

## Equipping young people is essential.



**“Equipping young people with quality education, training and skills is essential. This World Youth Skills Day reminds us that teachers stand at the forefront of this great global effort.”**

**—UN Secretary-General António Guterres**

With over 70 million young people unemployed around the world it is crucial to address the needs of people affected by leprosy, their families, and communities. Quality education and training often involves more than simply attending classes. Often it involves taking care of the whole person. Issues such as poverty, inner wellbeing, discrimination, and disability mean accessing, and continuing in education can be difficult. These need to be addressed before, and alongside, training.

The staff at The Leprosy Mission Trust India's Vadathorasalur Vocational Training Centre take this very seriously. They support and counsel students and families. They address the needs and rights of people affected by leprosy with the business community to ensure a fair go. They foster a student culture that strives for excellence and a sense of self-worth.

For Sumithra, circumstances and realities of life in Tamil Nadu, meant there was little hope of her being able to break the cycle of poverty her family found themselves in.



“Before my father contracted leprosy, I didn't know anyone with the disease. I only learned about it because he started taking medications. Previously he worked as a goat herder, but due to leprosy he is now physically unable to undertake farm work. My mother is a casual labourer, so after my father lost his income, we struggled to afford basic necessities like food, shelter, and clothing. In Tamil Nadu, women earn about half the amount that men earn, so the loss of my father's income had a big impact on our family.”

Can you imagine living on less than 5 Australian dollars a day? That is what Sumithra's mother earns...on a good day. This is not enough to live on in India and Sumithra was looking at taking a casual, low paid labouring job like her mother.

**Read the rest of Sumithra's story inside — and find out how you can help young people just like her!**



Muthukumaran, the principal of Vadathorasalur Vocational Training Centre (VTC)

With not enough money, in part due to the impact of her father's leprosy, further education and training seemed out of the question.

Then Sumithra was referred to the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) by a Leprosy Mission Hospital. A doctor there counselled her and suggested she consider training to become an electrician.



Because she could get training, Sumithra (above) has gained a whole range of new opportunities!

Faithful, compassionate supporters alongside income generated through making and selling products for the Centre mean that this training is free.

"I was able to choose from a range of specialisations, so I chose to become an electrician. There are a lot of good government jobs in this area...I am very happy because of the opportunities I have now."

What a precious gift this is to the hundreds of students each year who receive the education, training and life support they need to reach their potential. It is also a blessing to the businesses which employ these highly trained young people and of course to their families and communities from which they come.

**Pray for Sumithra to complete her training and find good employment. Pray this will help break the cycle of poverty her family are in and allow them to meet their needs and live a more sustainable life.**

**Give thanks and pray for the Vocational Training Centre at Vadathorasalur. Pray for staff as they look after the educational needs of each student and support them in dealing with other issues such as poverty, discrimination, and disability. Pray students will see and reach their potential to contribute to society and be included in all aspects of community life.**

Show your compassion and help another young person like Sumithra learn a trade and break the cycle of poverty today.

<https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/vocational-training-centre-project-kit07>





**“Two are better than one,  
because they have a good  
return for their labor:  
If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help  
them up.”**  
— Ecclesiastes 4:9-10



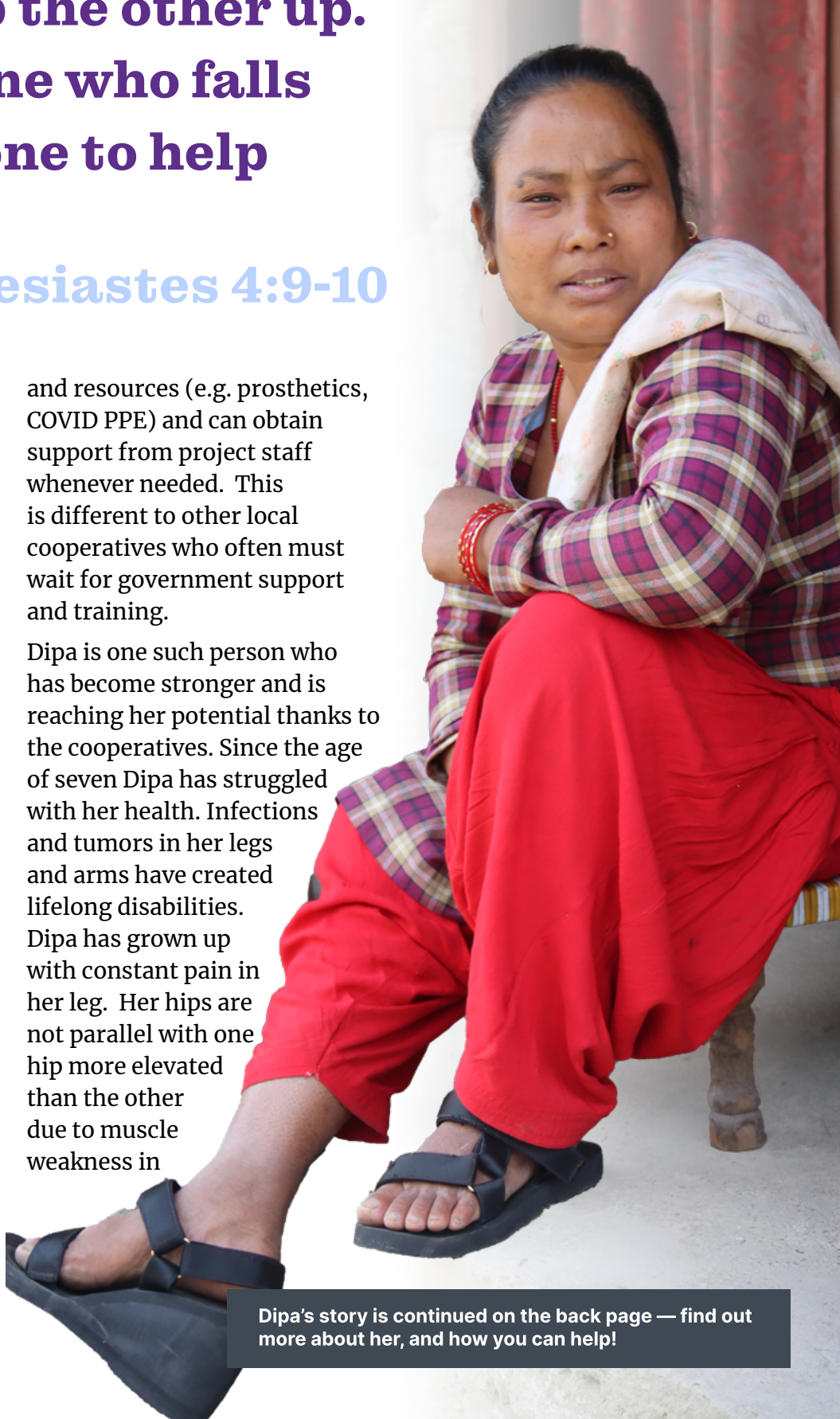
International Day  
of Cooperatives  
Cooperatives Build  
a Better Future for All  
6th July 2024

