



Issue 25 – March 2013

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Dear fellow-members of the TS and TOS around the world,

In 2013 we are looking forward to building on our achievements of the past years. In particular, we are excited about the opportunity for working with representatives from many of our groups at the international TOS Conference in July. Here, we will collectively share ideas, celebrate successes, and refine our plans for this decade as an international TOS community.

We are happy to let you know that with the last-minute help of many of you, we were able to qualify for the 2012 Kern Foundation matching grant of US\$18,000 to support the Golden Link College in the Philippines. A big thank you!

Remember that the newsletter is designed to be read while you are connected to the internet.

Please also consider sending photographs of your TOS activities and news items that might be of interest to fellow TOS members. We would welcome your contributions by email to the editors at carolyn.tosinternational@gmail.com.

With best wishes in putting theosophical principles into action,

Carolyn, Diana and Geoffrey



The editorial team (*L. to R.*)

Diana Dunningham Chapotin is the International Secretary of the TOS

Geoffrey Harrod is the International TOS Webmaster and Carolyn Harrod is the past National Coordinator of the TOS in Australia.

There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.

The Dalai Lama



The TOS honours Aman Amir

It is with sadness that we let you know of the passing to higher service on January 3 of the Hon. Treasurer of the TOS in Pakistan, Mr Aman Amir, in his 75th year. Aman was closely associated with both the Theosophical Society and the Theosophical Order of Service for several decades. His determination to keep both these institutions alive in Pakistan despite considerable difficulties was a testament to his belief in the universal values shared by all of us. He served both these organisations in a voluntary capacity for a great many years and was deeply involved in their administration, both in Karachi and from Sydney, where he lived for the last several years. We extend our deepest sympathy to his loving wife Fareeda and their daughters Zehra and Azra. [Read more...](#)

Bringing smiles to children's faces in Nairobi

On Saturday 22 December 2012 Christmas festivities had already begun – but not for many in Nairobi, especially the ones living in the impoverished, ill-reputed northern suburb of Gachie. On this eve of the outdoor Christmas Party the TOS in Kenya had planned in cooperation with its fellow organisation, the Karuna Charitable Trust, the sky was overcast and the rain soon came down in buckets. The weather cast a few frowns on the faces of the organisers but when Sunday came the grey clouds dispersed. The sun made its appearance and warmed the hearts of our volunteers and of the 16 children who were looking forward to their party. These are the children who come to read books, be read to, and taught reading by volunteers every second Saturday.

The party was to start at 11 a.m. but the children and Mary, their supervisor arrived well before that. [Read more...](#)





Insights through service

Many TOS members have found that their service to others has brought with it a deeper understanding of themselves, of relationships and of the theosophical principles that inspire their service. In the fifth article in this series, TOS member, Olga Gostin of Adelaide, Australia, relates some of the different kinds of service in which she has engaged during her lifetime and reflects upon the motivation she perceives as having given rise to each – from simple self-interest to impersonal and even anonymous giving.

She writes, "Now in my seventies, I reflect with some amusement on my ongoing volunteering at the Adelaide Botanical Gardens. I provide directions to visitors who come to the Information Centre. It may be as simple as showing where the nearest toilet or drinking fountain is, or as challenging as identifying the garden bed where a particular plant may be found. This is low-level volunteering, and several of my fellow volunteers have expressed frustration at our lack of status. I think this concern touches at the very heart of the whole business of volunteering: it is not about self-preservation, the assuaging of guilt, benefits or self-promotion, social imperatives or bursting the ego bubble – though all of these may well have played a role at some time in one's life.

