

Report back to The Funding Network

1. Name of your organisation and date funded by TFN:

The Friends of the Children of Orissa, via its partner organisation SOCH (Society for Children). Funding was granted following our presentation on November 30th 2015 in the sum of £ 9,350.78

2. What was the project you sought funding for from TFN?

We sought funding on behalf of SOCH, for the expansion of its programme in Orissa, which we refer to colloquially as the 4 Rs – to Rescue Runaway children from Railway stations and Reunite them with their families, if safe to do so.

Specifically, we wanted to open a fourth station hub, at Puri, a famous temple city on the Bay of Bengal, in addition to the three hubs already operating in Bhubaneswar, Khurda and Berhampur.

The aims and objectives of SOCH remain the same, but have expanded in terms of scope and ambition.

3. Were you able to do this work as you described it in your application and presentation?

Yes, but not as quickly as we had hoped, as we explain below.

4. If you were not able, please explain what happened and why?

We have successfully opened our hub operation at Puri but we were delayed in doing so for a number of reasons.

First, the budget for opening the Puri Station at the time of our presentation, was approximately £17,000 when converted to sterling, including set-up and equipment, and running costs for one year. TFN's generous grant has helped us to reach more than 50% of that target, but we needed additional funds before we could start. We were granted such funds by another organisation but their funding did not come in until late Spring 2016.

Then, unfortunately for our charity, the sterling crash immediately following the Brexit vote, meant that our costs were effectively increased by about 17%. With some redeployment of our resources and additional minor funding for this specific project, we made up the difference and hit our funding target by late summer, allowing us to start operational planning, by liaising with the various state and federal authorities, and other stakeholders, in order to build the network of "partners" at Puri station, including the two different police forces which are at every major station in India, and the porters, cleaners, vendors and the railway authorities without whose goodwill and co-operation the Rescue work cannot be carried out. It will come as no surprise to TFN that, in a country like India, this takes time.

Finally, in September 2016, as we were about to launch at Puri, we experienced a worrying incident at one of the other 3 station hubs, during which members of our staff were intimidated by local criminals whose child trafficking business interests are threatened by the rescue work we are trying to carry out. This has caused us to review our security arrangements and build stronger relations with railway and local police forces.

Puri Launch

Despite these challenges, we are pleased to report that the Puri Station Hub is now operational, as of mid-October 2016. The same principles outlined during our presentation are being followed. That is to say, a small team of uniformed outreach workers is patrolling the busiest platforms at Puri Station, looking for single children who look abandoned or distressed. Once they have gained the child's confidence, he or she is invited back to the Shelter, often frightened, dirty and hungry, to be offered food, rest and counselling. Usually the child will give us the mobile number of their family and a reunion can be arranged, if safe. If this is not possible, the SOCH team will refer the child to the local government's official CWC (Child Welfare Committee) for harbour in an appropriate care environment.

It is very early days and it should be remembered that Puri is likely to have significant peaks during the 13 major festivals linked to the famous Jagannath temple, including the Ratha Yatra festival, when up to 6 million visitors throng the streets.

To date, at Puri the team have rescued 8 children from Puri platforms, and managed to reunite 5 of them with their families, the remaining 3 still being counselled as we write this report.

5. Can you quantify any changes? Eg ...expanding number of employees, number of projects, geographical scope.

The Opening of Puri station hub, has increased the number of operational hubs by 25%. When fully operational at peak festival times, it will give rise to approximately the same percentage rise in employees. It increases the geographical coverage by including a major coastal area for the first time.

To put this into context, we believe that the Puri station hub will add significantly to the total number of children rescued by SOCH at the other three operational stations where, in the month of September 2016, 99 children were rescued, of whom 88 were reunited with their families. The other 11 children have been safely accommodated in appropriate child care institutions.

For further information on SOCH's progress, please refer to the attached SOCH 2016 Newsletter.