On the International Day of Cooperatives, we recognise and celebrate the truth of these verses. Together, people affected by leprosy, disability, and poverty can do so much more than they can alone. The Leprosy Mission has been establishing Self-Help Groups for many years to enable people with leprosy to find independence, sustainable livelihoods, and a support network through which they can reach their full potential, strive for their dreams, and offer a brighter future for their families.

For The Leprosy Mission, cooperatives are the next step from Self-Help Groups. Cooperatives form when several Self-Help Groups join. As government registered organisations, cooperatives provide stability by allowing people affected by leprosy and disability to gain education and skills, and to access loans to start or grow businesses. People in the wider community look favourably on the cooperatives as they are receiving training

and resources (e.g. prosthetics, COVID PPE) and can obtain support from project staff whenever needed. This is different to other local cooperatives who often must wait for government support and training.

Dipa is one such person who has become stronger and is reaching her potential thanks to the cooperatives. Since the age of seven Dipa has struggled with her health. Infections and tumors in her legs and arms have created lifelong disabilities. Dipa has grown up with constant pain in her leg. Her hips are not parallel with one hip more elevated than the other due to muscle weakness in



Dipa's story is continued on the back page — find out more about her, and how you can help!



This story begins INSIDE your Keeping in Touch newsletter! Start reading Dipa's story on Page 3



her legs and hips. When she walks, one leg is shorter than the other.

Additionally, Dipa is susceptible to new tumors growing and at times she will develop pain in different parts of her body. Due to this, she is not able to work in the field, walk long distances, ride a bike, or do housework efficiently.

Dipa's husband also has disabilities due to an accident with fire when he was two months old. Together, they have a six-year-old daughter who means the world to them. Dipa's husband works as a builder which provides the family with their basic needs.

Dipa wanted to do more and so joined one of the Self-Help Groups run by the now concluded IMPACT project. She had always enjoyed tailoring even as a child. She finds it easy to design and make things. She has her own sewing machine that she uses to make simple designs of clothes for her daughter and husband.

She also takes orders from people in the community.

However, she could only make simple designs which did not help her earn much income. When clients came to her asking for more complex designs, she was unable to make it for them.

The project gave Dipa training in skills required for more complex stitching and taught her ideas for new designs. Since receiving the training, she has increased confidence in her ability to tackle harder tailoring work and she is not afraid anymore when people come to her with new design ideas. The project also provided Dipa with custom made shoes to help even out the height of her legs so she can walk more easily.

Dipa is busiest during marriage season or when a festival is coming up. With the new skills she's learnt, Dipa is now able to charge her clients more and her monthly income has increased by 50 percent. This means Dipa can now save money for emergencies and even provide

her daughter with pocket money.

When asked her thoughts about the Cooperative, Dipa reported that she is happy with the support, including the many training opportunities she has been able to take.

**Pray for Dipa as she continues to grow her business and contribute positively to her family, the cooperative, and the wider community. Pray for Dipa's health, and for her to manage and be relieved from the painful infections and tumors.**

**Give thanks for the many Self-Help Groups and Cooperatives that have been established thanks to initiatives like the IMPACT project. Pray that more people affected by leprosy, disability will be able to join these groups and benefit from them.**

Bring dignity and a bright future to people like Dipa in Nepal today!

<https://www.leprosymission.org.au/dipa-nepal-kit07>