In the end, I think, it is about being there, doing what needs to be done, and **letting it go**. I look forward to the day when an anonymous rug will land on my own knees, and I hope that I may yet be lucid enough to bless the multitude of fingers that contributed to that gift." [Read more....](#)

TOS news from around the world

In this issue you'll find news from the TOS in **France**, about their project to knit teddies to comfort children and you'll read about the TOS in **The Dominican Republic** that delivered medicine and toys to a foundation for children. There's also news about an initiative of the TOS in **Uruguay** to raise awareness of healthy vegetarian food. Finally, the TOS in **America** shares news about three successful, on-going projects. [Read more....](#)

What's new on the International TOS website?

Our [Latest News](#) this month provides links to the programs for both the international TOS Conference from 23 July to 26 July, 2013 and the Summer National Convention of the TS in America from 19 July to 23 July. You'll also find links to the registration form.

The new [Featured Article](#) is by Pamela Zane Keys, editor of *TheoSophia*, the magazine of the Theosophical Society in New Zealand. This is her third article in a series sharing the personal transformation that can take place when a serious health challenge is faced with the aid of the perennial wisdom.

In our [Featured Project](#) we bring news of an exciting and challenging project initiated by the TOS in Bhubaneswar, "Change the mind-set to stop violence against women." The project was recently launched by the Governor of the State of Odisha in India and had excellent media coverage.

You'll also find additions to the TOS photo gallery and the expanded [Inspiration](#) section. We look forward to adding more new stories and videos over the coming year. Go to <http://international.theoservice.org>

A Charter for Compassion

The Charter for Compassion is a document that transcends religious, ideological and national differences. Supported by leading thinkers from many traditions, the Charter activates the Golden Rule around the world.

The Charter for Compassion is a cooperative effort to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action to the centre of religious, moral and political life. Compassion is the principled determination to put ourselves in the shoes of the other.

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.



Here we see victims of violence standing in two rows with candles to receive the Governor. These girls are not acceptable to their families because of the stigma attached to them. They are staying in a home for the destitute.



The International TOS is a signatory to the Charter which has been translated into more than 30 languages. [Read more and sign the Charter....](#)



The Elders: working for humanity

The Elders are independent global leaders who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.

An occasional newsletter is published: see the link labelled 'Email signup' at the top right corner of every page of the website. The names of the eleven leaders associated with this initiative are: Nelson Mandela (founder), Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu, Mary Robinson, Graça Machel, Fernando H. Cardoso, Martti Ahtisaari, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi and Gro Harlem Brundtland. [To learn more go to their website...](#)



Is there a smarter way to combat hunger?

While billions of dollars are put into providing food aid in poor countries, minimal progress is being made in reducing world hunger. In a report released in October 2012 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, it was estimated that nearly 870 million people, or one in eight, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2010-2012. Since 2007-2008, global progress in reducing hunger has slowed and levelled off. In Africa hunger has actually risen with the number of hungry growing from 175 million to 239 million.

Pedro Sanchez, of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, argues that changes also need to be made in the way that food aid is provided so that funding is shifted from providing grain produced in developed countries to funding agricultural development.

[Read more...](#)



Murmuration: a natural wonder

Murmuration is a mystery of nature. No one knows why they do it, yet each fall, thousands of starlings dance in the twilight above England and Scotland. The birds gather in shape-shifting flocks called murmurations, having migrated in the millions from Russia and Scandinavia to escape winter's frigid bite. Scientists aren't sure how they do it, either. The starlings' murmurations are manifestations of swarm intelligence, which in different contexts is practised by schools of fish, swarms of bees and colonies of ants.

Even complex algorithmic models haven't yet explained the starlings' aerobatics, which rely on the tiny birds' quicksilver reaction time of under 100 milliseconds to avoid aerial collisions and predators in the giant flock. Despite their tour de force in the dusky sky, starlings have declined significantly in the UK in recent years, perhaps because of a decline in suitable nesting sites. The birds still roost in several of Britain's rural pastures, however, settling down to sleep (and chatter) after their evening ballet.

