunkath, Special Commissioner. //By order// JOINT DIRECTOR 28/4/2005	

The District Disability Rehabilitation Centre, Tirupattur is handed over to WORTH

District Collector, S Gopalakrishnan, IAS, formally transferred it to WORTH on September 1, 2005. The DDRC was mainly to assist persons with disabilities in Tirupattur area to benefit from different Government schemes, without having to travel all the way to Vellore.

The setting up of DDRCs stipulated that national ID cards had to be issued to the differently-abled, so that they could benefit from Government schemes. WORTH helped in the issuing of these cards. Bhooma Parthasarathy, a former Trustee at WORTH recalls how this was done –

“To receive this ID card, the disabled individuals had to go through multiple excruciating steps. Firstly, they need a medical report from a specialist at the local Government hospital, certifying their disability. If they happened to be disabled in multiple ways, then they were required to get their certificates from multiple specialists. If by some good fortune, they managed to receive the said certificates, then they had to go through several other tedious procedures at the Collector’s office to finally apply for the ID card. This process required the disabled to travel to the Government hospitals and the offices multiple times, only for their application to be rejected on the grounds of a minor inaccuracy. If the disabled individual still felt resilient enough to pursue the ID card, then they had to brace themselves for doing it all over again, despite their physical inability, poor transport services and the systemic delays.

Worthy move from WORTH for mentally ill

The 45-year-old Workshop for Rehabilitation and Training of the Handicapped (WORTH) Trust at Katpadi, which was providing training and employment to the physically challenged persons all these years diversified its activities by starting a Day Activity Centre for autistic, mentally ill and mentally retarded children about a year ago.

A visit to the Day Activity Centre and interviews with parents revealed that there was noticeable improvement in the skills of children with autism and mental retardation after year-long training at the centre.

“My son used to squat on the western toilet, but after showing him a picture of a boy sitting normally on the toilet, he now sits properly on it,” said Poongodi Sivakumar of Arcot, who is the mother of 12-year-old Nishok, a child with autism who is being trained at the Centre. She brings her child to the centre every day, sits with him and teaches him to identify the objects shown in pictures. She said that previously, Nishok used to identify the object as a car only if he is shown the same picture of the same model car with which he was taught. He would blink if shown the picture of a car of a different model. But now he is able to identify a car irrespective of the model.

K. Radhakrishnan, Managing Director of WORTH Trust said that the Trust decided to start a Day Activity



SOCIAL SERVICE: An occupational therapist helping a boy with Down's syndrome to solve a jigsaw puzzle at the Day Activity Centre for Autistic and Mentally Retarded Children at the WORTH Trust in Katpadi. – PHOTO: D. GOPALAKRISHNAN

Centre for the children with autism, mental illness and mental retardation (MR) in view of the presence of a large number of autistic and mentally retarded children in Vellore district and the absence of adequate number of centres to train and rehabilitate them.

The mothers are asked to bring

their children, stay with them, teach them under the supervision of the occupational therapist and physio-therapist and take them home in the evening. The insistence on the mothers staying with their children stems from the realisation that the close support and monitoring of the parents is necessary for the success-

ful rehabilitation of children with autism and MR.

The WORTH Trust has purchased a new set of different varieties of educational aids to suit the specific needs of children with different levels of autism and MR. Each of the 49 children in the centre is taught with an aid that is appropriate for it.

Col. Radhakrishnan said that the WORTH Trust uses the expertise of the Mental Health Department of the Christian Medical College Hospital in running the centre. Anna Thariyan and Kannan, psychiatrists of the Mental Health Department of the CMC Hospital visit the centre once in 15 days and train the children, monitor the training of the children by the mothers and provide necessary advice to the staff in charge of the centre.

Farah, occupational therapist of the Day Activity Centre said that the centre also has children with cerebral palsy and Down's syndrome. Children with Down's syndrome are taught to work out jigsaw puzzles, which help them to acquire the capacity for judgement and colour matching. After training, Narayanan (13), affected by the Down's syndrome completes the puzzle in half-an-hour, she said.

The Managing Director said that 23-year-old Somu, a mentally retarded person who was trained in the WORTH Trust for the last three years in the Rehabilitation Centre for MR Children is today a vocational trainee in the Technical Training Centre, where he is trained on small jobs done with machines. “He works with concentration for three hours, after which we change his work in order to break the monotony,” he said.

P.V.V. MURTHI
in Vellore

The Hindu reports on WORTH expanding its ambit to include the intellectually challenged

Golden Jubilee Celebrations



By 2014, WORTH had crossed fifty years in the service of the disadvantaged. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee, a special book was brought out, titled, *A Success Story Well Begun*. The introductory note to the book read – “2014 was ushered in with great joy and pride by the peal of golden bells in WORTH Trust. It has been fifty, glorious years of hard, selfless work and excellent achievements by its commendable workforce. It is indeed worthwhile to look back at those fifty years and review the success story of WORTH Trust. Every successful story has a worthy protagonist, who has actively initiated, nurtured and guided the successive events. The WORTH Trust is synonymous with Antonysamy and hails him as its initiator, mentor and guiding light.”

September 15, 2014 was a significant day, as it marked the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Trust. The function was kick-started with the inauguration of an exhibition, namely a photo gallery, that beautifully showcased the history of WORTH and how it was initiated, how it evolved and shaped itself into an iconic institution for the differently-abled in India.

A Golden Jubilee theme song was launched on the occasion. There were speeches by S Viji, Chairman of the Trust, Antonysamy and other dignitaries. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Dr Prakash Amte, son of the renowned Sadhana Tai and Baba Amte, Gandhians and humanitarians who had done yeoman service among the leprosy-afflicted in Maharashtra. It was also a time for thanksgiving and the Annual Report for the year 2014-15 made sure that it commemorated all those who had played a very vital role in the growth of the organisation over the years.



