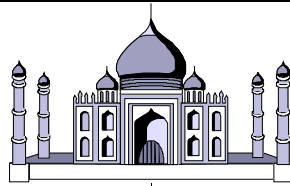




Patron: Robert Evans, Member of the European Parliament

Newsletter



A GREAT YEAR FOR DRIVE

2006/2007 was a very enjoyable year for the DRIVE scheme with 36 pvs from IVCS and 1 from AFP (Asian Foundation for Philanthropy). Once again, we retained an international flavour with pvs from Britain, Ireland, Australia, USA, Belgium, Germany, France and Luxembourg with ages ranging from 18 to 53. They included a store owner, school leavers in their Gap year, secretaries, teachers, a graphic designer, a writer and publisher, chef, translator, mental health nurse, animal carer, electrical engineer, facilities manager, accountant, computer programmer, textile designer and civil servant. It was interesting, challenging and rewarding to interact with such a wide spectrum of people.

There was one unexpected benefit from the March group which included the pv from AFP. We had agreed that she would be taken to Jafarpur Junior High at least twice a week to help with conversational English. March was only a small group so we suggested our own pvs might like to go with her and see if they could become involved too. This worked very well. The pvs took small groups of pupils out of mainstream English classes and gave them intensive

conversational English lessons. We will now include Jafarpur in the activities we offer future pvs at APK.

After a happy and problem-free year, we were looking forward to further success in 2007/2008 but so far, enquiries and applications have been unexpectedly low. It is difficult to trace the reason for this but it may well be due to the fact that we no longer control the niche market in the kind of scheme we offer. Until recently, the choice we offered was unique. Other schemes offered old-fashioned, traditional volunteering or were very expensive. Now, however, lots of new organisations are jumping on the bandwagon and Internet searches reveal lots of similar schemes at fairly reasonable prices. So finally, after 25 years, we are facing serious competition.

This has prompted us to look at our website text again with a view to updating it and making it more positive and more appealing. It may be that the whole website needs a new look or at least the pages on the DRIVE scheme. At any rate, this is an important job for this year and we would welcome some help.

URGENT REQUEST

Calling all past pvs with web design and/or writing skills.

If you think you could help with redesigning our website and in particular, with rewording the text, please contact Jyoti at jan_singh2002@yahoo.co.uk

DREAMS COME TRUE

On Monday, 12th February, Rajni Rawal, pv co-ordinator at APK for the last two years, saw her dreams come true when she was married in the college campus to Arun Gautam from Southall, England. Rajni was very keen that her family should not have to pay the traditional dowry in order to get her married and land themselves in huge debt; she also had a dream of coming to England. When we were able to arrange a match with Arun, she saw the chance of both her dreams coming true.

Arun's parents and sister came from England for the occasion as well as many of their relatives from Delhi and Islamnagar. Pvs from the January and November groups also returned to APK for the occasion.

The wedding went off brilliantly, despite appalling weather and torrential rain the day before and the day after!! Some of us even stayed up for the Hindu marriage ceremony which started at 1 am and finished at 5!

Next day, the newly married couple went to Delhi for a combined honeymoon and application for a UK visa for Rajni. Both were successful and at the end of March, Rajni accompanied her husband on the flight to London where she is now living happily with her in-laws.

A RURAL ROMANCE

At the end of January, when October pv Sarah Voaden returned to APK, the engagement was announced of Sarah and Manoj, much to the delight and surprise of everyone.

Manoj is the youngest son of Mukat Singh's son by his first wife. He and Sarah got to know each other shortly after Sarah arrived at APK in October 2006 and joined the

PGRRM course which Manoj was also studying.

Thus, on Sunday 18th March, Manoj and Sarah were married in a *dharamsala* in Chandausi. This was a much smaller affair than the earlier wedding but a very joyful one nevertheless. It was quite amazing to see Sarah dressed in full bridal regalia. The Gupta girls and Manoj's sisters-in-law helped her with all the traditional pre-wedding preparations.

After a honeymoon in Rajasthan, the happy couple are now applying for a UK visa for Manoj. Meanwhile, Sarah is living in the heart of the village with her in-laws, using a hand-pump to get water and learning how to cope in a typical village family.

A SAD DEMISE

In March, we received an email informing us of the sudden death of Alisoun Browne, pv from September 1992.

After her return from India, Alisoun joined the IVCS executive committee and served on it for many years, despite the fact that she did not live in London nor drive so had a long journey by public transport to attend meetings.

Just before her unexpected death, Alisoun's friends and family organised a special 80th birthday celebration for her.

All those who knew Alisoun will remember her for her sweet nature and care and commitment to Third World development.

EYE CAMP

It has been quite a busy year at APK, especially with two family weddings, two visits from our own family and several EC members plus all the usual project activities and meetings. Consequently, with the best will in the world, we could not organise another eye camp in November '06 nor, as planned, in February '07. We also had a problem finding a doctor willing to donate his services. Another obstacle was that the replacement lenses for cataract patients are

no longer provided free and the cost was way beyond our budget.