Two young ladies were out for a late afternoon canoe ride and fortunately one of them remembered to bring her video camera. What they saw was a wonderful murmuration display, caught in a short video. Watch the variation of colour and intensity of the patterns that the birds make in proximity to one other. And take a look at the girl in the bow of the canoe watching the aerial display. [View the video....](#)

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- To sign up, you only have to send a message telling us which country you live in to tos.intouch@gmail.com with "Subscribe TOS e-newsletter" in the Subject line.
- If you do not want to receive future newsletters you can easily unsubscribe. All that is needed is a blank message to tos.intouch@gmail.com with "Unsubscribe TOS e-newsletter" in the Subject line.

The TOS honours Aman Amir

It is with sadness that we let you know of the passing to higher service on January 3 of the Hon. Treasurer of the TOS in Pakistan, Mr Aman Amir, in his 75th year. Aman was closely associated with both the Theosophical Society and the Theosophical Order of Service for several decades. His determination to keep both these institutions alive in Pakistan despite considerable difficulties was a testament to his belief in the universal values shared by all of us. He served both these organisations in a voluntary capacity for a great many years and was deeply involved in their administration, both in Karachi and from Sydney, where he lived for the last several years.



Aman never refused anyone who came to him for help; in his quiet way he was responsible for transforming hundreds of lives but he never wanted to be rewarded or even recognised for anything he did. To him, it was enough that he had helped.

A staff member at the TS's headquarters in Karachi, Ms Parveen Akhtar, had this to say about Aman's passing: "We at TOS are all heartbroken by the demise of Mr Amanullah. He was most admirable and loved by all of us and truly he was the best leader, who cared so much for his staff. Madam Fareeda herself is a very kindhearted person, who takes immense care of her staff. We all share her grief equally."

Aman's daughter Zehra writes: "As children my father taught us how to stand up for what we believed in, to be independent and to believe that we could achieve all that we wanted. His support and encouragement meant a great deal to us. He adored my mother and I have never seen a couple so happy together. He certainly taught us a great deal about selflessness and unconditional love. We feel that the best way to honour his memory is to celebrate his life and to live ours in a way that would make him proud."

Since the TOS's educational work in Pakistan is substantial, skilled and prudent financial management of donations is required. By his outstanding work in this area and the rock solid support he gave to his wife Fareeda in her challenging role as Honorary General Secretary, Aman has helped the TOS to carry on its work in conditions of political volatility and social violence that few other groups could have managed. The TOS in Australia in particular has been inspired by Aman and Fareeda to extend long term support and has recently set up a custodial account in Sydney for incoming donations from TOS groups around the world.

The TOS would like to take this opportunity to salute both Aman and Fareeda for their considerable personal sacrifice. Their dignity, courage, humility, compassion and graciousness mark them out as two of life's very special people. Again, we send our most loving thoughts to Fareeda and her family.

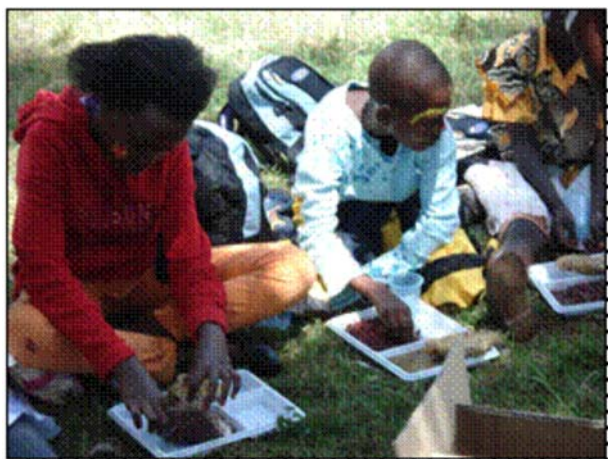


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The party was to start at 11 a.m. but the children and Mary, their supervisor arrived well before that. So did Mitesh, Payal and Diya from TOS and Panna, Brij, Gideon, Sheela and Keirav from Karuna.