(Here and in succeeding pages) Various awards received by WORTH

Many individuals from the rural communities were so deterred by this dreadful exercise that they decided that they were better off without the card. The WORTH Trust took things in hand. It hosted camps in rural areas, where the doctors and the Government servants visited the disabled, instead of the other way round.

The camps proved to be greatly beneficial as the process of issuing the cards was simplified and speeded up.”

While WORTH conducted these camps on its own in Vellore, in the neighbouring district of Ranipet, it collaborated with Tirumalai Charities Trust (TCT) run by Tirumalai Chemicals.

While this kept WORTH busy through much of the years 2005 to 2010, this was also when, as we saw in the previous chapter, the Day Activity Centre (DAC) for the Intellectually Challenged came up, in 2007, followed by the Early Intervention Centre for Children with Hearing Impairment in 2008. The DAC was hailed as a “worthy move from WORTH for the mentally ill”, by *The Hindu*, dated February 2, 2008. It was also at around this time, in 2006, that the KK Nagar Centre was started in Chennai, in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Madras. The centre offered free six-month courses for the differently-abled in computer applications, secretarial practices with MS Office, tailoring, advanced courses in AutoCAD and DTP. For the visually challenged it offered special courses in computer application and braille.

The good work WORTH was doing was recognised. In 2012, it received the National Award for the empowerment of persons with disabilities. This was received on behalf of the Trust by P Athmanathan who was then the CEO & Director, and he received it from the then President of India, Pranab Mukherjee.

Awards Received by WORTH Trust



- 1978 – Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) Award for outstanding service in training and placement of the differently-abled persons
- 1978, 1982 & 1987 – Tamil Nadu Government State Award in connection with World Disability Day
- 1988 – National Award for the Welfare of Handicapped in public recognition of its outstanding performance in the field of Handicapped Welfare
- 1997– Mr C Antonysamy, Founder and former Managing Director of WORTH Trust received the Late Shri ND Diwan Memorial Award by National Society for Equal Opportunities for the Handicapped, India
- 2003 – The Government of Tamil Nadu Award for the Best Private Employer
- 2004 –Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) – Shell Helen Keller Award to Mr C Antonysamy, Founder and former Managing Director
- 2003 – National Award for the Best Institution for outstanding performance in the field of empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.
- 2013 – Sri Vijay Merchant Memorial Award as an Outstanding Employer of the Differently Abled awarded by the National Society for Equal Opportunities for the Handicapped, India
- 2018 – NCPEDP Mindtree Helen Keller Award for outstanding service to the Differently Abled persons
- State Government Best Special Educator Award to Ms. Anita, WORTH Trust, Special Educator, Early Intervention Centre for the Speech & Hearing Impaired, Katpadi
- 2020 – Tamil Nadu Government State Award for Best Organisation employing maximum number of Differently Abled persons
- 2020 – Pondicherry State(UT) Award for Best Institution for best work done for the cause of the Differently Abled
- 2023 – WORTH Trichy Award for Best Institution for Work Done for Differently Abled
- 2023 – WORTH Trichy Award for Best Organisation Employing Maximum Number of Differently Abled
- 2023 – WORTH Trust Tirupattur Award for best work carried out for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities



An aerial view of the Katpadi campus

The WORTH Trust received the Vijay Merchant Memorial Award as an outstanding employer for the disabled and this was conferred upon it by the National Society for Equal Opportunities for the Handicapped (NASEOH) India. This too was received on behalf of the Trust by P Athmanathan.

The Golden Jubilee Souvenir is a good reference document for summarising all that WORTH had stood for over the years and the various activities it was undertaking at the time it turned fifty. Some excerpts below –

“WORTH Trust today is a fully self-sustained rehabilitation organisation. Registered as a charitable trust, it is managed by a Board of Trustees, made up of eminent persons in diverse fields, united by their common interest in the service of the differently-abled. The production centres, which employ mostly persons with disabilities, enable them to generate a surplus. The entire cost of its Technical Training School for speech and hearing-impaired children and outreach activities are efficiently managed.

“Over the last five decades, WORTH Trust has grown into what it is today, excelling in the supply of quality products for major industries and making aids and appliances for the differently-abled. Constant monitoring of products and quality assurance has enabled WORTH Trust to achieve a unique status in the field of training, rehabilitation, manufacture and supply of quality products for major automobile and plastic industries catering to home appliances and lifestyle products.

“Five establishments of the Trust—WORTH Brailers, WORTH Plastics, WORTH Industries at Katpadi, Pondicherry and Tiruchirapalli received the ISO 9001-2015 accreditation, for excellence in quality standards. This is a unique honour because WORTH Trust is the first rehabilitation institution in India to achieve this. WORTH Industries at Katpadi, Pondicherry and Tiruchirapalli, and WORTH Plastics have also been accredited with IATF 16949:2016.



(Here and in following pages) A slew of activities at WORTH, Katpadi

“The uniqueness of WORTH Trust is its complete self-sufficiency. The production centres, manned by skilled workers with disabilities, compete with other industries which employ the non-differently abled. The production centres have earned the confidence of clients, some of whom continue to place orders without interruption during the last thirty years. The machinery in these units is being modernised to suit the demands of the present-day industry.

“The Governments of Tamil Nadu and India, support the activities of the Trust by exempting the products from sales tax and excise duty. The earnings from the production units, which are exempted from income tax, are ploughed back into various rehabilitation activities, the training centres, the schools and the outreach programmes. This enables the Trust to reach out to more people with disabilities.

“WORTH is entirely self-sufficient and not dependent on donations from the public or financial support from the Government for its revenue expenditure. So, it is a unique NGO, involved in rehabilitation. The Trust is also sensitive to the welfare of its trainees and workers. Workers are encouraged to integrate normally into society in every segment of life. This kind of motivation helps to emphasise the differently-abled persons’ sense of independence and self-esteem. It creates awareness among the

public about their abilities and the difficulties that the differently-abled people face in daily life.

