

“Fill the gaps”. That was the advice of Mr Ariff, Mayor of Galle, Sri Lanka last January when I asked how we might best use the money people had, with great generosity, donated to our Tsunami Appeal.

Galle was one of the worst affected areas in Sri Lanka. Already underway we have a family centre that will include a children’s therapy pool and a comprehensive care programme. The centre will employ amongst its staff: carers, therapists, educationalists, a nurse, volunteer doctors and dentists.

Sylvester Joseph is the pastor of a church in Bogawantalawa, a small town in the hills amongst the tea plantations. Sylvester’s church runs a special school for children with learning difficulties, an excellent work that we have supported through our Child Action International programme for several years. Whilst Sylvester’s church was not directly affected by the Tsunami, many sister churches on the East coast were, and by the turn of the year the hill country churches were organising weekly aid trips.

The East Coast of Sri Lanka took the full force of a 60-foot wave that destroyed everything within hundreds of yards of the beach and leaving very few families unaffected. The death toll was in the tens of thousands. Its remoteness from the major cities of Colombo, Kandy and Galle, and the long-standing troubles between the Sinhalese army and the Tamil Tigers, have led to the impoverished region being largely ignored by a tourist industry that brings in millions of pounds to the island every year.

Following the tragedy a major issue was for people to get to work and children to school, so one of the first things we did was to buy a shipment of bicycles. Thirty-five were delivered to Ravi, pastor of a church in Batticaloa, which he distributed. Others in the region received not only bicycles but also vanloads of household goods, schoolbooks and equipment... and a few cricket bats – number one request of every schoolboy.

*Crossroads* of Hong Kong, a charity specialising in ‘gifts in kind’ aid, kindly donated a container of goods to our Tsunami Appeal. Household goods, crockery, baby food, medicines, vitamins and more bicycles were shipped in. It was quite costly, customs paperwork and shipping agent’s charges cost us £4’500, but we considered it well worth it as the value of the new and nearly-new goods in the container was £ 20’000 at Sri Lankan prices.

The country still faces a daunting task in Rebuilding and re-equipping homes but the even bigger challenge of dealing with the psychological trauma caused, also has to be addressed. The effects of being involved in such a disaster are far reaching. The Epiphany Trust has teamed up with Jigsaw 4U to help individuals who are feeling such loss, anger, helplessness, and in many cases, guilt at surviving where so many perished.

Jigsaw 4U was the vision of Anne Davies, a committed Christian, who set up the organisation because she felt she had much to share from her own experiences of bereavement and loss. Jigsaw, as the name implies, is all about putting the pieces back together in broken lives. This summer we invited Jigsaw to provide a team to go to Sri Lanka. Nine counsellors spent three weeks visiting each of the communities where we have provided aid. The trip was a great success with over 200 adults and 150 children, (all of whom have lost relatives and friends) attending the ten counselling sessions. We are now considering providing a round the year programme with counsellors going out on a rota basis.