



## The India Rural Evangelical Fellowship (UK)

(Recognised Scottish Charity, number SC033100)

### **CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRES**

*A new initiative from IREF(India)*

#### **What is IREF?**

The *India Rural Evangelical Fellowship (IREF)* is an indigenous Indian Christian organisation, working primarily amongst rural people in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It was founded by a former teacher, Prasada Rao Rebba, in 1950. As well as its church-planting and evangelistic activities, it runs two boarding schools, a Degree College, a Teacher-Training College, and Nurses' College. It is also involved in extensive relief work.

Living conditions for the many farm-workers and fishermen in the coastal area of Andhra Pradesh, where IREF is based, are very harsh. Poverty is an ever-present problem, due to a lack of work for substantial periods of the year (i.e. in between the rice-planting and harvesting months of the year). Frequent natural disasters, (such as cyclones and monsoon-season floods), fires and epidemics exacerbate the situation. As a result, many of the rural communities in and around the large town of Repalle (where IREF's headquarters are based) suffer from acute social and educational deprivation.

#### **IREF's Schools**

Over the years, IREF has been addressing the needs of children and young people in some of these deprived rural communities by establishing schools with boarding facilities. These are providing a good standard of academic and spiritual education, as well as shelter, food, clothing and basic health care - all in a loving, caring Christian atmosphere. IREF seeks to maintain the centrality of Jesus Christ in all its work. It is aware of its strategic role in spreading the Christian message throughout India, knowing that many of the children nurtured and trained through its schools will become future leaders and teachers of the Christian church in India.

#### **Child Development Centres**

IREF has recently initiated a new work, designed to cater for the needs of even more children from deprived rural backgrounds. It is becoming increasingly difficult to provide sufficient accommodation for the large number of children whose parents want them to join IREF's hostel-based (boarding) schools. It is also a long and expensive process to obtain government registration for such schools.

So a number of village-based *Child Development Centres* are being established, through which children benefit from an IREF style of education, whilst being able to live at home with their own families. The new initiatives are taking place in villages where IREF has already been serving the local community through its evangelist-pastors (and/or Bible Ladies), and has been able to establish its own permanent Church building.

#### **Why are CDC's needed?**

Many of the rural villages in Andhra Pradesh already have a government-run school, catering for children up to the age of 10. But the education most of them can offer is quite limited. They are normally staffed by only one teacher, who has the daunting task of trying to meet the educational needs of pupils across the entire primary age-range.

IREF's CDC's seek to enhance the education a child receives through its government-run school, by providing additional tuition after school hours (parents often have to work in the rice fields in the evenings and at weekends).

#### **What the CDC's provide**

Each CDC is staffed by *at least two qualified teachers* - a Project Manager, a Tutor, and other staff as required. The staff live at the centre and hold *a general tutoring session* for the children

every day after school hours, from about 5.00pm, for 3-4 hours (rather like a Homework/After-school Club).

*Health care and hygiene classes, physical and recreational activities, and spiritual education* are included in the curriculum for each child, alongside its academic studies. Details of the programme each CDC follows are given below.

*Refreshments* are provided for each child when he/she arrives at the centre, and *supper* is provided at the end of the tutoring session.

*Attendance Registers* are maintained on a daily basis, and the pupils' academic and all-round developments are carefully monitored.

On Sundays, the children are encouraged to attend IREF's village church service, along with their parents. The children's *Sunday School* classes are conducted by one or more of the Project Staff members. Parents are encouraged to attend the church services, as part of the support IREF can offer them, but there is no element of compulsion or coercion.

### **Who attends the CDC's?**

Typically, *children from the poorest families* in each village attend the CDC's. Usually these are children of farm-workers, fishermen, or labourers.

Village people in Andhra Pradesh traditionally belong to a particular caste community, often based on a parent's occupation. Families from the higher castes (often landowners or those in better-paid occupations) seek the best educational opportunities for their children by paying for them out of their own means.

*IREF's CDCs offer the poorest families in a village free enhanced education for their children*, as well as free food (one nourishing meal a day), free clothing (in the form of school uniform), and free basic health and hygiene care.

Typically, one or two children per family attend IREF's CDCs (most families in Andhra Pradesh are limited to two children), depending on their age range and that of the CDC. *No children who wished to attend a CDC are turned away* on the grounds of their religion, social background, or wealth.

### **What are the advantages of a CDC?**

IREF's CDCs are designed to provide vital support for *whole families* in deprived rural communities. They help parents bring up their children in the best possible way. The parental love, care and home-environment that the children continue to enjoy by being based in their own homes (as opposed to living away from home in one of IREF's hostel-based schools) undoubtedly has a beneficial effect on the mental and physical health of each child. Each CDC places a strong emphasis on the family home as the ideal setting for each child's personal development. Instead of children being moved out of their home environment to board at one of IREF's hostel-based schools, children benefit from attending a school within their own village, from the security of their own home.

### **How the CDCs are financed**

The finances for each child's academic education (teachers' salaries, running costs, books, a school uniform, and one nourishing meal a day) are met through IREF's *CDC Child Sponsorship Scheme* (currently £102 per year, half the level of sponsorship for a child at one of IREF's boarding schools). The *start up cost* for each CDC is currently £600. A small proportion of the funding will be used by IREF to cover its administrative costs for each child.

### **Future developments**

IREF's first CDC, for 50 children, opened in the village of *Akkivariipalem* in the autumn of 2003. The second CDC, for a further 60 children, opened in the village of *Ullipalem* in August 2004. Several other CDCs have opened since and more are planned. The CDC's typically cater for 50-100 children.

### **For further information contact**

Revd David Hunt, Chairman of IREF(UK)

Address: *94 Sunnyside Road, Sunnyside,  
Newcastle upon Tyne NE16 5NF*

Telephone & fax: *0191 488 3433*

e-mail: *IREF@drghunt.freeserve.co.uk*

## **Outline programme for each CDC**

### **A. Academic:**

1. School curriculum subjects, homework classes, weekly tests.
2. Special tutoring sessions where necessary, for individual pupils.
3. Exam preparation and techniques.

### **B. Physical:**

1. Daily games and sports competitions;
2. Health screening, health talks, medical check-ups and follow-up;
3. First Aid demonstrations.

### **C. Social:**

1. Environmental education, such as gardening, cleaning the premises, tree planting;
2. Life-skills, such as letter writing;
3. Excursions & picnics.

### **D. Spiritual:**

1. Sunday School: flannel-graph lessons, action songs, memory verses, story telling, Bible quizzes, memorising the books of the Bible, nativity play, etc.;
2. Competitions: memory verses, and singing;
3. IREF's children's camp, and Children's Bible school, after annual exams;
4. IREF's annual Youth Conference and Bible Conference.

### **E. Parental education:**

1. General awareness programmes;
2. Health & hygiene, social behaviour;
3. Church-going, Gospel and Crusade Meetings.

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