“The production centres employing persons with disabilities have the support of industries they serve. Their conviction has not been misplaced, as time and again, their products have won acclaim from their buyers for their precision, quality and punctual delivery. Industrial clients have demonstrated their faith in the Trust by repeatedly placing orders. All the production centres have proved to be successful business ventures and are fully self-sufficient. They are poised for greater growth.

“From its inception, the founders of WORTH Trust have believed that the persons with disabilities have equal rights and the ability to be valuable, productive members of a family and society. The involvement of WORTH Trust in the community has changed the lives of so many differently-abled people and their families in this district. The new awareness of the wholeness of the individual, be it an adult or a child, has fostered a sense of care and commitment within the country.

“It is heartening to see children who were once assisted, having their deformities corrected, return as adults seeking vocational training. Some having had specialised training, are now employed elsewhere and some have returned to the Trust as workers, instructors and trainers.





It is also always a joy to see new families being created.

“The Trust has proved that the differently-abled are not useless members of the community, isolated and institutionalised. Given the opportunity and the right kind of training, they

can also be productive members of society, who contribute towards the economy of a nation.”



The Services Offered by the Trust

The 2014 Souvenir also gives us a bird's eye view of the various activities that the Trust was involved in. As these have remained substantially unchanged, we are reproducing the list -

- Production centres at Katpadi, Tiruchirapalli and Pondicherry mostly employing persons with disabilities
- Manufacture of mobility aids like wheelchairs, tricycles, walkers
- Digitisation of books for the print-disabled and embossing of braille books
- Three Technical Training Centres, where boys and girls with disabilities are provided free vocational training in turner, machinist and welder trades
- Non-formal training of the differently-abled is carried out at Production Centres
- Placement of trained differently-abled students in reputed organisations
- Government-recognised transitional school for children with speech and hearing impairments from preschool to Class 5
- Early Intervention Centre to train hearing impaired infants in verbal and auditory skills
- Day Activity Centre for the intellectually challenged

Over a period of time the following activities have been added:

- Early Intervention Centre for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2018
- Technical Training Centre at Gummidipoondi providing free vocational training in turner, machinist, horticulture and smartphone technician cum app tester trades in 2022





My journey of “ability beyond disability” is my way of creating positive impact by proving that with the right opportunities, people with disabilities can also be achievers. Anything that adds to the value of this mission and in turn changes the outlook of society towards being more inclusive and accepting is what I love to do.

Deepa Malik

First Indian woman to win a medal at the Paralympic Games

Chapter 15

Marching Towards the Diamond Jubilee

The decade between WORTH Trust's fiftieth birthday and its sixtieth has been eventful. While progress across many fronts has been made at the Trust itself, it is the Covid pandemic that has been the single greatest defining factor. The manner in which WORTH weathered that crisis is narrated further down this chapter. But before that we need to look at developments between 2014 and 2020.

A group of NGOs working towards the welfare and upliftment of differently-abled people in Vellore joined hands in 2015 to form the Vellore District Disability Network (VDDN). Presided over by Antonysamy and DK Oza, the organisation met at the WORTH Trust premises on November 2, 2015, to get things going. The NGOs present included CMCH-Rehab, Thirumalai Charity Trust, Rangammal Memorial Hospital, Eliz Trust, etc. The main focus of the meeting was the implementation of welfare programmes for the differently-abled

through better networking. The VDDN has since gone about its work quietly but effectively and it has helped the DDRC in its functioning too. Between 2015 and 2020, the Trust was part of many outreach programmes—participating in exhibitions, distributing mobility aids on behalf of the Government and collaborating with other NGOs such as TCT, in organising camps.

The close relationship with the Perkins School for the Blind, USA, continued. In 2015, Perkins appreciated the WORTH Braille unit for its outstanding inventory control, and the employees of the unit were presented with a 10-gram silver coin as a token of appreciation.

It was a proud moment for all at WORTH Trust to receive the prestigious NCPEDP-Mind Tree Helen Keller Award 2018 in the category of Best Organisation working for the cause of the Differently-Abled. The award was received on behalf of the Trust by R Karthikeyan, CEO &





Managing Director and Myke Ignatius Nunes, Senior Manager.

The same was dedicated to all employees and stakeholders of the Trust.

There were changes at an organisational level at this time. After serving the Trust for 41 years, S Viji, Managing Director of Brakes India, Chennai, retired from his role as the Chairman of WORTH Trust on September 17, 2016. A year

later, he, and former Chairmen, Antonysamy and MV Subbiah would all three be named Patrons of WORTH Trust. R Parthasarathy, Chairman & Managing Director, Thirumalai Chemicals Ltd, Ranipet, who was the former Vice-Chairman of WORTH Trust took over as Chairman of the Trust from Viji and Ranjit Pratap, Managing Director of M/s Rayala Corp Pvt Ltd, Chennai assumed the position of Vice-Chairman.

In 2020, Ranjit became the Chairman and was in turn, succeeded by Harish Lakshman, in 2023. At the executive level too, there were changes. P Athmanathan, who was CEO & Director, stepped down in August 2015 and was succeeded by R Karthikeyan, who came in after several years of experience with the Murugappa Group in particular. He continues to be the CEO & Managing Director.

Another person, who has been key to WORTH is Myke Ignatius Nunes. Long familiar with WORTH, thanks to his association with Antonysamy, he was all set for going to Australia in 2004 when the latter asked him to come on board, which he did, focusing initially on the Braille unit. Myke is now the spokesperson of the WORTH Trust. In conferences and exhibitions, he participates on behalf of the Trust, and talks about it in its full glory—as an institution focusing not just on rehabilitation, but also on education, training and employment



Some of the trustees, past and present, at a WORTH event

of the disabled, and about the company's various production activities.