6. Can you measure, assess or describe the change that happened as a result of this work?

As already stated, it is very early days for Puri. But the opening of Puri station hub has already caused 8 children to be rescued. Based on experience at other stations, we might expect that number to rise to around 600 in a full year, with the potential for large numbers of children to be rescued during major festivals, and reunited with their families, or placed in a secure care environment by state authorities.

Had the Puri station hub not been opened, it is likely that many runaway children would have fallen into the clutches of local criminal elements, for trafficking, prostitution, or thieving.

TFN has provided approximately 55% of the funding for the Puri Station Hub.

7. As a result of presenting at TFN, did you experience any of the following;

new subscribers to your mailing list, new volunteers to your organisation, further funding from individual donors, further funding from institutional funders an introduction that benefited your organisation (e.g. to an individual, business or other organisation), other benefit (please describe)

We have recruited several new individual supporters through our attendance at TFN events; they are now on our mailing list, and some have made generous donations. Some of our existing donors have also attended TFN events, which has helped us and presumably other institutions as well. We have also benefitted greatly from TFN's highly professional approach to preparing presentations of this kind. The new operation at Puri has also enabled us to recruit a number of talented new staff, and local volunteers, who will in the future make a major contribution to the overall growth and evolution of the organisation.

8. Could you give us an estimate of how many people have been reached by the TFN funded project/work and by how much?

At this stage it is difficult to estimate the number of those reached, apart from the number of children actually rescued, because the Puri hub project is in its infancy. But our research shows that the visible presence of outreach workers on the platforms makes its mark quickly and word of the support they provide spreads quickly on the grapevine.

In addition we should point out that the Station Rescue operation at any station is dependent on a network of partners, such as the Child Welfare Committee, the Railway Police, the City Police, the Railway Authorities, the station vendors, taxi drivers, porters, cleaners etc, numbering in the hundreds. As part of the launch process, there are sessions with all these constituencies to educate, inform and recruit them as stakeholders, whose eyes and ears can often alert our station staff to a successful rescue operation.

9. Can you tell us any personal stories to highlight the value of funding from TFN?

Yes, please see the attached case history of a young boy rescued from Puri railway station and eventually reunited with his family after counselling by SOCH at the Puri station shelter. Another case history (from another station) is detailed in the attached September newsletter.

10. Since presenting at TFN, has your organisation undergone any significant change(s) which our donors would be interested to know about (these changes do not need to be related to the experience of presenting at TFN).

SOCH (Society for Children), our partner in India which runs the railway station child rescue teams, including the latest addition at Puri which was made possible by TFN, has also started a new programme to rehabilitate 'hard core' children who have lived on railway platforms or nearby streets for months or even years. These children are generally not susceptible to the short term rescue process which is sufficient to reunite most children with their families; they are totally habituated to the almost feral life they live, often associated with drugs,

sexual abuse, minor crime and other problems.

SOCH have designed a one month rehabilitation camp process which can successfully address these children's problems, and the first trial took place in March. Twenty boys took part; they participated in an intensive full time programme of counselling, games, classes and exercises; fifteen of the children were reunited with their families at a very moving event at the end of the camp, and all were still at home when they were followed up some months later.

More recently, a generous donor has offered to fund the purchase of a suitable piece of land and an accommodation block, to enable SOCH to run similar 'camps' on a regular basis; anyone who has spent time on streets or railway stations in India will be aware that there is no lack of children who will be able to benefit.

11. Do you have any other comments regarding TFN funding?

TFN funding has been the main platform on which this project has been built. Without it, the project would very likely not yet have been launched. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of TFN and its members.

12. Can you please include any relevant photos or clips that may relate to the project?

As the Puri hub has only just opened, we have only few photos. These are attached together with a case history of a child rescued at Puri Station.

The picture of the son reunited with his mother is representative, as it comes from a different area, and is particularly poignant as this was a 'hard core' street kid, reunited after a rehabilitation camp, approximately one year after running away.

Also attached is the SOCH September 2016 newsletter, giving another case history and a wider picture of SOCH across its range of hubs and activities.