The children were gathered together and started singing a welcome song to the organisers. It brought tears to my eyes to see the effort some of them had made to dress up for the event. Their clothes were worn out but clean, the shoes some of them had on were just being held together by luck, worn to the bare soles, but the happiness, dedication and warmth they displayed in singing Christmas carols and saying their prayers were enough to bring in the party spirit.



We started by playing 'pass the parcel' and what fun we had. Everyone joined in with gusto. It took a while for each of them to get a turn. By now the number had increased to 21 as some children passing by had asked if they could join in.

Now face painting started. The queue for Keiya was much longer than for Usha as Keiya knew exactly what faces the children wanted, but it was a huge success.

Spiderman, Batman, butterflies, etc. were now ready for lunch: chapatis, beans and green lentils. This is a special Kenyan Christmas meal. The children ate with relish till they were full. I noticed a child putting a packet of beans in his pocket and chapatis in his sachet and when I asked him why, he said it was for his sibling at home – a true Christmas spirit of sharing and caring.

Now came the time for parcels of gifts. The TOS and Karuna had received articles from friends and well-wishers, so each child received some Christmas presents: the famous Rome teddy bears, extra soft toys from a well-wisher in London, a satchel, sweets, chocolates, pencils, coloured pencils, a packet of maize meal, erasers and, to top it all, a pair of tennis shoes and a pair of slippers.

The children could not believe their eyes. The look of bliss on their faces was heart-warming! What a great start to their Christmas and what a great start to the Christmas of our TOS and Karuna volunteers.



By 2.30 p.m. the party was over. The time had simply flown by. The children and Mary left waving their hands saying “thanks” and “bye” till the last minute when they could not be seen any more.

There were some toys left in the car so as I drove along, I stopped whenever I saw a small child and gave him or her one. It is so rewarding to bring a smile to a person's face, especially a child's. Yes! Yes! TOS and KCT brought smiles to the faces of all those 21 children and felt greatly blessed.

TOS Italy: your teddies have made us do things we never thought we would do. Blessings on all your members and friends who knitted the toys. Blessings to all gift donors and to all in TOS and Karuna, Kenya.

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Insights through service

Many TOS members have found that their service to others has brought with it a deeper understanding of themselves, of relationships and of the theosophical principles that inspire their service. In the fifth article in this series, TOS member, Olga Gostin of Adelaide, Australia, relates some of the different kinds of service in which she has engaged during her lifetime and reflects upon the motivation she perceives as having given rise to each – from simple self-interest to impersonal and even anonymous giving.



I was the sixth child in a family of nine siblings. In these circumstances, everyone had to help out around the house, as can well be imagined. One could either 'volunteer' (and hope to goodness to get one's choice) or accept the job allocated. I put up my hand for laundering and darning and left the kitchen to my three sisters and my mother. This was a choice based on sheer **cowardice** – laundering mishaps could easily be rectified but cooking disasters could not. We were poor in the 1950s as recent migrants to South Africa. Food was sufficient but could not be wasted – indeed our wartime experiences in Belgium put a hallowed aura round the whole business of growing, purchasing and preparing food. A crème brûlée which was indeed burnt had to be served, vegetables forgotten on the stove while we played volleyball had to be rescued and the smell dissipated before my father got wind of the disaster.

Ah, the luxury of laundering at one's own pace – though there were snags too: if there was no wind, there was no water, as the pump only provided water erratically, and tank water was sacrosanct for domestic/food use only. Clothes, and especially towels and sheets, then had to be washed at the river. There was no-one to critique or direct the laundering process at the river, and if the dog did run over the sheets spread out to dry on the bushes, one could always re-rinse and no one would be any the wiser. Thus though my opting for laundering duties was motivated by self-interest and a fear of exposure through inept cooking, it is only fair to observe that I have been playing catch-up in the kitchen ever since. There is some deeper lesson implied in that, I'm sure, and my long-suffering spouse Victor is the recipient of my culinary cowardice of those formative years.

