



WINTER NEWSLETTER ISSUE 32

AMARPURKASHI NEWS

HEALTH CAMP

On 31st October, 2012, the Health Centre at Amarpurkashi hosted a free health camp for villagers. Over 700 patients turned up, the largest number since these camps began. Fortunately, Teerthankar Mahaveer College, Moradabad sent a large team of over thirty medical staff, including fourteen dentists, five GPs, a bone specialist, a paediatrician, two eye specialists and two gynaecologists. Everyone received three days' medicine and an offer of free consultation should they need further treatment. The camp was sponsored by *Villages Espoir*, the organisation set up by Toby Whitfeld, volunteer from November 2006 and cost £363.



Villagers line up to be seen by the doctors.

SCIENCE FAIR

The Science Fair on 7th November 2012 saw the Inter College and Degree College transformed into a festival of science, music, innovative ideas and

excited students. Medicinal plants along with existing flowers and trees created a perfect setting for a fair focusing on the environment. Colourful decorations and specially-erected tents added to the festival atmosphere in which students from primary to post-graduate level displayed their hard work and talents, both creative and academic.

While having a clear focus on science and the environment, the fair also provided space for other skills of creativity and English. Students from the primary and secondary schools at Amarpurkashi provided entertainment in the form of folk songs and dances. Wearing traditional outfits, with some dressed as Hindu gods and goddesses, they danced with joy and enthusiasm, delighting their audiences. There were several poems and short plays in English such as 'My Garden' and 'Trees' highlighting the importance of nature while the short play 'Mr Garbage' showed bad environmental practices. Many students participated in stalls involving card and number tricks, while others used science to create 'magic', all performed with confidence and showmanship.

Another important aspect of the science fair was its role as a community gathering and platform for important issues represented by stalls for HIV/AIDS awareness and careers guidance for students. The HIV/AIDS stall was well attended, providing important information; many in attendance were wearing the universal symbol of HIV/AIDS awareness and solidarity, the red ribbon. Throughout the day B.Ed. students were kept busy providing advice to both boys and girls on career paths such as the police, medical professions and commerce.

Some stalls dealt mainly with the scientific such as experiments using hydrochloric acid to test for impurities in milk and ghee. Others took a broader approach such as a

modern-day version of Ravana, the demon king whose ten heads each represented a problem facing India from environmental to health and education. There was however, no lack of stalls that engaged imaginatively and resourcefully with the environmental theme by combining the social and scientific. Issues that appeared repeatedly were the problems caused by plastic bags including a visually striking display that sought to recreate the impact of plastic bags; this was accompanied by a short play against their use. Water pollution was another important issue. One group from Amarpurkashi even used bricks, pebbles, a hosepipe and some physical labour to create a mini river alongside a model of a water pump and well. Other models focused on homes and particularly factories as major causes of water pollution. This focus undoubtedly reflects the experience of the local area with the visible and very “smell-able” effects of the paper factories on the local river.

The strongest projects were those that showed not just an understanding of the causes of environmental damage but also proposed solutions. The first prize won by Babu Ram Junior High School, Amarpurkashi showed methods of improving the environment of a rural village by having covered communal toilet blocks and different rubbish pits based specifically on the recyclability of materials. Jafapur High School presented models about the impact of greenhouse gases and how to use solar power as an alternative to cooking fuel. H S A Inter College, Sahas Pur presented plates and bowls made from leaves as alternatives to the use of plastics.

The special prize requested by Toby Whitfield was awarded to the group that demonstrated the best use of waste materials. This went to the B.Ed. students’ ‘zero waste’ display that demonstrated decorative and practical uses for materials often thrown away. These included woven

bags, magazines and newspaper holders, pictures made from the straw of old brooms and flowers made from wire and off cuts of materials. A colourful and creative display, it demonstrated the possibilities for recycling and moving towards a ‘zero waste’ society, making it a worthy winner.

The Science Fair brought many interesting ideas and showcased the knowledge of the students. Also notable was the obvious pride with which the students presented their models and stalls and their obvious keenness to impress and to demonstrate their hard work. The Science Fair provided an environment in which a wide range of students with a range of talents and interests were able to participate in activities that encouraged them to think and act independently and innovatively.