Between 2015 and 2018, the three production centres, at Katpadi, Pondicherry and Tiruchirappalli, expanded their scope of operations, with state-of-the-art machines being installed. In 2017, the latest blow moulding technology was brought to the plastics unit. In 2018, an Early Intervention Centre was begun for children with autism spectrum disorder as well.

All the progress in the business units across Katpadi, Trichy, Pondicherry and Chennai, and the rehabilitation activities, and the work happening in the schools for the physically

and intellectually-challenged children came to an absolute halt as the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the country in 2020. R Karthikeyan, the CEO and Managing Director of the Trust elaborated on the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown in the Annual Reports as follows: “The fiscal year 2020-21 that has gone by has been the most challenging year for WORTH Trust as has been for the whole of humanity, with the long and agonising spells and waves of the devastating pandemic. (The lockdown imposed nationwide) continued unabatedly causing major disruptions both for our business and rehabilitation activities, throwing our entire operations and our lives out of gear through the entire year (2021) that followed.

It is to the credit of the resilience and discipline of our employees that we could wade through this period of unprecedented agony with determination and self-belief and continued vigour and positive intent. Hats off to our employees who stood by us in this time of prolonged and acute crisis in not only attending to work with unflinching commitment through various disruptions and hardships, but also demonstrated superior discipline in adhering to the safety protocols and standard operating procedures that were to be enforced from time to time.”

Though the year 2020 was filled with distress and trepidation for the Trust, it still is important



Commemoration plaque for WORTH's silver jubilee of making brailers

for two reasons. The Government of Tamil Nadu awarded the WORTH Trust as the best employer in the State for employing the maximum number of differently-abled workers. The award was received on behalf of the Trust by R Karthikeyan, CEO & Managing Director from the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in December 2020. This brought in great pride, joy and in turn, encouragement for the organisation and its employees.

The year 2020 was also the Silver Jubilee celebration of the partnership between the WORTH Trust and Perkins School for the Blind, USA. Perkins presented a plaque to WORTH Trust in grateful recognition of its 25 years of outstanding services and dedication to the Perkins School for the Blind mission—1995-2020. The celebrations happened virtually with the participation of Antonyamy, Ranjit Pratap, R Parthasarathy, R Karthikeyan and Dave Power (CEO, Perkins School for the Blind), Luiza Aguiar (Executive Director, Perkins Solutions) and Dan Roy (Director of Operations, Perkins Solutions) and all the employees of the WORTH Brailers unit.

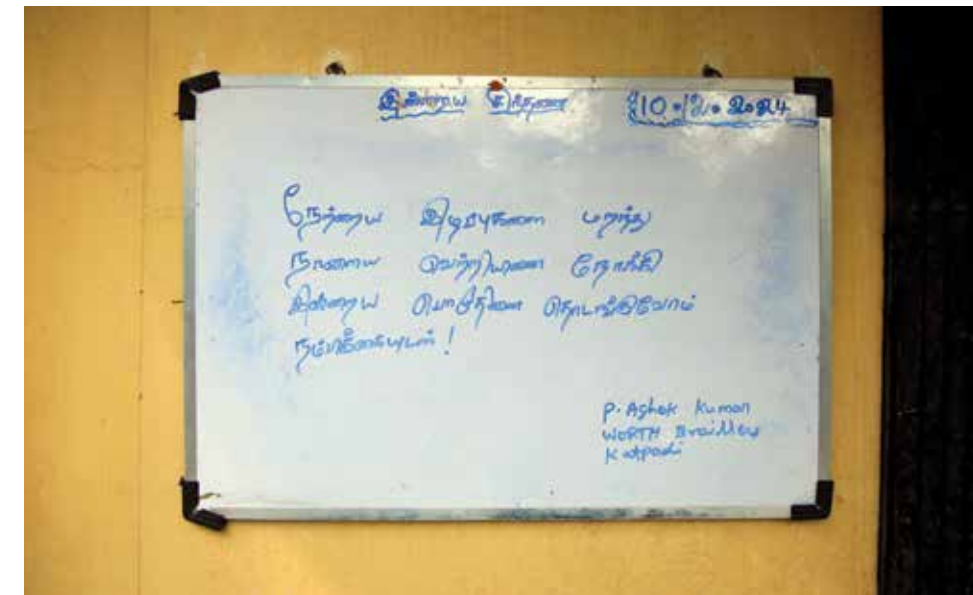
Though the WORTH Trust used multiple tools and resources to manage the challenges posed

by the pandemic, what cannot be denied is the fact that the world as we knew it before 2020 changed irrevocably. Institutions of all kinds had to grapple with the changes that they never foresaw. An organisation, like the WORTH Trust, which runs solely on the principle of rehabilitation of the disabled through training and employment is especially faced with many challenges.

In order to address these, the Trust has introduced a range of new initiatives. These initiatives encourage workers to contribute beyond their routine tasks, fostering a deeper connection with the organisation and giving new significance to their roles.

Total Employee Involvement (TEI)

As the name suggests, this initiative involves the active participation of all employees across the units. It also encourages them to take on creative and engaging roles to tackle challenges beyond their regular duties. In each unit, five teams are formed—Cross-functional, Kaizen, Safety, 5S, and Suggestion. The employees have demonstrated great commitment to the initiative, which has enabled them to address issues by implementing creative problem-solving methods, contributing to the overall improvement of the individual units. TEI has significantly transformed the attitudes of



Spreading positivity, the WORTH way

employees and helped redefine their relationship with work, fostering a positive working environment.

