

Trip to India 2015

Every two years I, Marilyn Spilchen, Manager Corporate Support Canada, try to go to Mumbai, India to see the school, staff, students, families, and the overall situation. The knowledge and observations help in promoting One! International to the world, local schools and organizations, and supporters. It also helps in identifying the needs 'on the ground'.

I returned from such a trip in August 2015. This time I was accompanied by my fifteen year old granddaughter who was able to give a younger perspective.

Talia is a dancer in Vancouver Canada and taught three different levels of students some of her Canadian dances.



DanceVideo.mov

Talia also worked with the pre-step babies, helping the mothers/supervisors to learn new skills in teaching the 'little ones'. She organized a basket of resources appropriate to the age group. The basket of resources are still being used with pride by the mothers who go to the office to ask for the basket.



When I am in India, I generally help out in the office as needed and try to make observations of note. I am always impressed at the growth and development at the schools in India from one trip to the next. This time I was amazed. There has usually been a steady growth, but this time it was as if a boulder had been rolled

away and the path was completely clear. I don't know if the reason is natural development of staff members, stability of staff in positions, or perhaps the motivational result of having the grade 10 students pass the National Institute of Open Schooling exams. In any case, there was an obvious commitment by all staff to provide the best possible educational experience for the children. The staff are showing shared values, confidence, an increased ability and willingness to problem solve, and they are working as a team. There was no bickering. If there was something that needed to be done, they did it and supported each other as needed.

Khar Danda School is generally cleaner. Sanjay – one of the older boys is looking after the school in general areas, and the cleaners are taking pride in their work. Manda seems to be enjoying her job looking after the pre-step children and watched carefully Talia reading to and teaching the little ones. The library has been set up with easy access for the children. The books are organized and labelled, and the library is being maintained and managed by the students.

New Curriculum workbooks are being developed for all subjects. They are developed per Step (level), and semester (2 semesters per year). There will be a general instruction book for the teacher and each student will have their own workbook. Preliminary usage is proving to be successful.. A group of volunteers in Edmonton are working on the Health Curriculum.

The curriculum books promote class planning. The teachers use the books to plan classes, indicate what they have covered, indicated the notes given to the students on the board, the knowledge the students have gained, attendance and any other class notes. The books allow for volunteer/teacher coverage in a seamless manner. The student books will show the progress being made by the student.

Curriculum is also being influenced by the experience of the Grade 10 exams and the knowledge of what is being expected at that level.

The Grade 10 classes are well established. There are more students ready to study with that group, but they are young and cannot be registered to write the exams until they are aged 14.

Generally the students' reading ability and understanding of English is very good. Their classroom has been set up with benches and a large wall sized whiteboard which is working well for them.

The 200 T-Shirts that were donated and decorated by the public and students in Sherwood Park Alberta will be used as a prize for good attendance at the Khar school where clothes are in greater need by the families.



The Khar staff are working well together; respectful of each other's skills; and are beginning to take on problems as a team to solve. For example, staff began to recognize the need to improve the nutrition of the meals provided to the students. Often the daily lunch meal is the only meal the students have per day. The staff have changed/added to the daily meal within the budget guidelines set.

Some desk computers donated by a Canadian supporter have been repaired inexpensively and are providing needed back up. Inconsistent electricity and security issues are still causing delays for computer usage at Nallasopara.

Saturday activities are usually at the school, and volunteers if available help with supervision. Games, puzzles, outdoor games, or movies are the general activities and a noon meal is provided.

Ex pat ladies still assist on an erratic basis. The American School partnership continues to be a great asset with joint activities and many in kind and monetary donations. Donations of books has helped to fill the shelves at Khar and the new school library at Nallasopara.

Teachers Days are held once per month and all the staff from both schools take part. The days are used for class planning and staff development. Games such as role playing help to create team building and problem solving. The staff seem to enjoy these activities.

Rohit, our blind student knows his letters now and is beginning to learn words. The staff take turns teaching Rohit when they have time. His health has not been good and staff are quite worried about him.



I did not spend a great deal of time at Nallasopara but do have a few observations. The population growth of the area has not slowed down. There are more cars, more people, more shops, more chawls (rows of concrete shop/homes areas), paved roads almost to the school, fewer fields in the immediate area, still very few reliable services. The school itself is in need of a few repairs; the climate

is very hard on buildings. One of the walls in the yard needs to be replaced, and although the inside rooms in the school remain in good condition, there is one room where the floor has been affected by rats tunneling underneath the building. The landlord remains supportive of the school.

Staff are proud of their garden. They have planted new plants including a neem tree.



Work has begun on the new Library. It will be set up with the same system as Khar Danda. Many books have been donated; shelves are being built.

All staff including the new staff are working well with the new curriculum books and system, and finding it helpful for teaching and evaluating students.

A great deal of work was done in Nallasopara at registration time. Each family was interviewed by the social worker and another staff with the intention of registering children who would not otherwise be in school. It is gratifying to see a number of 'handicapped' (differently challenged) children learning and being accepted by the other students. Generally speaking the families at Nallasopara have more resources available to them.

When I started this Report, I commented on the perspective of a 15 year old. Watching Talia work with all of the children at Khar Danda, it was obvious that children are children where ever they are. Children want to learn. Children accept difference. Children support one another, and make friends easily. One advantage of modern technology is that Talia can maintain the friendships she made in India while she plans for her next trip.



It was a memorable trip.

Marilyn