

## Goethals Himalayan Hope & Welfare Society

Chris Niwas, Goethals Siding, P.O. St. Mary's Hill, Kurseong, W. Bengal 734203

email: [sushsaso@gmail.com](mailto:sushsaso@gmail.com) Website: [www.himalayanhope.org](http://www.himalayanhope.org)

### June-July 2011 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all from all of us here at Chris Niwas!

Forgive me if this newsletter sounds too watery. If it does, blame it on the weather. Let me first give you a weather update. We are in full monsoon mode. It has been raining regularly for the past two months and continuously for the past thirteen days. News of several major landslides has been coming regularly. The electronic meter in my room reads 98% humidity outdoors and 97% indoors. A couple of times we have been in a situation where there is 'water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink' because the water pipes were washed away. The main road from Siliguri coming up to Kurseong and Darjeeling has been out of action for the past year and a half because of landslides and they are not getting much done in the line of fixing it because of the rain. Overall mood is very depressing because of the weather. If we did not have so many happy and funny children around us, we would all be suffering from depression.



#### Rita Miss with Chris Niwas children and (R) the boulder which landed in her kitchen

Monsoon is a very hard time here for everyone. You hear of many disasters but some disasters are more devastating because it involves people you know. For example the landslide which happened three weeks ago where four members of a family were buried alive. I knew all of them well and in fact one of the teenage boys who died was a student of mine. And again last Friday there was a landslide quite close to Chris Niwas. Although there was no casualty, which is a miracle, damage to the property was huge. Rita Miss comes and helps our children with their studies five days a week. That day, when she returned home after teaching our children, she found a big boulder, as big as her house, had slipped from the hillside above her house and had landed in her kitchen – trapping her 70-year old mother and aunty who were cooking dinner at that time. When she called me on my mobile, I couldn't quite understand what the problem was. All I could hear was the word 'landslide'. So I gathered a couple of young boys and went down to her house. What we witnessed there was beyond our imagination. We broke through the back of the house and rescued the two ladies. Both the ladies were trapped in one corner of the kitchen, with the kerosene stove still burning. Rita's mother escaped with minor scratches but her aunty had a fractured arm and pain in her chest and in the head. We brought them all to Chris Niwas for the night, administered first aid and gave them steaming hot rice, dal and vegetables and a good night's rest. Next day we got them admitted in the hospital. The government has started removing the boulder and cleaning up the debris and is in the process of repairing the house. But the sad part is both these disasters were man-made. The first landslide was caused because the house which was built above the buried house had not put proper drainage system. All the water falling from the sky and their roof was eating into the naked hillside which eventually caused the landslide burying four members of the family alive in a muddy grave. The government officials who came to investigate the second landslide were quick to conclude that it was caused due to the number of trees that had been cut from the area.



#### (L) Armed with saplings, our children march ahead to protect Mother Nature. (R) Cleaning the plantation area

Chris Niwas family is happy to announce that not only do we not cut down any trees but rather every year we plant a number of trees in and around our locality. Both the above incidents were great eye openers for our children. If we take good care of Mother Nature, she will also take good care of us. If we abuse her, we will be the ones to

suffer. We at Chris Niwas are doing everything possible to safeguard Mother Nature – planting trees, recycling, composting, using solar energy, disposing of our waste properly, picking up nondegradable garbage from our area. Hopefully because of our effort and commitment to be the most environment-friendly family, we will see less and less of landslides and casualties in our locality. Yesterday, as part of our annual reforestation program, we planted 174 trees of various kinds. Looking at the growth of the trees we planted two years back, I think we will have a respectable forest around Chris Niwas in the next twenty years which will hold the mountainside from slipping down and killing whole families, it will also absorb a lot of excess water and release it slowly so that we have drinking water all year round. Besides ensuring the future generation clean air to breathe and a healthy environment to live in, it will be a home for the multitudes of wildlife also.



**Anushree (L) Kiran & Karan (M) and Punam (R) planting trees.**



**(L) Andrew holds the tree he planted two years back with help from Abhinoy (R)**

### **Home visits**



**(L) Nehal holds an umbrella over Shanti while she weaves a jhola (R)Sashi with Nehal and Shanti**

Remember our weaving ladies and our blind tailor? They are still turning out beautiful 'Jhola' bags. Some of you have been helping us support our weaving team by selling the jhola bags they make and we are so grateful to you for that. For three years they had been coming to Chris Niwas everyday to weave. But we thought it would be better for them to be working from their home since they are all single mothers with young children to take care of. Working from home also gives them the freedom to do other odd jobs to supplement their income because whatever we are able to give them, it is not enough for their family. Sashi and I visited the ladies in their villages to find out how they are managing. Shanti has a temporary job in a tea garden and Purnima works as a house maid. Both Sashi and I were shocked to see the condition of the houses these women live in, especially Shanti. The shell of the house was built with old bits and pieces of wood and tin, dirt floor, half the roof collapsed because the cross beam had rotten and could not hold the weight of the roof. From inside she had put a sheet of tarpauline to stop the rain from flooding the room. Big pots and pans strewn all over the room to catch the rain water dripping from the roof. Everything in the room was soggy. When we entered the house, Shanti was on the loom weaving, her son Nehal was holding an umbrella over her to protect Shanti and the loom from getting soaked. That sight brought back a lot of childhood memories because both Sashi and I had lived in the same condition. We are so sad

for Shanti and her son for the condition they are living in. Both Sashi and I feel we should do something to help Shanti repair her house because although she works eleven hours a day – 8 hours in the tea garden and 3 hours on the loom at home – Shanti only makes little more than \$2 a day which is barely enough to feed her family of four and send her son to school. If we can at least give her enough building material to repair her roof, which I estimate would come to around \$350, Shanti's house will be somewhat fit for human dwelling. Every time you enter your home, please think about and pray for Shanti and her family who are living in such inhuman condition.

---

### **Multi-talented new member in Chris Niwas**

When Sashi and I agreed to take in Wangchuk as one of our family members, little did we know how talented he was. We knew him since he was a little boy in SASAC. It's the same story of poverty and unemployment. The tea garden where Wangchuk's father was working has closed down because of union problem. His mother collects vegetables from the farmers in the villages and sells them in town. With a little bit of profit she makes from her business, she is taking care of five family members. The high education cost is something which she can not afford. She came to Chris Niwas to ask us if we would help educate one of her children. We find it very difficult to say 'no' to people who are in need, especially those who themselves try very hard to come out of that situation. It's been just little over a month since Wangchuk joined our family and we have already realized how valuable he is for our family. Wangchuk is truly a multi-talented young boy. When one of our children needs a haircut, it is Wangchuk who turns into a barber (in the process he saves our family almost 450 Rupees (\$10) a month which we would have to pay the barber in town. When something needs a coat of fresh paint, he turns into a painter. When I need help to un-clog a clogged downpipe, it is Wangchuk who comes to my help. On top of all that, Wangchuk is a very good student. You couldn't ask anything more from a teenager. We are truly blessed to have such wonderful children in our family. Thank you very much for making it possible for us to have Wangchuk in our family.



**Wangchuk, the barber, the painter and a hard-working student**

Peace, Joy and Love to you all from everyone!

Sudhir, Sashi, Andrew, Apeksha, Anushree, Abhinoy, Namita, Subani, Punam, Patrick, Wangchuk, Sujana, Karan, Kiran, Priyanka