Power of Positivity

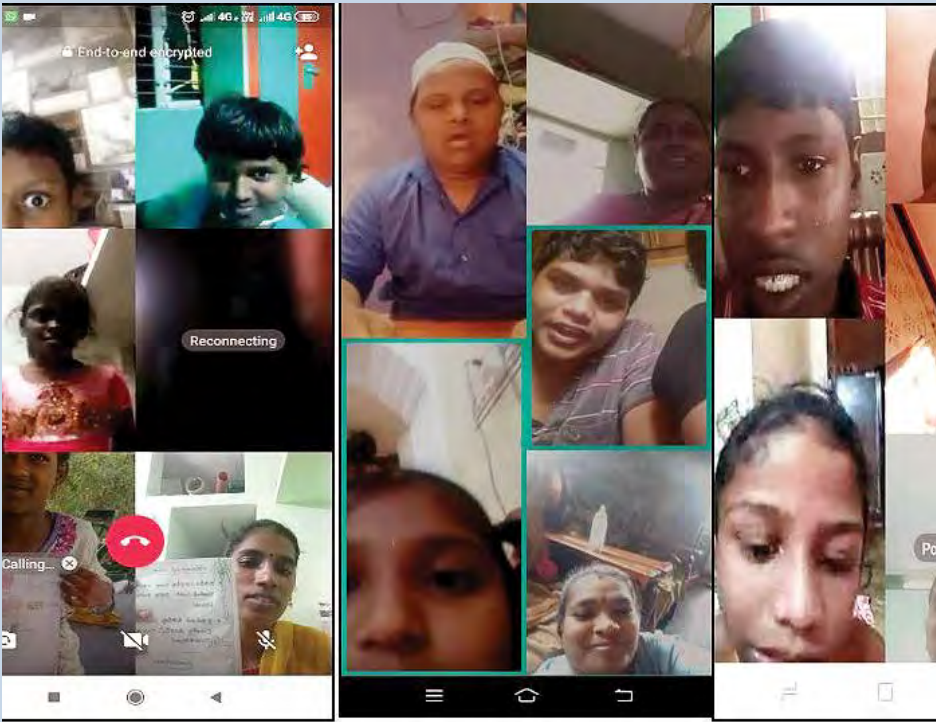
The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges and exacerbated existing issues. At this stage, spreading positivity is more crucial than ever. At WORTH Trust, each unit has its own 'Team of Positivity' comprising members who share messages of courage, love and hope. They meet once a month to discuss significant events and milestones in their personal lives and spread motivation and positivity among fellow employees. This has proven to be a highly successful initiative.

Knowledge Management Cell (KMC)

KMC was established to support the growth of both the organisation and the individual employees' professional lives, with the belief that knowledge is most valuable when shared. A centralised Knowledge Management Cell has been formed and it organises monthly meetings to share technical and non-technical knowledge, as well as related materials online.

It was also in 2022-23 that there was further recognition from the Government of the good work that the WORTH Trust was doing. It was empanelled in a high-level committee to advise the Government of Tamil Nadu in identifying suitable employment opportunities for the differently-abled in private organisations. R Karthikeyan attended the sessions. He also represented WORTH in an online national consultation session on the draft policy for persons with disabilities organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, New Delhi.

Special Education in Special Circumstances



The Government of Tamil Nadu ordered the closure of all schools in April 2020, owing to the rising cases of COVID-19. While all schools across the state adopted the online training mode, implementing the same for special children was particularly challenging. Despite that, online classes were handled for children from the School for Speech & Hearing Impairment, Day Activity Centre for the Intellectually Challenged, Early Intervention Centre for Speech & Hearing Impaired and Autism Spectrum Disorder. In addition to the classes, therapy and vocational training were also provided virtually with the involvement of parents. The special educators and the rehabilitation staff attended 179 webinars organised nationwide on the topics relevant to COVID-19, and issues related to the differently-abled in that period. It also provided an opportunity for the special educators to learn Hindi.

Since the lockdown denied the children of the pleasure of meeting their friends and playing outdoors, the special instructors came up with innovative solutions to keep them engaged and to keep their morale high. Several tasks were proposed for the children to boost physical, social and mental health.

Gardening was emphasised as an important tool to provide the necessary physical exercise and also for the sensory and emotional benefits it brings about. The children were given the task of folding clothes to help develop hand-to-eye coordination and logical thinking. Arts and crafts were taught to improve their creativity, fine motor skills, problem solving ability and mental wellness.

Since going out for shopping was not an option, multiple lessons were provided on savings. This encouraged the children to spend responsibly and apply the mathematics learnt in classes. A method that worked well was giving them a flat allowance in exchange for the basics expected like doing some small household chores such as making their beds, caring for pets, etc. What deserved special mention is the fact that these children contributed to the TN State Chief Minister's COVID-19 Relief Fund out of their savings.



(Above Top): Empanelled Committee Tamil Nadu, for identifying suitable employment opportunities for the physically challenged and (Above) a National Consultation Session online

WORTH Trust was presented as a case study and role model organisation with its unique self-sustaining model in a virtual conference on 'Business Beyond Boundaries – Empowering Entrepreneurs with Disabilities' organised on February 6, 2021, jointly by ATPAR, NCPEDP, NHFDC and NEDAR New Delhi. Two of its major clients, Roca India represented by its MD, KE Ranganathan and Perkins USA by Dan Roy, Director of Operations were present as was Ramesh, a successful differently-abled entrepreneur who was a product of WORTH TTC. They joined R Karthikeyan CEO & MD WORTH Trust in the panel elaborating on the WORTH model.

