

IVCS**INDIAN VOLUNTEERS FOR
COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Registered Charity No. 285872

Patron: Robert Evans, Member of the European Parliament

Newsletter



EXPERIENCE RURAL INDIA

This year, 17 pvs went to Amarpurkashi, 9 women and 8 men. As has become increasingly common in the last few years, they came from a range of countries including England, Northern Ireland, Spain and Slovakia. We very much enjoyed their visit. They were all, without exception, interesting people who made a genuine effort to learn something about rural life and development and get to know some of the local people.

Nevertheless, this is only half the number we had the previous year. However, this is not something unique to IVCS. Other, similar organisations are also finding that applications are down. It seems that increased competition in this field is the main reason, plus the fact that many Indian projects now have their own websites and recruit volunteers or visitors directly.

Western applicants are often very keen to secure a place by direct application to the project as they think that this will cut out the middleman, minimise their expenses and make sure that all benefit goes without deduction to the project.

There are pitfalls in this, though. For a Westerner, particularly a young woman, to arrive in a project in a place she has never been to before is just fraught with dangerous possibilities. It is a tremendous risk to take.

We think that the three weeks we offer is not only extremely good value for money and well within the pocket of anyone planning to go to India but also an excellent way of adjusting and acclimatising to a very different way of life before moving on either to tour and sightsee or to volunteer in another project.

THEY CAN'T KEEP AWAY!

We were delighted this year to welcome a number of past project visitors on return visits.

In September 2007, Greg Parker, pv in February 2006, came from Australia for his third visit. Everyone loves having Greg back at APK. His positive, lively personality keeps us all happy and cheerful and he always manages to make a useful contribution to the work of the project, particularly in helping with computer training and conversational English. We are thrilled to know that he is

already planning his next visit for October this year.

Moppy Barr, pv in November 2003, paid us a return visit all the way from the U.S.A. It was lovely to see her again. We also owe her a very warm thank you for donating two overhead fans to the dining area under the verandah so that diners are no longer plagued by flies as they eat their food.

Toby Whitfeld, pv in November 2006, paid us a return visit to see how his scholarship scheme was going. Toby, originally from the UK, lives and works in France. On his return there, he set up a charitable organisation, Villages Espoir, which has funded a scholarship scheme to enable villagers to enrol in the computing courses now being run at APK. While visiting, Toby got talking to a number of local youths and consequently felt that there was a need for a special class in conversational English to help those who could not attend the classes held in term time. As a result, he established another scholarship scheme and appointed a teacher, Lekhni Gupta, to run a three-month course in conversational English over the summer holidays.

CONGRATULATIONS

- To Lydia Howe, pv in February 2007, who is getting married to Graeme in December
- To Fatema, pv in March 2002, and Deepak who are expecting their first baby in November

AMARPURKASHI NEWS

HIV/AIDS AWARENESS PROGRAMME

In February 2008, a new programme aimed at raising awareness of HIV and AIDS was initiated. The first phase was urban mapping of the whole district of Moradabad to identify the most vulnerable areas.

This mapping was so well done that those of our staff who were involved in the programme were asked to train staff from other projects in how to carry out this kind of urban mapping in a further 25 districts.

PROGRESS OF NEW CLINIC

The building of the new clinic is now complete. Doors and windows have been fitted, the walls partly tiled and marble flooring laid. The total cost was twice our original estimate but we had to follow the guidelines given by the doctors who will eventually be working there. Thus the main room had to be a certain size and the flooring had to be good quality and easily cleaned.

What now remains is for electricity to be fitted in the rooms, fans and lights installed and money raised to buy medical equipment and furniture. Then we will be ready to start!!

We hope to be finished in time to hold a free eye camp and a health camp in November.

ACTION RESEARCH

There has been considerable concern in India about the drop-out rate in government primary schools. Despite huge investment of money and resources and substantial support from the World Bank and the British government, the situation has not improved.

At the beginning of the year, the project therefore decided to initiate a programme of action research. On 1st February 2008, a new member of staff was appointed. His job was to investigate local government primary schools.

Ten government primary schools in the blocks of Bania Khera and Bilari were visited without prior notice or knowledge. Observations were made from village houses conveniently situated near the schools. Neither students nor staff were aware of this. Observation began one hour before the schools were due to open and teachers' and students' movements were recorded every five minutes up to the close of the school day.

