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Sunshine to the street children of India



Fiona Barbaro Sant with Anu, Tanu and Roshni, who inspired tailor Kuku Arora to start the Sunshine Project. Photo: Kushal Pachchingar

For children living on the streets of New Delhi, India, simple things that many Maltese children take for granted, such as brushing their teeth, are alien.

When the children taking part in the Sunshine Project, where Fiona Barbaro Sant will work, were given a toothbrush for the first time, they had to be told it belonged to them only and they were not to share it with anyone else. That night, they slept with the toothbrush in their beds because they were so happy to own something for the first time in their lives, their parents said.

"If they're not at the Sunshine Project centre, they're either begging or working and the older girls are probably prostituting themselves. It's really sad," said Mrs Barbaro Sant.

After travelling across Asia with her husband last winter, she was inspired to give a helping hand and is planning to return again in December. During her travels, she heard about a tailor named Kuku Arora who worked to get children between three and 17 years old off the streets and give them the happy childhood they deserve.

It started eight years ago, when Mr Arora met two-year-old Roshni, who only had one hand and was in a state of complete neglect, on his way to work. He and his wife took her some food everyday but, one morning, she disappeared and was found begging in a very busy main street. The couple instantly decided to help and visited her parents to discuss how this could be done. The next day word had spread and Mr Arora found 17 children on his doorstep.

Today, the day care centre has no fewer than 143 children and Mrs Barbaro Sant is planning to help them for about three months come December.

She is also planning to help a women's empowerment group called the Sambhali Trust. The organisation works mainly with Dalit women, in other words, those lowest in the caste system, known as the untouchables. Through education and empowerment, it works to slowly break the vicious circle in the lives of these women and, through them, develop their village communities.

In her time in India, Mrs Barbaro Sant hopes to cast a ray of sunshine on the lives of those less fortunate. "I realised you just give a little and it makes a big difference," she said.