A New TTC at Gummidipoondi



At the inauguration of the Gummidipoondi TTC

The friendship and collaboration between WORTH and the Rotary Club of Madras was as we saw in the previous chapters, of an enduring nature. It was therefore appropriate that one of the latest developments has seen the two come together again. The Rotary Club of Madras WORTH Industrial Training Institute, Gummidipoondi was started with the objective to educate, train, employ and empower the differently-abled boys from rural and poor economic backgrounds in suitable technical areas and thereafter to guide them to get suitable jobs and to lead an independent life with dignity. It was envisioned as a residential technical training centre for the differently-abled boys aged 16 to 30, in turner and machinist trades for two years, horticulture trade for one year, and smartphone technician cum app tester trade for six months.

The beneficiaries of this Institute were primarily to be the speech and hearing-impaired, orthopaedically-challenged, low vision and intellectually-challenged persons who had completed their 10th standard and would be identified from Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram,

Chennai and other neighbouring districts. All the preliminary work for starting the centre was completed and accreditation was obtained from the Director General of Training, New Delhi. The centre was inaugurated in May 2022, with dignitaries from WORTH Trust and the Rotary Club of Madras. It was inaugurated by Ravi Sanna Reddy, Managing Director of Sri City Industrial Corridor which is in the vicinity of the centre, as the Chief Guest on the occasion. He assured the centre all support in terms of future employment opportunities. According to Ranjit Pratap, the obstacles were many and though the idea had been mooted by him when he was President of the Rotary Club of Madras in 2018, it took four years for matters to reach a satisfactory conclusion. The pandemic was a major reason he says, as were approvals within Rotary. But happily it was resolved by 2022 and with actor Mohan V Raman as the President of the Rotary Club, the project proceeded.

The Trust conducted and took part in various camps and outreach programmes for the differently-abled in the districts of Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, Chengalpattu and Ranipet for the admission of students at the TTC Gummidipoondi. The Trust found that there was great interest shown by the intellectually challenged students to join in the horticultural trade in particular.



Courses at Gummidipoondi - (Clockwise from Top Left) Smart phone technician cum app tester, Horticulture, Turner and Machinist



From darkness lead us unto light.

The Upanishad

Chapter 16

Into the Future

The trend of recognitions and better visibility for the Trust continued through 2023. It collaborated with the Mary Verghese Trust of CMC Rehab Institute, a premier organisation working for the rehabilitation and training of spinal cord injured (SCI)

persons post injury and discharge. The aim is to look into all areas of daily life and try to ensure independence of the patient. But employment of SCI persons has been a real challenge especially in occupations that could enable them to be independent and earn a sustainable livelihood.

Rehab Melas are conducted by the CMC Rehab Institute every year so that many of the past patients can meet and share their successes and also their requirements. It was in one of these melas that R Karthikeyan came up with the idea of WORTH exploring the possibilities of training and creating employment opportunities for persons with SCI. He, along with Dr Guru Nagarajan, a Social Worker from the CMC Rehab Institute worked together on this and made it a reality. With collaborative and mutual trainings and field visits from the teams of WORTH Trust and CMC, employment was provided at WORTH Trust for two persons with SCI. They had completed their rehabilitation



Spinal cord injured persons at CMC



WORTH gets involved at the national level. (Above Top) A Sensitisation Programme underway and (Above) A CII Programme

and training at CMC. WORTH Trust has made changes at the workplace which has enabled the SCI employees to work independently with the required comfort and safety and at par with other differently-abled employees at WORTH Trust.

A workshop on 'Employ-Ability for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)' was jointly organised by the Christian Medical College & Hospital (CMC) and WORTH Trust on March 21, 2023, at the Rehabilitation Institute, CMC Bagayam, Vellore. The workshop was attended by senior managers from HR and Operations, from various industries in Vellore and Ranipet districts. The workshop was on employment opportunities for differently-abled persons in industries and also the various roles that could be carried out by them. Successful stories of SCI persons—Samu and Sakthivel who had been rehabilitated at CMC and were employed in the industries of WORTH Trust, were shared. The participants were taken around the CMC Rehabilitation Institute showcasing the various therapies and technologies for patients with spinal cord injuries. The workshop ended with a positive commitment to work towards employment of the SCI persons in private industries.

CII-IBDN (India Business and Disability Network) is a new initiative of CII focusing on Accessibility, Inclusion and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. The WORTH Trust was identified as a role model organisation and was a case study on best practices in disability inclusion.

V-Shesh, a social impact enterprise based out of Chennai conducted this study on behalf of CII-IBDN. The V-Shesh

team visited WORTH Trust, Katpadi in the month of February 2022 and conducted a detailed study which included interactions with employees and managers. On behalf of WORTH Trust, this entire study was coordinated and anchored by Myke Nunes, Senior Manager (Operations), WORTH Trust.

In continuation of the study, a National Conference on Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities was organised by CII in New Delhi wherein the study report was released as one of the CII-IBDN publications. R Karthikeyan, was

invited as a Panelist/Guest Speaker at the National Conference to showcase the model of WORTH Trust. He spoke on the long history of the Trust in working for the cause of the differently-abled as an organisation "For, By and Of Persons with Disabilities", enabling deep engagement amongst its employees, which makes everyone feel valued and strive to meet the organisational goals with fervour. The WORTH Model was the cynosure of all eyes and ears and the august gathering at the conference was in awe and were highly inspired by it. This paved the way for many of these organisations visiting the WORTH Trust campus post this event.

The WORTH Trust crossed its 60th year in 2024. His frailty notwithstanding, Antonysamy beams with pride when he reflects on this. He expresses quiet satisfaction at the Trust remaining true to its ideals and contributing silently and strongly towards the cause of the physically and intellectually challenged.

