

## PROFILE

# Twin sponsor partnerships to educate the poorest of the poor in India

**David Wiles** is a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Twinnage Committee, overseeing the Indian Student Sponsorship Scheme. Anita Boniface went to meet him to find out about his links with India and motivation behind his twinnage work.

"EDUCATION is the key to escaping poverty," David Wiles tells me. We are sitting in his lounge at his home in Whitstable, Kent, where he lives with his wife Lesley and daughter, Paula.

"In India, to escape poverty you either win the lottery or you get educated. Education gives children and the young opportunities in life and hope for the future," he says.

It is this belief in education that has led David to oversee the Indian Student Sponsorship Scheme, which allows people to sponsor a child or young person either for one year of school study, three years of technical and vocational study, or four years to train as a doctor or dentist.

So far the scheme has helped to assist many thousands of young Indians to escape poverty, support their families, and get a decent chance in life.

The alternative is often for children to drop out of school because of fees and expenses and enter child labour, depriving them not only of an education, but also arguably a childhood.

Often families depend on loan sharks and high interest money lenders for finance, which draws them even deeper into poverty and related stress.

David works closely with the SVP in India to administer the Student Sponsorship Scheme from his home, and seeks to match sponsors with individual young people where possible.

A retired civil servant, David is a keen administrator with a passion for India.

The dawn of his twinnage vocation was a trip to India with a party of SVP members when, David tells

me, he was able to reconnect with his roots.

While David calls himself a "Man of Kent" and can trace ancestral roots east of the Medway back 500 years, he says his mother was of Anglo Indian heritage from Calcutta and he very much feels India is in his blood.

He asks me with a smile: "How many people do you know who have a saint buried in their ancestral home?"

His mother grew up in a house in Calcutta which was to be handed over to the Missionaries of Charity in the late 1940s and became the home of Mother Teresa herself.

The saint's body now rests in a tomb below his grandparents' old apartment, now a chapel.

It is in this apartment that David's parents had their wedding breakfast. David was born after his parents moved to England in 1950, leaving the house to the nuns.

He feels "very blessed" to have been involved in India through SVP's twinnage programme, and has seen first-hand the power and potency of a donation of £15 for a school child, £70 for a technical and vocational student or £120 for a medical student.

"It gives them a life," he says. Medical fees are "extortionate", so being able to give a student that money allows them to live, to buy food, to travel to see their families, to buy books, and help pay their other living expenses.

Enabling young people to stay in the education system is also very positive for gender equality as girls often "miss out on an education", says David.

"Now girls are able to study. Just think of all the talent the world has



David Wiles, with pet rabbit Clara – 'Doing my part to help young Indian people put their skills and talents back into their country and into the rest of the world, is my hope'

lost because girls weren't and still aren't receiving an education. It doesn't bear thinking about."

David feels that there's a tremendous potential behind every donation and every child it helps. That's because "the UK pound can go a long way in India".

But it isn't just money that will help young people. David also believes prayer is the foundation, as is the Gospel: "Jesus said: 'Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do unto me', and that's what we are doing every time we help a young person in India get an education.

"My faith keeps me going when I face obstacles, as we all do. Prayer keeps me strong. And doing my part to help young Indian people put their skills and talents back into their country and into the rest of the world, is my hope."

The SVP's twinnage programme twins SVP groups in England and Wales with SVP groups in poorer countries around the world, including in India. Through this partnership in prayer, donations and letter writing, volunteers are able to utilise the vast network of charity that the SVP is made up of, in order to help the poorest of the poor.

■ If you would like to sponsor a child or young person's education in India, visit: <https://www.svp.org.uk/twinnage-and-overseas-aid-to-download-an-application-form>. To find out more about the SVP telephone: 0207 703 3030, e-mail: [info@svp.org.uk](mailto:info@svp.org.uk) or visit: [www.svp.org.uk](http://www.svp.org.uk)



## Friends of the Holy Land (FHL) wishes to recruit additional trustees

We currently have on our Board 9 trustees, two of whom are priests and the remainder laymen. We are looking to diversify the Board in gender, age and experience. Our mission has developed so that our support as a charity is focussed from the bottom up by identifying individuals and families in the Holy Land in need of help. It is a very rewarding charity with which to work.

**FHL is a registered Charity whose objectives are:**

- To raise awareness of the challenges faced by Christians living in the Holy Land
- To encourage prayer on their behalf
- To generate financial resources to give them a sustainable future
- To encourage visits to the Holy Land to meet local Christians

FHL's mission is to help individuals and families who are vulnerable Christians in the Holy Land, seeking to maintain a Christian presence in that land. The work of FHL is ecumenical and non-political. It was established in 2009 and patrons include Cardinal Vincent Nichols and Archbishop Justin Welby.

As a trustee you will be required to attend three meetings per year, two of them in Central London, and to participate in telephone and email communications in order to share your experience.

FHL is looking to recruit trustees who support Christian values and whose experience can contribute positively to the mission and objectives of the Charity and to ensure an appropriate balance within the Board. Specifically, candidates with finance, legal, communication or human resources skills will be favoured. *This is a voluntary position.*

You can see more information as to our work on our website or by obtaining a report on us from the public area of the Charity Commission site. More information can be obtained from Jim Quinn, Chairman of the Trustees, [jim.quinn@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk](mailto:jim.quinn@friendsoftheholylan.org.uk) Applications with a CV should be submitted to him by 17 June 2019. Interviews will take place in July. Charity No. 1130054