However, Adil Hussain, who organises our eye camps, didn't give up and eventually found an eye specialist to perform the laser surgery and negotiated a substantial discount for the lenses. An eye camp was finally held in May. 25 people were taken to Bilari Community Hospital and successfully operated on for cataracts. Many thanks to Shelley Chadda (pv from Nov. 2002) whose family gave the funds to make this possible.

WALL FOR JAFARPUR

Thanks to a generous donation from Asian Foundation for Philanthropy, a boundary wall was built to make Jafarpur Junior High School a safe and secure environment for its pupils. The school is right in the middle of farming land and cattle often used to wander onto the playground during the day.

There was also enough money to build two proper toilets. As a result of these improvements, the number of girls attending the school has risen from a mere 9% two years ago to 23%.

APK STAFF ORIENTATION

On Saturday 31st March 2007, at 7.45 in the morning, 44 staff from the primary school, intercollege and degree college as well as the clinic and female foeticide campaign went by hired coach to Narora on the banks of the River Ganges in the district of Bulandshahr. The aim of the day was to orientate staff in peaceful surroundings away from the distractions of state elections.

The coach arrived at the venue at 10am and staff were given an hour of free time to go down to the river banks and, if they wished, take a dip in the Ganges or walk around the pleasant park nearby. Then, at 11 am, everyone met in a classroom of a junior high school that had kindly opened its doors for us and the first session began.

There were three sessions throughout the day with a short break for a picnic lunch prepared in the early hours of the morning by the canteen staff. In the first session,

staff were encouraged to describe any problems they were having or had observed or were concerned about. In the second, possible solutions to these were discussed; and in the third, an action plan for the year ahead was formed.

The main issues that arose in the course of the day were improving the quality of education, the importance of results, building up a better relationship with pupils' parents/guardians and the usefulness of the science fair.

Dilawar Singh, Executive Officer and Manager of Morajpur Gramodaya High School, also joined APK staff for the day and gave an inspiring closing speech.

PGRRM REFOCUSED

After a promising start with a good number of local students plus two international ones from among our pvs, the PGRRM course ran into several problems. The educational standard of the local students was very low and this made it difficult to deliver all the course material. The international students found the basic standard unacceptable and the language barrier insurmountable and withdrew. Among the local students, many were already engaged in part-time employment so their attendance was very erratic.

It was decided to restrict the course in future to Indian students only. The website was therefore updated and all reference to international students removed.

This unique course is very beneficial to students but only if they attend regularly and complete all the assignments. In a country where it is possible to get a post-graduate degree without doing more than committing a few essays from guidebooks to memory and regurgitating them in the exam, regular attendance at lectures and completion of homework are not the norm.

Nevertheless, we shall persevere for at least another year before we decide whether the course is viable or not. If, at times, we become disheartened, we only have to look at the success of the first year of the course,

when we insisted that all students live on the campus. Because it was residential, the students had no choice but to attend all lectures and it was easy to pursue them for their homework assignments. They are all now employed in first-rate, well-paid jobs and still keep in touch with us. This course completely changed their lives and they really appreciate that.

HEALTH CARE FUND

As a result of the very successful eye camp held in November 2005 and sponsored by Hari Dhanoo, we decided to set up a Health Care Fund aimed at raising £6000 to build an extension to the small clinic at APK and install modern, high quality equipment so that in future, all laser surgery on cataract patients could be carried out at APK.

Some years ago, when we received a grant from the National Lottery, we tried to employ qualified doctors on a permanent basis so that there would always be good medical services available to the local villagers. However, it was difficult to get doctors to work, let alone live, in a village and even those who stayed for a while, only did so to improve their knowledge and extend their experience and they then went back to the towns to set up their own private practices.

The free eye camps we have been running for 20 years have, on the other hand, been very successful and there is still a big demand for them. Hari talked to us about the possibility of extending medical services in some other, more viable way. The plan we eventually formulated includes both eye camps and other medical services. We are confident that we will be able to get qualified doctors from Chandausi, Bilari and Moradabad to give their services free once a month and conduct examinations for general health issues such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. The attraction for the doctors, who are not known for their charitable work, is that villagers are then more likely to visit their surgeries in the towns when they have serious medical issues.

Past pvs and in some instances, their families have been extremely generous in

donating money to this cause and we now have £3490.

There is still a long way to go though.

If anyone would like some specific material and photos to show a potential donor, please contact Jyoti at jan_singh2002@yahoo.co.uk

COMING EVENTS

- Orientation for prospective pvs on Saturday 21st July
- Orientation for prospective pvs on Saturday 29th September
- Orientation for prospective pvs on Saturday 15th December
- Annual General Meeting of IVCS on Sunday 29th July at 12 noon. Lunch is provided. All members welcome.
- Executive Committee meeting on Sunday 30th September at 3pm. All interested members welcome.

