



Who could deny that smile?

Dave Kellett, Instructional Officer, Garth Prison, Butler Trust Award Winner 2002.

Dave Kellett gained a Butler Trust Award in 2002 for sustained, imaginative restorative work in imparting technical skills to prisoners in the community workshop in Garth Prison. The work done by the prisoners enables Dave and the Inside Out Trust to meet the needs of disabled people in India to gain mobility through specialised wheelchairs developed in the prison.

Working with the 'Inside Out Trust' Garth Prison have developed a workshop in which old, discarded wheelchairs are adapted, refurbished and personalised to the specific needs of people in India. 'Inside Out' has worked on restorative justice projects in prisons for the past ten years helping prisoners take responsibility for their behaviour and seek to do some good for others as a form of reparation. As a result of this work we were given a Butler Trust Award in 2002. I received the following e-mail message from Susan Critz who teaches at the school in southern India, to which we send the refurbished wheelchairs.

It's a miracle! We arrived at Andhra Mahila Sabha as we do every Thursday afternoon. What was different from the beginning was that the children at the front door hailed us before we ever set foot out of our cars. And who was biggest of the bunch? — Manikandan. He proudly sat tall in his wheelchair saying hello and as we entered, turned his wheel chair to follow us. He sped through the halls to the classroom and this was the beginning of our insight into his two-day transformation. We always wondered if those little deformed hands could manipulate the wheels. The answer is a definite 'yes'.

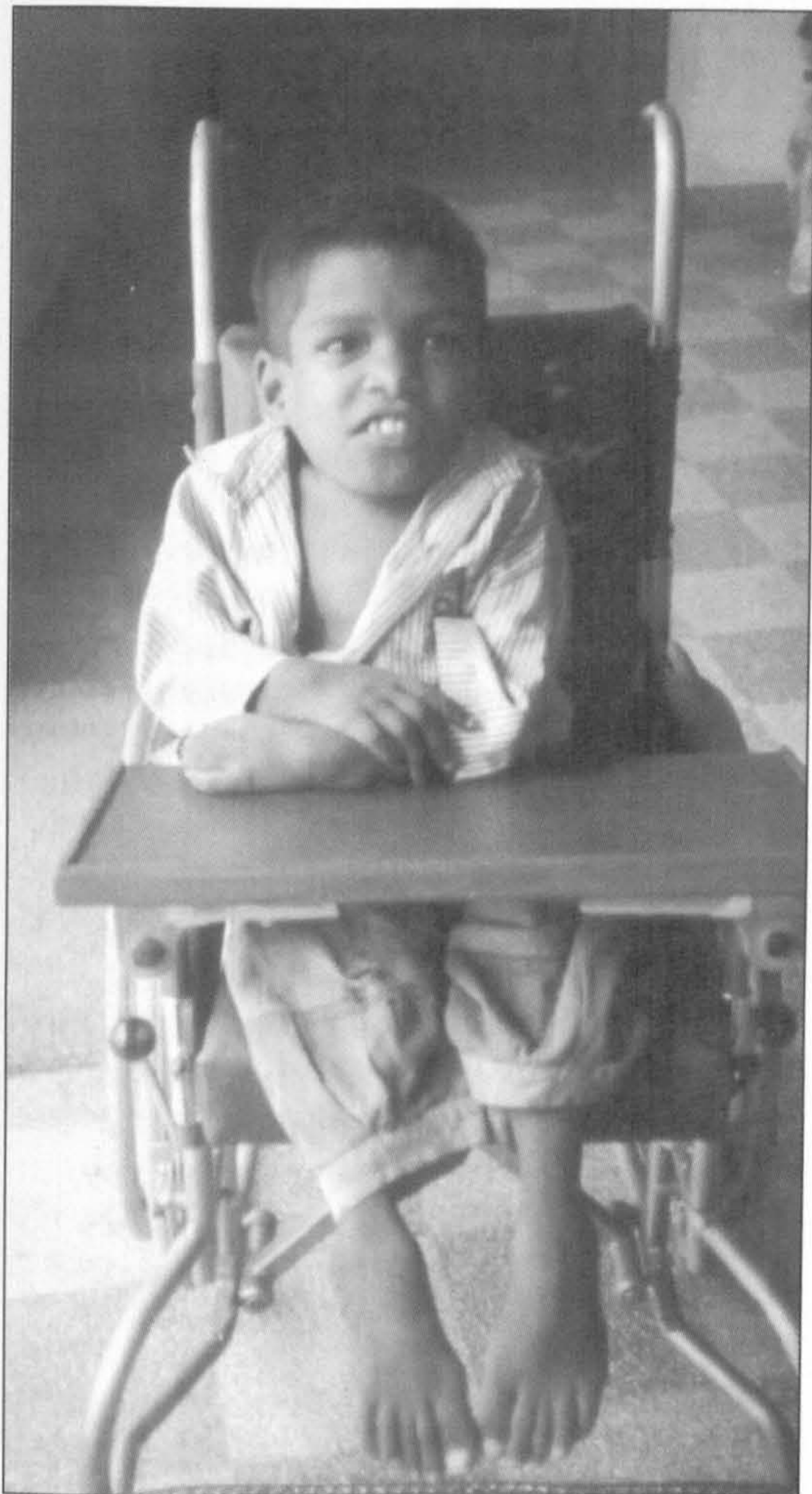
In the past, the children would enter the classroom and choose a desk/chair a bit like musical chairs since there are not enough for each of them. In prior weeks, if one of us saw Manikandan, we would

lift him into a chair but we had noticed a growing trend where the other children would go to him and tell him to sit on the floor so they could have a chair. This had always disturbed us as teachers. The whole problem is now solved because with the addition of the wheelchair there are enough desk chairs for all children since Manikandan's desk is built into his chair.