It was a unusual experiment—taking up what would be perceived world over as a charitable task but uniquely backing it up by surplus generated through industrial activity. It was a rare example of its kind in the world and even today, sixty years later, remains unique. And yet, it is surprising that others in the field of rehabilitation of the disabled have not caught on to a fundamental principle—that those being



Trainees at Katpadi



WORTH's journey – from leprosy to orthopaedic challenges to the hearing and visual impaired to the intellectually challenged to the spinal cord injured

helped need to be able to stand on their feet if they must survive and for that they need to add value and not be mere recipients of it. The task was not easy and that is perhaps why most other organisations in this space prefer to depend on the kindness of others to carry on their good work and not look at what they can themselves do to be self-sustaining. This is not a comment on the guiding principles of kindred NGOs and other such entities but merely an observation.

To survive and flourish for sixty years in the space of rehabilitation of the physically and intellectually challenged is no mean achievement. And this has been made possible by WORTH moving with the times in terms of its execution while remaining steadfast to the core principle behind it. There was never any doubt at WORTH that its *raison d'être* is helping those in need by way of physical and intellectual disabilities, through surpluses generated from its production-related activities. But change has come in two ways—the nature of the challenges to be addressed and the complete transformation in the manufacturing industry. WORTH kept up with both admirably, and it is in this ability to transform with time that we see the key to the Trust's success.

Let us first look at the changes in challenges to be handled. WORTH came into existence at a time when leprosy was a major scourge though it was, unlike tuberculosis, or even epidemic

diseases such as cholera or smallpox, not a swift killer. Leprosy killed slowly by its frightening disfigurement, which came about only through lack of treatment and neglect. That in turn led to ostracism and eventually vagrancy, malnutrition and death. While there were many organisations in India that took it upon them to care for leprosy victims, WORTH aimed at making them contributing members of society.

But by the 1980s, leprosy was on the wane—as a disease and as a social discriminator. That was when WORTH turned to other physical challenges to be overcome. It was of course an indication of the vision of its founders that even at inception, the activities were never restricted to just those afflicted by leprosy but also included within its ambit those who faced orthopaedic challenges and later, those with speech and aural impediments as well. Thus by the 1980s, the Trust was able to focus on polio and help in rehabilitating its victims. When thanks to mass immunisation, polio too began declining, the Trust made the move to help those with speech and hearing impairment, and later persons with visual challenges. In this, the fact that it could take on making brailers, and also eventually move to digitisation shows how it could make the shift as demanded by time and circumstances.

Simultaneously, the school run by the Trust too made its transitions. When children with orthopaedic challenges needed to be brought on

par so that they could fit into regular academic institutions, the Trust began its special school. When the demand for such an institution declined, the school changed track and went onto to focus on children with speech and hearing impediments. The Trust thus remained and continued to remain relevant. Of course, its school for children with intellectual and learning

challenges is another example of moving with the times.

This skillful steering of the Trust was entirely due to those who sat on its Board and guided it. This was where the industrial and business focus of the Trust helped. Its unique model no doubt was instrumental in attracting captains of industry



Happy faces at the WORTH school



Machines, conventional and cutting edge

and they made sure that the revenue generating side of WORTH too changed with the times. There was for instance, always a professional CEO in charge, which is not primarily a feature of many NGOs that begin with the best of intentions. The founder, in this case Antonysamy too, gracefully made way for younger people to take on the day-to-day running and a long line of professionals have been at the helm. Thus, the production facilities and the management of WORTH were of the best practices that prevailed at any time.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, when even the best industrial houses struggled with aspects of quality and systems, and only the exemplary made the cut, WORTH, with the help of its customers and patrons, made its mark as a supplier of high quality products. Gone were the age-old lathes, and the new era was ushered in with CNC machines, plastic moulding and computers, together with a continuous emphasis on systems and certifications. It was thus able to obtain orders for a product range that remained relevant and thus its revenues were assured. Today, when we document these changes, it is just a matter of a few words but only those who were involved and those who remain in charge will know of the struggles in making all this happen. What if WORTH had not made the cut? What if it had only stuck to its old machines and methods of manufacturing? The loss would have



The present trustees. (Standing Left to Right) Arun Alagappan, Dr S Sunder, Ranvir Ranjit, Sriram Viji, Sunil Shanker, Ram Venkataramani and R Karthikeyan.

(Seated Left to Right) Sriram Panchu, Bhooma Parthasarathy, Rajul Padmanabhan, R. Parthasarathy, S Viji, Ranjit Pratap, Harish Lakshman, P Athmanathan and R Santhanam

been immense to the community that benefitted—those with challenges of various kinds.

The guidance for this came from the members of the Board. All of them firmly believed in the ideals of the founders and worked hard to make it relevant for the changing times. Ranjit Pratap, who was Chairman till 2023, recalls how the Executive Committee meetings of the Trust were detailed sessions, with plenty of data being crunched, trends looked at, and debates on what best could be done. Almost all of the Trustees were heads of, or associated with, companies that had managed the crucial leap forward in

the era of liberalisation. Their organisations had not rested on their legacies but kept abreast with world trends and remained relevant. The same focus was also evident in their dedication to WORTH Trust. The members also represent a great continuity—several among the current crop—Harish Lakshman, Arun Alagappan, Arun Vasu and Sriram Viji are representatives of the second generation from various corporate houses, while Ranvir Ranjit is third generation—a striking testimony to the continuing dedication they bring to WORTH.

The Trust has also been fortunate in that it has had the services of a long line of CEOs, beginning with Antonysamy up to the present incumbent, R Karthikeyan. Each has brought his experience from work life to the running of the Trust's activities. The Trust has also had the good fortune of having professionals from various related fields who have shared their valuable insights in the process of improving its functioning. The present Board has names such as Rajul Padmanabhan who has dedicated her life to children with special needs, Bhooma Parthasarathy who has been running the Tirumalai Charities Trust for years and Dr S Sunder who brings his medical knowledge in psychiatrics and rehabilitation.