Report by Chloe Hignett, volunteer in October 2012

EYE CAMP

Monday, 19th of November saw the start of a free Eye Camp sponsored by Hari Dhanoo, VRI trustee and loyal supporter of the project. A team of medical staff headed by Dr Bhavtosh Shankhdhar examined 410 patients and identified 62 for lens transplantation. On the 20th, all were tested for sugar, blood pressure and cardiac problems. 35 were found to be fit for the lens transplant. Another 6 were treated for minor complaints and were then fit for transplants.

On 21st November, 18 patients was operated on with the remaining 23 receiving lens transplants the following day. They stayed at the Bilari Community Hospital for two days and then, on 23rd, their eyes were checked, their bandages changed and post-operative medicines and glasses given.

All medicines, glasses and food were provided free. These patients were then checked repeatedly over the next month.

There were no problems and we were very pleased to have a 100% success rate.



Lens transplants operations at Bilari Community Hospital

HIV/AIDS AWARENESS

This programme first began in February 2008 but funding ended in March 2012. With the generous support of VRI trustee, Janet Wilson, this work has now been continued in the blocks of Bilari and Baniakhera. Suitable staff have been appointed and trained to undertake HIV prevention and care work in the community. In the first three months of the extended programme, the workers carried out mapping at block level, identified vulnerable villages and organized entry level activities in the community using participatory processes.

NATIONAL WORKSHOP

On 2nd and 3rd March 2013, the Gramodaya Degree College and Research Institute will host a national workshop to discuss the proposal for a university for sustainable rural development.

VRI NEWS

UEL CONFERENCE

On 10th November, 2012, VRI trustees, Lizzie Monks and Nayan Shukla, spent the

day at the University of East London Docklands Campus.

International development charities had been invited to hold stalls and speak to students about meaningful volunteering opportunities in developing countries. This was part of the student-run UEL Development Conference 2012.

Among those charities represented were Restless Development, the Dalit Solidarity Network, Motivation and the Red Cross.

Around 100 students attended the event and heard keynote speaker, Dr Meera Tiwari, speak about development beyond 2015 and academic recommendations for the revision of the Millennium Development Goals.

Both young and mature students were keen to talk to our trustees about volunteering in India and mentioned various motivations for wishing to develop a rural development project. The event was a great chance for VRI to promote our volunteering opportunities to a captive audience. We have even been invited to return in 2014!

Nayan at the VRI stall



VOLUNTEERS

In October, there were two new volunteers at APK - Anne Richardson and Chloe Hignett.

At the end of January, 2013, Toby Whitfield, volunteer from November 2006, will pay another visit to APK.

On 13th February, two new volunteers will arrive at APK – Rachel Breen, who has a PhD in Biological Chemistry and Tracy Marshall, who has a PhD in Education.

On 21st February, five young optometrists from the U.K., all of Indian origin, will go to APK where they will stay for eight days and carry out comprehensive tests on the eyesight of the students of the primary and secondary schools. They have already held a Monopoly bike challenge which involved riding 23.5 miles round London, visiting all the sites on the Monopoly board. They hope to raise enough money to fund the equipment they will take and endow a small scholarship fund to assist any poor students who need glasses or treatment but cannot afford it.

On 24th February, VRI's General Secretary, Jyoti Singh, will visit APK after an absence of three years.

BOOK REVIEW

by Samta Patel

I read the book "Life of Pi" at APK and loved it. I recall the book being engaging, unexpected and leaving me with a smile on my face for quite a while afterwards. I'm often disappointed watching films based on books that I've read. They never quite live up to my imagination. So I was wary about watching this, but Claudia Winkleman's rave review on "Film 2012" convinced me and she was right!

The film is narrated by an older Pi (Irrfan Khan) and takes place in the present as he tells his life story to a writer. Pi begins with how he got his name and how his family owned a zoo, but eventually leads into his family needing to leave India for financial purposes. The heart of the story lies in Pi as a young man and the time he

spent out at sea on a lifeboat with a tiger named Richard Parker.

It portrays a religious message in a light that doesn't seem too preachy but this aspect is really only a backdrop. This is a story that has been waiting for computer aided design and 3D. Unlike other "clever" films, these innovations are essential rather than being a distraction. The film is beautifully shot with vivid colours and stunning scenes – the jellyfish being my particular favourite.

I defy you not to smile...but if you don't, then take it up with Miss Winkleman!

If you have an idea for an article or something you wish to submit yourself, such as a book/film review or a recipe, please get in touch with Jyoti, details below.

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