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Our dear Star Action supporters,

Your continuing support and interest in the work of Star Action means a lot to me, and especially in these last months following the passing on 25th April of my dear partner and co-founder of our little charity, Stuart Neil.

Some of you will have received my email about Stuart's passing and thankfulness for your gifts to Star Action in memory of his life of service. I also explained that my son Michael, who has many years of charity experience and is currently working for WWF, Worldwide Fund for nature, and now one of Star Action's trustees, has taken on Stuart's role of looking after all the finance and helping us continue our projects.

All Star Action correspondence should now be addressed to:

Star Action, Michael Dent, 53 Grove Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 1BJ. Or email him at: staractioncharity@gmail.com. You can also call him if you want to discuss any aspect of our work: +44 7906 724709

Thank you again for all your support and with good wishes for Christmas and the New Year ahead.

(and our Trustees)



Flooding in Kathmandu



Sasees with this year's Avocado harvest

TRIBUTE IN MEMORY OF OUR CO-FOUNDER STUART NEIL

by Jenny



Stuart in conversation with Rohan

Star Action owes its beginning to Stuart. After many years leading Emergency teams into 'disaster zones' following floods, earthquakes and during wars, and with special training with the United Nations in Geneva, when the Boxing Day (in 2005) Tsunami devastated parts of South-East Asia, Stuart very quickly decided to offer his help in Sri Lanka, where he had colleagues in Medecin Sans Frontier. I had some holiday due, and knowing I wanted to bring together my spiritual work for the religious charity I had grown up in, (the White Eagle Lodge), with practical action, Stuart invited me to go with him to do what we could to help survivors along the devastated East Coast of Sri Lanka. (See our website for more about this time.)



Images from devastated Eastern Sri Lanka

Stuart was also passionate about helping the vulnerable, such as the women and children, through practical help such as lorry loads of blankets, clothes and food

The civil war had re-started at this time, and the 'Tamil Tigers' were very active in this region, but Stuart was determined and tireless - two qualities I much admired. We met Rohan's father, Upali, who was trying to bring greater understanding between the warring factions, as well as make sure the post tsunami aid which was coming from various overseas charities actually got through to where it was needed. After this initial visit, we returned as often as we could, and soon found that one of the key issues with aid is making sure it really gets to those in need, and its use is constantly monitored.

One of the strengths of Star Action is that, helped by the key people in each area where we work, we keep a close personal watch on everything. Stuart was brilliant at this, making sure that every donation was used in the best possible way.

He is already sadly missed, but thanks to Michael's help, with Kate and Joan's support, we plan to continue and hopefully expand the work we are doing.



Stuart Neil

OUR WORK IN NEPAL

When I wrote last time, I also shared the sad news I had just received from Keshav, in Kathmandu, of the terrible flooding in Nepal and asked for emergency donations. Response was immediate and enabled Star Action to offer Keshav some much appreciated help. He has written:

“With the funds you kindly arranged for the flood victims in Nepal, we were able to help 14 families with rations (rice, lentil, oil, salt, etc.) and some sanitary items (soaps, hand wash, etc.).

As you can see, our help has brought smiles to the faces of these people as this will sustain them for some time in this difficult situation. Each one has thanked you both and Star Action for all the help.



Since writing this, Nepal has been hit by another disaster in the form of an earthquake in the West of the country, not far from the Pokhara region. Keshav writes:

“The situation here is dire and the affected communities are in urgent need of food, clean water, medical supplies and shelter ... any help from our StarAction supporters would be highly appreciated.”



Temporary shelter following the recent earthquake in Nepal

OUR STAR ACTION SCHOOL IN GHANA

As we told you in our Newsletter last Christmas, we now have a kind volunteer helper Samuel Ampong, who is visiting the school regularly where we sponsor ten little children, whose parents would not be able to pay, for their school fees, (no free education in Ghana!), uniforms and lunches, making sure they have at least one good meal a day. Samuel talks with the headmaster and parents, checks on our sponsored children, and reports to Fred and Hamida.

The greatest need for the school now is a reliable electricity supply and we are hoping to install solar panels to provide this. Hamida has been personally raising funds towards this in lieu of 70th birthday gifts, but we still have a way to go!



Hamida with Fred and some of our Asiakwa students

OUR BRIGHTER LIFE CHILDREN'S HOME IN SOUTH INDIA

Our house-parents, Richard and Sasees were devastated when we told them of Stuart's death - he was like a father to them. Uncle, as they called him, in keeping with the traditional Indian form of address, always appreciated that they gave up their teaching careers, with government pensions, to take on the running of our orphanage, started by his daughter, Kate, when she was only 18. Even from that young age, she was following in her father's footsteps, wanting to help those less fortunate than herself.

It really comforted them to have Kate visit in July - a trip which had been arranged by Stuart before his passing, and now grandson, Ben, is there with them all for the Diwali festivities and Ben is able to help the older boys with their English, giving them an understanding of what life is like for young people in the UK. All our Bright Life children are very much part of a united family, and our help continues with career training after their schooling is completed. We have paid for Sanjeep and Sabir (both age 18) to start a Hotel Management course which has good career prospects.



Sanjeep & Sabir

These two lads came to us from illiterate tea plantation families where they would have been stuck forever in 'the poverty trap'. Stuart wore for many years a bracelet on his wrist 'End Poverty Now' - and he certainly did everything he could to make this happen for as many children as possible.



Sasees with two local girls we are supporting to stay in education

He was also passionate about giving girls greater possibility for career training. In the areas where Star Action works, for most girls from poor families the only 'career prospect' is marriage and babies. For some years now we have been offering financial assistance to older girls who have done well with their school studies but with no money for further education. (see our last year's Christmas Newsletter with photos and information about our Muslim girls - Shakeenah, Zahra and Fatima). Then in 2019 we began to help girls living near our Brighter Life home, (where currently strict government regulations means we can only house boys) by encouraging their families to send the girls to school and providing money for uniforms and books. This is closely monitored by Sasees, and is going well. Thanks to your support we have been able to take on two more families during the summer.

Then, this October Sasees told us of the sad case of two little boys whose mother had just run away with a new boyfriend leaving them in the care of an elderly grandfather.



How could we refuse to help Nagararajan and Meenatchi? We couldn't, of course, so hopefully with your continued support we can keep things going as Stuart would wish! (I believe he is happy in his 'heavenly life', and encouraging us all to 'keep on keeping on'!)

OUR WORK IN SRI LANKA

It is a while since I have been able to actually visit Sri Lanka. My planned visit last April was cancelled due to the very sad conditions there with street riots, food shortages and no diesel for journeying across the island to monitor our various projects and visit the schools we are helping.

Rohan, who looks after our work in Sri Lanka reports that conditions are still really difficult for the poorer people with huge inflation and food shortages.

The political situation has only improved slightly, and there is still much unrest, but Rohan feels it will be OK for me and Michael to visit in March next year (2024) to check up on all our projects.



Rohan distributing food to a hungry old man in Colombo

We are hoping that Richard and Sasees can join us there for a few days, as their help is invaluable. As Tamil speakers, the language of most of the people we are helping now, they can discuss things in depth without the need for translation. Rohan's native language is Sinhala, the main language of Sri Lanka, but he is fluent in English, and deeply committed to helping us with the work of Star Action.





Our dear Stuart
1943 -2023