Manikandan wheeled into the room with a big confident smile that would not go away. He proudly took a place with the other students. The minute the worksheets, pens, crayons came out, he went straight to work. Another transformation! In past weeks because he is left-handed and the desks are for right-handed students, his arms and hands were too weak to do any work. This week, with his arms properly supported by the table of his wheelchair, he completely finished his work with amazing dexterity. In fact, when we offered to pin one of his sheets to a bulletin board, he glowed. I am sure he has never had a piece of work displayed before this time!

Even on the day of the wheelchair presentation, we asked his teacher what language this boy spoke. He spoke rarely and when he did it was softly and no one seemed to understand him. He has had the wheelchair two days, and he is speaking loudly, clearly and constantly. His reluctance to speak in the past must have been due to the small stature and the conscious/unconscious way that others treated him.

I want everyone related to this project to know that they have truly changed a life. This boy was destined to become one of the street beggars who move between



Manikandan with his customised wheelchair.

stopped cars at intersections and tap on windows for a few rupees. Within two days, I can see that Manikandan is going to contribute to society and will have a wonderful life. Who could ever deny that smile?

As the instructor in charge of the Community Workshop I have been impressed by the way that men working with us have shown an enthusiasm for personalising the wheelchairs that we are recycling to the specifications of the receiving person in India. We have ten prisoners working on the chairs which can take two weeks to alter. They know the power of personalising possessions when you are deprived. They know how important it is for the recipient of each wheelchair to feel 'Yes, this is mine' and it is something special. They know the impact of achieving greater control over your life which their work brings for those receiving the chairs. Clearly they also receive so much in terms of their own awareness of the possibility of doing good for others without expecting anything in return.

The powerlessness of being in custody can be transformed by this act of giving. They feel truly empowered by their act of reparation, taking some responsibility for their past and owning up to the need in others. This is a truly responsible action on their part and shows their maturing into citizens able to take their place in society again. They have shown their humanity and become adults through that process.

We have taken over 200 wheelchairs to Chennai (Madras) transported free by British Airways. For a few pounds, a lot of imagination,

Dave Kellett making final adjustments to Buhna's wheelchair.



ingenuity and care we take wheelchairs that would have been on the scrap heap and put them to good use.

'Time' for others

The following is the testimony to the transforming power of giving 'time' for others. It is written by Martin, one of the Community Workshop crew at HMP Garth.

My views on the sort of work you get to do in prison are fairly jaundiced to say the least, but lately my opinions have changed considerably. Having been unemployed for the past six or seven months and going through the all too familiar 'bang-up' syndrome, which you would normally associate with a local prison, I was becoming jaded and restless when out of the blue I was given a job.

Community Workshop was the name that was written on the ticket. I was no wiser so I asked a couple of the guys what it was like. 'Oh, it's the old wheelchair shop' they replied. So, that first morning I duly turned up with no preconceptions other than I would be bored stupid for very little reward as usual. Coincidentally, Dave the civvie in the shop had just returned from a field trip to India, where he had gone to assuage his curiosity about the recipients of the various types of wheelchairs produced in his workshop, and he (very astutely I feel) had videoed the handing over of the 'very much in demand' wheelchairs to various charitable organisations.

So my first task on my first day was to sit with the other guys in the workshop and watch what turned out to be a very heart-warming video of human beings

who had less than nothing, living in indescribable conditions and who were so obviously full of joy and gratitude at what to them was a major miracle in their lives.

To watch this was almost painful in a way, yet at the same time poignant. I mean it made me feel good and I hadn't, up until then, had anything to do with this project ('cos that's what it is I think, a project). So far I had been just doing my bird like everybody else, head down, getting on with it. This experience presented something tangible and worthwhile to me. In the space of one hour my whole mindset had undergone a change, 'I'll have some of this,' I thought. Forget all the tired old clichés about doing something constructive, this was doing some good and making me feel good at the same time. I mean normally you get the mind-numbing, boring, robotic work that's about as fulfilling as a migraine. The fact that the wages weren't too clever didn't bother me as much once I got started, although a decent wage would be nice, as most cons would agree.

Helping people who really deserve a leg-up makes a lot of difference and I'm pretty sure that most of the guys feel that way. It's not like having a conversion or an epiphany; you just know that given the option a lot of cons would sooner do this kind of work, where they can actually feel that they make a difference and can see the results by the smiling faces of those people on that video who somehow seem to have things worse than us but endure it with such admirable stoicism. Who can deny that smile?