My first significant volunteer work as an adult took place in Papua as a budding anthropologist in the mid-sixties. It was my first encounter with sheer destitution and I felt dreadfully **guilty** about my relative affluence compared to the local indigenous people amongst whom I had come to live for two years. Increasingly I questioned the validity and luxury of being a 'scientific' observer of the process of resettlement of the Kuni people who had relocated from their mountainous homelands where the traditional lifestyle could no longer be sustained for a variety of reasons.



I volunteered to apply special medication to the populace on a daily basis, so as to combat the effects of grilly – a very contagious skin disease. This activity, which took up 1-2 hours daily, somehow salvaged the mind and heart but went totally against the grain of academic practice. When my supervisor from the Australian National University came to visit, she was appalled by my 'do-gooding' activities and this led to major realignment of my anthropological mind-set. I challenged her criticism of my approach, refused to stop applying medicine, and was recalled to Canberra. There I had to plead my case that what mattered was academic outcome, not the method of attaining data. It was a double-edged argument, but enough to warrant a change in supervisor and a return to Papua. With hindsight, my supervisor had been right: I wasn't really cut out to grace the halls of learned academia; I found much of the post-modern debate fatuous and meaningless. Instead, I was irresistibly drawn to working or volunteering with people who needed a boost to achieve their innate potentials.

The next phase in volunteering was in the seventies and eighties when as a wife and mother in Adelaide, I joined forces in kindergarten, then primary and high school fund-raising activities, helping in the canteen, digging holes in the school oval for benches, offering French tuition, joining Parents and Friends Committees and the like. Life in suburban Australia was totally alien to me and these activities were my initiation into community living and the marvellous institution of self-help and volunteering which is so much part of the fabric of Australian life. My involvement was nevertheless still somewhat **self-interested** since it grew out of a concern for the welfare of my own children.

At the same time, however, I was exposed to another, more **disinterested** type of volunteering revolving around a neighbour who had set up a group of some ten women who would meet twice a week in her garage to make quilts, do T-shirts and provide shawls, blankets and other handiwork as requested by local hospitals, nursing homes and women's refuges. This was disinterested, collegiate action with the set goal of giving to others without any expectation of a return. Though we have recently moved away from that suburb, I have maintained my connection to this group through knitting endless squares and strips for wheelchair-bound persons. Somebody else puts the bits together, and yet another volunteer delivers the articles as requested. It is very satisfying to be an anonymous link in a chain of contributions which end up on someone's lap.



There are times when volunteering is non-negotiable; it is a **social imperative**. Such, for example, was the request from the Adelaide Children's Hospital (ACH) that I become a temporary surrogate parent to Mauritian children who were flown from the island to Adelaide for open-heart surgery. The flight was at the city's expense and the operation was free, as a gift from the surgeon, Dr Goldblatt, and the ACH. No adults accompanied the children and our home became their refuge for three weeks prior to the operation and two weeks thereafter. I had been targeted by the hospital because we were then hosting Mauritian tertiary students and French is my home language. The five years of association with Mauritian kids enriched us way more than we ever contributed to the children's wellbeing. What was particularly edifying was that one volunteered as a part of a team doing just what had to be done – no fuss, no ceremony, no formal recognition. In time, South Africa became a cheaper option for surgery for Mauritians and the Adelaide connection wound down.

Much the same imperative applied in the late seventies when we became involved with Vietnamese refugees. Here again, the ramifications of volunteering extended way beyond one's relatively insignificant contribution. In 1978 we rallied to a call for host families or mentors for new arrivals in Adelaide and went to the Refugee Association's gathering intending to link up with a family with children roughly the same age as our own, then seven and five years old. As luck would have it, the call came through the loudspeaker asking for any French speakers, and despite a gut-feeling that a roller-coaster journey was about to unfold, we identified ourselves and landed five teenagers, cousins aged 15-19. This is neither the time nor the place to relate the ups and downs of our joint journey of the past four decades, but I do want to share the following anecdote.