A summary of the results is given below:

1. None of the schools opened at the officially specified time.

2. None of the schools remained open for the whole of the school day.
3. Out of a total of ten teachers working in these schools, two (20%) were absent for the whole day.
4. Out of a total of twenty assistant teachers, (Shiksha Mitra) five (25%) were absent.
5. None of the teachers or teachers' assistants stayed at the school for the whole day.
6. Those staff who were present moved in and out of the schools throughout the day without any formalities i.e. without asking permission or informing anyone.
7. Two (20%) of ten schools held an assembly.
8. Pupil-teacher contact was 45%.
9. 20% of the total number of students on roll was present at the beginning of the school day.
10. 18% of the total number of students on roll was present at the end of the school day.
11. Approximately 90% of the total number of students attending school that day arrived before any of the teachers.
12. 20.8% of pupils were present for the midday meal.

It is interesting to note that there was an increase of only 0.8% pupils at the time of the midday meal. Moreover, only 20% of those on roll are attending school and only 18% of those on roll stay for the whole school day.

These are the children who are influenced by the behaviour and attitude of the teachers. What they see is that the teachers are always late, often absent, come and go without notice, only teach for 50% of the time and don't bother with assemblies. This is the education they are receiving.

PROTEST AGAINST POLLUTION

As everyone who has been to APK knows, the local paper mill has caused horrific pollution, especially in the last ten years. At first, it was just the Aril River which became sluggish, black, acidic and covered in an evil-looking froth. Then it spread to farmers' adjacent fields, ruining their crops. Next, the

mill owners dumped live ash on the roadside where unsuspecting cyclists and pedestrians walked or rode through what they assumed were cold ashes. Many villagers suffered horrendous burns as a result.

These days, the stink of chemical effluents often pervade the air of the neighbouring villages and black dust from the factory chimney is blown far and wide, settling on everything. The water table has dropped dramatically as the factory uses huge amounts of water and the underground supply has also become polluted causing a sudden rise in the number of people suffering from jaundice. The farmers who lose their crops every year have never been compensated while villagers are forced to pay for ever-deeper borings to ensure a clean water supply.

Mukat Singh, founder/director of the project at APK, decided to stage a sit-in protest by the roadside, not far from the factory and river. All the senior government officers for the district were informed but did nothing. Hence on 22nd February, Mukat and Jyoti Singh, along with staff and students of the project as well as local village men and women, began an indefinite 24 hour sit-in.

Every day, emails were sent to government officials, informing them of the continued sit-in and reminding them of the demands made to bring about a sustainable solution to the problem. When there was no response for four days, it was decided to begin a relay fast.

At last there was some response from local officers and the fast was postponed on their promise to meet all demands.

Unfortunately, three months on, none of the demands has been met. Instead, a task force has been set up but has so far not taken any action.

STAFF TRAINING

This year, we hired a bus and took over 50 members of staff to Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges for a short break and some in-service training.

We stayed at an old family-run ashram where the accommodation was simple but

adequate and the food was plain but plentiful and served in traditional style, sitting cross-legged on mats on the ground.

Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to bathe in the Ganges and explore the local markets in the small town. The training sessions were marked by free and frank discussion among staff and a range of issues was successfully addressed.

BOOK REVIEW

"Transmission" by Hari Kunzru, a new young Indian writer, is about a computer geek, a typical young Indian from an average middle-class family who aspires to go to the States and make good. Of course, when he gets there, he finds that the job he was promised is actually a nasty con and he has a pretty miserable time.

However, he's not a computer geek for nothing and somehow, completely innocently, manages to infect computers worldwide with a powerful virus, getting himself into serious hot water.

The book is very well written and makes a welcome change from run-of-the-mill plots.

POETRY CORNER

Rosie Piasecki, pv from January 2008, wrote a charming little poem before leaving APK.

Welcome to APK

*You won't forget this place
We call APK
It has a certain charm
That makes you want to stay*

*Help out in the school
Or with English pronunciation
You might fancy a trip into town
Or get invited to a special occasion.*

*Every evening there are discussions
Then you'll be hungry for something nice
This doesn't vary greatly
But you'll love the daal and rice.*

*They're fussy about what you wear
And it really does seem to matter
Make sure you're in your kurta*

And your trusty dupatta.

*Whatever you choose to do
Three weeks is just not enough
And when you come to leave
You sure will find it tough.*

COMING EVENTS

- The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 20th July 2008 at 3 pm. (*Please note change of date.*) All members are welcome, especially those interested in becoming a trustee.
- The next orientation for prospective project visitors will be held on Saturday 2nd August from 2pm – 5pm.
- The A.G.M. (Annual General Meeting) of IVCS will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 21st September at 12 noon. All members are most welcome. Lunch will be provided.