WORTH today is recognised nationally for the work it does in sensitising people on the needs

of the differently-abled. It has also received encomiums for making the physical and intellectually challenged gainfully employable, thereby giving them dignity. In recent times, R Karthikeyan, has been part of national forums that worked on policy in these spheres.

It has been a successful journey lasting over sixty years. But the question arises, where or what next? That is something that the current Board is pondering over. Harish Lakshman, as Chairman, believes that the Trust has a vision of rehabilitation, and that production is the tool that it uses to achieve that end. Therefore it would not be correct to only look at refining manufacturing techniques but also keep looking out for new opportunities in rehabilitation. He cites the recent example of how the Trust has introduced horticulture for the intellectually challenged. “No one predicted that horticulture is an area that could be tapped into,” he says. “More than the mechanical diplomas, the horticulture course got filled in quickly.” Similarly, the Trust has widened its ambit by including people with low vision and also those with spinal cord injuries. The former are trained in the machinist and turner trades, while the latter, in connection with whom the Trust collaborates with CMC Vellore, are employed in the brailier and plastics unit.

Will WORTH always be able to rely on its unique model—of surplus from production going to

fund its activities? Harish says this has to be focused upon – “A new emphasis has been laid on WORTH to bring in new clients. In the initial years, these companies supported the WORTH Trust, by bringing in business and providing employment opportunities. But now, thanks to the volatility in industries, ushered in by the increasingly unstable nature of the business world today, the tendency to be generous and philanthropic has been on the decline as well.”

At the same time, the thinking of the Board is that, any further help, in other ways, will also certainly be welcome. After all, it all goes to the benefit of those needing such assistance. And so, through manufacturing, and innovative new employment opportunities, and by spreading the good word about its activities, WORTH Trust will step into the future.

The next question arises—will there be people who still will seek out WORTH Trust? With the increasing stability offered by blue-collar jobs and the lure of quick money from menial jobs outside, especially from the gig economy, a significant challenge in running the factories arises. Among the many challenges faced by the Trust in the present, what deserves attention is the unavailability of enough disabled people to take up the jobs provided by the Trust. A continuation of this trend can even threaten the very motto that it was founded with.



Transforming lives for a better future, (Here and in next page) Children at the EIC



Mary Celine discusses these problems from her purview as the HR person of the Trust.

Even if a candidate lacks adequate formal qualifications, the Trust looks for opportunities where their skills could be utilised. While able-bodied workers are also employed, priority is always to hire disabled individuals. According to Celine, positions are reserved for disabled candidates, and only if none are available are able-bodied candidates considered. In recent times, a dictum has been laid across the organisation to maximise the percentage of differently-abled across all levels. With improved social acceptance of disabled individuals, there is a shortage of candidates for rehabilitation at the Trust. There are also multiple opportunities in Government and private sectors for people with disabilities to pursue employment, which was not the case a few decades back.

This also results in the challenge of finding adequate number of students to take up the ITI programme.

Myke believes that this challenge is indirectly an opportunity for improvement. A student should have completed 10th grade in order to be eligible to apply for the ITI. But there are several disabled students who discontinue school much earlier. If they can be targeted and given prior training for four years and made eligible for employment, then they can be recruited to work



(Here and in next page) CSR funds have helped in making the campus truly worthy of WORTH's initiatives



at WORTH upon completion of the programme. Myke also reveals that the future goal of the Trust is to truly focus on the cause of the intellectually challenged. Through outreach programmes, etc, awareness needs to be spread about intellectual disabilities, and discover the people who are

undiagnosed, get them the Government ID cards, and sign them up for the schemes, and provide them education and means for employment.

Yet another aspect that Myke highlights as an indication of how WORTH has changed with time is the importance it gives to the spaces it occupies

and the surroundings. “In the old days getting the task done was of paramount importance, but now the look and feel is important. In this, the support received from R Parthasarathy, our former Chairman is noteworthy—all the roads in our campus and many of the training centre buildings and hostel buildings, have been kept shipshape thanks to his contribution. Similarly, Mr Arun Alagappan, our Trustee on Board for many years has made sure funds through CSR are available to ensure our school and rehabilitation centres have robust infrastructure and facilities.”

And so, will WORTH be able to maintain its original vision? The answer to that is a resounding YES. As long as there are people with what conventional society perceives as disabilities, and as long as these people need help to become useful members of the community they live and thrive in, WORTH will be relevant. It is only the nature of the service it provides that will need to change.

‘Helping the helpless, transforming them into admirable self-efficient persons—that is the true mark of greatness’—this quote is from the last page of the Golden Jubilee Souvenir of the WORTH Trust. Ten years on, we can come up with no better statement to define WORTH Trust itself. Countless are the people whose lives it has touched, and many are torches of hope it has lit when life had nothing but darkness to offer to

those who were unfortunate to be born as what is still defined as ‘disabled’ or ‘challenged’. That was the way of the ‘normal’ world—it was far easier to compartmentalise such people chiefly because exploring ways and means to harness their potential was a difficult and demanding task.

But the WORTH Trust was different. It believed that potential existed which probably others did too. But it was in its process of harnessing and channelling that potential that it was unique. Getting into a mainstream activity like manufacturing, and firmly adhering to a business approach, it demonstrated that people with ‘disabilities’ were not any different from their ‘normal’ counterparts. It was just the method of making them self-reliant and contributing that had to be different. And having succeeded in that, WORTH has remained true to its goal. Long may its service continue.

WORTH Trust

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3. Viji Santhanam

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2. MV Subbiah
3. Viji Santhanam
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2. NC Bose Croos
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4. P Athmanathan

Present Managing Director

1. R Karthikeyan





WORTH Trust

The unique, self-sustaining model of WORTH Trust, and the holistic and inclusive support it has been providing for the differently-abled over the past six decades, in enabling them through rehabilitation, education, training, employment and empowerment with resilience, dedication and commitment, is truly inspiring.