Whereas the Refugee Association provided a flat for the young people, the furnishing and rigging out of amenities was our problem. I remember taking my trusty wheelbarrow down our street and collecting crockery, cutlery, bedding, chairs and lamps from our wonderful neighbours. I made a point of bypassing one house since I knew that the husband had been in Vietnam as a soldier and had returned traumatised, and not at all sympathetic to the refugee cause. Within an hour his wife came to my door inquiring why I had bypassed her house. I shared my reasoning. She just took me by the shoulders: "Where there is need, there is need. Full stop. Come to my place with your car: we have beds to spare." Need one say more?

It would not do to itemise 'successful' volunteering without mentioning an important fiasco, relating to what I would call '**possessive**' volunteering. It was 2000, I had just retired from the Aboriginal Task Force where I had taught tertiary Indigenous students for 30 years, and I was at a loose end. My daughter suggested I volunteer at her NGO, the Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia. The kitchen needed a volunteer to help preparing lunches for the clients and help train people with mental illness to take some responsibility in this task. Over the next two years I discovered an interesting, and not so edifying aspect to my personal involvement as a volunteer. While still a 'new chum', I enthusiastically learned the ropes, monitored supplies of bread and condiments, and supervised the washing up and cleaning of the kitchen, all the time engaging clients to take control. As the months passed, though, I became aware of waste and other practices which were strictly speaking not mine to own, much less redress. What had started as volunteering based on caring neutrality, gradually became a source of internal questioning and critique. It came to me suddenly and very clearly that I had made a mental shift from volunteering to 'owning' some of the issues. It was time to sack myself and disengage without hurting others or undermining their practices. Volunteering is not about imposing one's imprint on anything. It is about working with others, within their pre-determined order. Sometimes things change for the better; sometimes it is better to call it a day. What is absolutely certain, to my mind at least, is that ego and volunteering are a bad mix.

Now in my seventies, I reflect with some amusement on my ongoing volunteering at the Adelaide Botanical Gardens. As I have poor retentive memory, I am not a guide (a prestigious, high-level and well publicised type of volunteering) but simply provide directions to visitors who come to the Information Centre. It may be as simple as showing where the nearest toilet or drinking fountain is, or as challenging as identifying the garden bed where a particular plant may be found. This is low-level volunteering, and several of my fellow volunteers have expressed frustration at our lack of status. I think this concern touches at the very heart of the whole business of volunteering: it is not about self-preservation, the assuaging of guilt, benefits or self-promotion, social imperatives or bursting the ego bubble – though all of these may well have played a role at some time in one's life.



In the end, I think, it is about being there, doing what needs to be done, **and letting it go**. I look forward to the day when an anonymous rug will land on my own knees, and I hope that I may yet be lucid enough to bless the multitude of fingers that contributed to that gift.

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TOS news from around the world

The TOS in France: a bouquet of teddies!

We have reported more than once on the outstanding work of TOS members and friends in England and Italy knitting teddies to comfort small children who have to go into hospital. (To date some twelve thousand teddies have been collected by the TOS in England.) Now the French TOS has taken up its knitting needles!



In early January, Armande and Paulette launched the project at a meeting of the TOS in Paris. They gave away bags of donated wool and stuffing to the volunteer knitters present.



Old friends, George and Madeleine, declined to join the knitting project but lent encouragement. The two have been supporting the TOS for at least 35 years.

The TOS in the Dominican Republic: bringing joy to children

The first activity for 2013 of the TOS in the Dominican Republic was to deliver medicine and toys to the Fundación Vida y Esperanza (Life and Hope Foundation) in Santo Domingo.

Our Correspondent, Maria Amparo Sanchez Franco, was accompanied by Felipe de Castro and Miguel Saviñon. They met with the President of the Foundation, Ms Juana Carpio.





