



## Woodcraft Folk's future threatened

By Hannah Eiseman-Renyard

**The Government has scrapped the funding for a national youth group that has been a central part of the upbringing of hundreds of East Finchley children.**

The Woodcraft Folk has lost its funding grant of £52,000, representing 20% of the organisation's overall funding. Without it, the Folk's future is uncertain. Earlier this year, Minister for Children, Margaret Hodge, refused the annual grant that Woodcraft has been receiving for 40 years. The national organisation, run on a shoestring by five paid members and more than 3,000 volunteers, was accused of not providing 'value for money' - ironic, given that the Government has named 2005 as the 'Year of the Volunteer'. The Woodcraft Folk, founded in the 1920s, is a peaceful and progressive youth organisation with slogans such as 'Span the World with Friendship' and 'Education for Social Change'.

### Values or value?

I have been involved in Finchley's group since I was six, and can't imagine growing up without it. On the annual summer camps I've learnt about ecology, unfair world trade, as well as outdoor skills such as how to build fires. But Woodcraft is so much more than that. Woodcraft is a supportive, co-operative community where everyone is valued, and everyone helps each other. Rudi Vis, our Labour MP at the time of writing, whose children are

members, described Woodcraft as "a wonderful upbringing", adding, "We ought to save it. We will save it."

On Tuesday 22 March, I was one of around 30 local Woodcrafters who went to the Houses of Parliament to lobby MPs about the cut. We were joined by members from all over the country. By 5pm the central lobby of the House of Commons was packed with green sweat-shirts - the Woodcraft uniform. Margaret Hodge, unsurprisingly, stayed away and the only MPs willing to meet with the hordes of Woodcrafters were familiar with the organisation and extremely sympathetic.

MP Jeremy Corbyn told us that 65 MPs had signed motion 849 to reinstate the funding. Stephen Pound, MP of Ealing North described the amount of funding as "absolutely minuscule" in government terms and said "only a parblind bean counter locked in some Treasury basement" could accuse Woodcraft of not being value for money.

At the time of writing, the Woodcraft Folk are waiting to hear if the support they have for their campaign to get the funding reinstated is having any effect on the powers-that-be.

## East Finchley aid gets to survivors

**When local mother Sara Sibley called on her community to help the survivors of the tsunami disaster, she was amazed at the response.**

Hundreds of tins of baby formula milk powder and feeding bottles poured into the donation centre she set up at the Green Man Community Centre at Strawberry Vale in January, courtesy of residents and businesses across the district.

And our pictures show that this crucial aid has got through to the very needy.

The goods were shipped to the Bellanwila temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka, who are co-ordinating the relief operation on behalf of the London Buddhist Vihara.

From there, Army personnel and volunteers transported the aid to the affected areas in

the south and north-east of the country.

The powdered milk, bottles and feeder cups sent from East Finchley were vital in helping the stricken communities fight the threat of hunger and thirst amongst their children.

Sara thanked everyone who had helped the aid operation and said: "I just hope people don't forget that the people out there still need our support. We have given these babies a start. Let's hope they now have a great future."



Sri-Lankan toddlers feel the benefit of our local donations. Photo courtesy of Trinity Newspapers.

## Truth behind the tsunami

By Jackie Randall

**Ten hours from Heathrow is Colombo, where at a sweltering 37°C an enthusiastic welcome awaits from Sri Lankans renowned for their hospitality and friendliness.**

From our hotel, we investigated how to offload the goods we had brought for the tsunami survivors, including hotel toiletries. Our contributions seemed woefully inadequate as we passed endless campsites for the thousands of displaced families lining the southern coast road.

We were advised not to give items spontaneously at these camps as, being by the road, they are frequented by tourists. Eventually, we managed a controlled giveaway to a children's orphanage and a camp for elderly people 8km inland.

It appears to many of the survivors that the Sri Lankan government has yet

to pass a rupee their way. An investigation is under way to account for \$500M in donations. The country still seems bound up in bureaucracy and corruption, with continuing tensions between Tamils and Sinhalese.

The government declared that no houses are to be rebuilt within 100 metres of the shoreline, but enforcing this whilst securing suitable building land is a major issue.

Most of the relief work is being done by EU Army crews and overseas charities, for which gratitude is expressed through large banners at each campsite.

### Desperate conditions

There is intense hostility towards the government because of the lack of progress towards providing permanent housing. Although some benefit from makeshift wooden huts, most people only have one tent and a sleeping mat for their remaining family. With the early monsoon rains the campsites are becoming steaming mudbaths, exacerbating an already desperate situation.

What seems most remarkable is the resilience and cheerfulness of the people amidst the loss of life, livelihoods and devastation. A living has to be scraped by whatever means and unfortunately this includes plundering endangered turtle eggs for bartering.

### Come back, tourists

Sri Lanka is desperate for tourists to help economic recovery. If you were thinking of visiting, now would be a great time, with special packages available. Visitors can donate their unwanted clothing and buy in Colombo clothes designed for western stores at a fraction of EU prices, all helping to fuel the local economy.

For those willing to help in other ways, several charitable schemes are providing aid and constructing basic, solid homes for the survivors e.g. "Odel Foundation" or "Unconditional Compassion" (look on the web). Currently, these are the most effective schemes for getting people out of tents and into homes.

**Ian McCormack Invites you to catch "A Glimpse Of Eternity" Sunday 22nd May - 11:00am at The Finchley Youth Theatre 142 High Road East Finchley London N2**



**Ian McCormack was night diving off the island of Mauritius when he was stung multiple times by Box Jellyfish, which are among the most venomous creatures in the world. His amazing true story relates how he clung to life while being taken to hospital, and how he was declared clinically dead soon afterwards. During this time he had an encounter with God which radically changed the direction of his life.**

(Big Screen Presentation)

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