

CULTURAL CURRENTS

Zurich Runners Support Indian Charity

Young Cancer Patients

Each year, thousands of Indian children diagnosed with cancer are sent to Mumbai from distant towns and villages. Once in Mumbai, they receive medical treatment at the Tata Memorial Hospital, but many of them have no place to live and therefore end up sleeping in the streets. Their immune systems weakened by cancer and chemotherapy, these children face the risk of life-threatening infections on a daily basis.

This terrible situation is addressed by the St Jude India ChildCare Centers, founded by the Indian couple Nihal and Shyama Kaviratne. The St Jude Centers provide free-of-cost, safe and hygienic housing for young cancer patients and their families. Moreover, they also offer nutritional support, transportation to and from the hospital, schooling and emotional support during the months of medical treatment. It is this holistic approach that sets St Jude apart, looking after the physical and emotional needs of the children to allow for a successful medical therapy.

From a first centre opened in 2006, which provided housing for 8 children and their families at a time, St Jude has today expanded to 8 centers across Mumbai and Kolkata, with a total of 96 family units. So far, St Jude has provided over 120'000 peaceful nights to over 2'600 children with cancer and their families. However, the existing centers are fully occupied throughout the year, resulting in many families in need that have to be turned away. Further funding is therefore needed both to maintain the existing centers and to open new centers in Mumbai and other Indian cities.

The name St Jude was chosen since he is the patron saint of desperate causes. Admission is provided to needy children and their families, regardless of their religion or community. The St Jude organization is run by volunteers, supporters and a staff of paid employees. As a non-profit organization, St Jude is entirely funded through the generous donations of

individuals, companies and organizations, including the Rotary Club Zurich Belvoir International (RCZBI).

Rotary is an international service organization that brings together professionals to support various social and humanitarian causes. Among the Rotary Clubs in Switzerland, RCZBI was founded as the first "international" club, conducting all its sessions in English and attracting members with an international background or outlook. RCZBI has been supporting St Jude since 2011, when the Zurich-based club chose this Indian organization as its main humanitarian project abroad.

On 21 April 2013, RCZBI took its support of St Jude to a new level, by organizing a first "sponsorship run" at the Sihlhoelzli sports arena in Zurich. Club members and friends, regular runners and couch potatoes, adults and children were called upon to participate in this charitable event. Each runner was asked to sign up colleagues, friends and family members as sponsors, who pledged donations for each 400 meter lap completed. And runners and non-runners alike were invited to stay for some Indian food (provided by King's Kurry) and some children's activities including a bouncy castle.

Links:

- St Jude India ChildCare Centers:
www.stjudechild.org
- Rotary Club Zurich Belvoir International:
www.rotary-zurichbelvoir.ch