The TOS in Uruguay: Raising awareness of healthy vegetarian food

As part of TOS activities in Uruguay, vegetarian cookery classes are being given at the TS premises in Montevideo. Apparently some of the participants attend the demonstrations on the recommendation of their doctors.

Here we see Silvia Anon dispensing sound nutritional advice.



The TOS in America: three successful, on-going projects

Support for Native American education

For the second time, the TOS in America has granted a \$3,000 scholarship to a Native American student displaying both merit and need. This amount is helping to cover 27-year-old Natasha Ferguson's expenses in her final year of training at a college school of nursing. She was selected by the college according to criteria set by the TOS.

Natasha is a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe from the Pine Ridge Reservation in North Dakota. "After graduation," she says, "I hope to give back to the Native American community by working as a Registered Nurse within the Indian Health Service. After gaining some experience and settling in as an RN, I plan on finishing my education by obtaining a Bachelor of Science in nursing. I extend to you my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for your donation to the Oglala College Nursing Program."



"One of my goals is to graduate in the top of my nursing class," writes Natasha.



The Trees for War Veterans programme got underway in 2011 and is doing well.

Trees for war veterans

Citizens sent to fight overseas often return traumatized by their experience, as we know – and sometimes they don't return at all.

David Ely, a TOS member from the Northeast of the United States, has created a project called "Trees for Vets".

People wishing to honour a war veteran, and help the environment, donate to have a tree planted in their veteran's name.

The Chushul home for children in Tibet

On trips made to Tibet in 2008 and 2009, American and other international Theosophists visited an orphanage of around 30 children near Lhasa, Tibet. The visitors were touched by the needs of the children and the efforts of the management to meet their needs. As a result of this contact, and with the assistance of Tibetologist Glenn Mullin, the American TS worked with the American TOS to establish a project that would improve the conditions for the children at Chushul. Fund raising was so successful that they were able to add bathroom facilities, a septic system and some new dormitory space. All work is carefully coordinated with Peggy Day of Peggy Day Adventures in order to assure effective and appropriate use of the funds. Support is still extended each year.

Below, you see Betty and David Bland visiting the home.





Is there a smarter way to combat hunger?



While billions of dollars are put into providing food aid in poor countries, minimal progress is being made in reducing world hunger. In a report released in October 2012 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, it was estimated that nearly 870 million people, or one in eight, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2010-2012. Since 2007-2008, global progress in reducing hunger has slowed and levelled off. In Africa hunger has actually risen with the number of hungry growing from 175 million to 239 million.

The report underlines that overall growth is necessary but not sufficient for a sustained hunger reduction. Agricultural growth is particularly effective in reducing hunger and malnutrition in poor countries since most of the poor depend on agriculture and related activities for at least part of their livelihoods. According to the report, agricultural growth involving smallholders, especially women, will be most effective in reducing extreme poverty and hunger when it generates employment for the poor.

In an article in the 12 March 2009 issue of *Nature*, Pedro Sanchez, of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, argues that changes also need to be made in the way that food aid is provided so that funding is shifted from providing grain produced in developed countries to funding agricultural development.

According to Sanchez, food aid fails to provide a sustainable solution to hunger and poverty and is comparatively expensive. For instance, it costs approximately \$812 to deliver one tonne of maize as USA food aid to a distribution point in Africa. In contrast, several agricultural development projects have shown that by providing training, fertiliser and hybrid seeds to African farmers, for less than one sixth of the food aid costs, yields have increased to an extent where farmers have considerable surplus. As much emergency food aid as possible could then be purchased from African farmers.



The results of these projects suggest that the sustainable way forward is to use increasingly larger proportions of the international food aid budget to provide training, markets and resources to local farmers. This strategy enables farmers to grow food to feed themselves, to sell the surplus and to diversify into high-value crops, livestock and tree products. As Sanchez argues, "This creates a sustainable exit from the poverty trap, thereby decreasing the requirement for aid."