

Action Aid Australia Ltd

THREE MONTHS IN INDIA

Rebecca Reeves

There are all sorts of places to start an account of my visit to the SEDS farm, many would begin in Bangalore, where many weary travellers begin their journeys into South India, but my account starts in Lyn and Ian's lounge-room.

After an afternoon of tips and advice from Lyn and Ian about travelling to South India, I had no doubt in my mind that they were passionate about their cause. This was to the point where I nearly reconsidered my Internship with another organization, but instead my family decided to sponsor four of the children, and I toyed with the possibility of visiting the SEDS farm some time during my stay in India.

After many near-miss emails, and confused in-country phone calls, the plans were finally set for my friend Maybel and I, to visit the farm. Rough maps from local friends got us to the meeting point, where we were met by our driver (and a letter from Lyn assuring us the driver was legitimate).

The drive to the farm took us out of the fumes of Bangalore, India's chaotic Silicone Valley, through spectacular scenery into our neighbouring state, Andhra Pradesh. For many kilometres along the way I spotted SEDS signs along the roads, marking where they had set up various projects. I also noticed the stark difference in landscape from the drier areas, to the lush green, where SEDS was participating with locals and making a positive physical mark in the area. Lyn's excitement over photos of big holes and piles of dirt, which I had seen back in Narre Warren, suddenly made sense, the impact of that work was exciting. I had had no idea of the impact or scope of Lyn and Ian's work through Action Aid Australia, together with SEDS, and this was just the landscape, I hadn't met the people yet!

As we arrived at the farm the serenity was nearly overwhelming, as was the welcome from Lyn and Ian, who made me feel as if I was meeting long lost family! As we wandered around the farm, which felt more of a tropical resort, Lyn and Ian introduced me to some of the kids living there, and told me the circumstances which led to the children's residence at the farm.

As I reflected on the pleasure of being at this peaceful farm, I thought how wonderful it was to be there, away from the craziness of the city. For the children living there, each with their own tragic histories, however, the wonder of being there must be far greater. The knowledge that there are people in this world who know little of them, but are willing to support them and provide a loving and free environment, is truly amazing for children who have seen more misfortune in their few years, than most of us will see in our lifetimes. It was easy to see on these children's faces what happy lives they lead at the farm, and as they freely played cricket during their break, I could tell that this was not a show put on to humour the foreign sponsors, as I have seen in many places.

We were fortunate to be at the farm when all the sponsored kids came to get their checks done, a big (and I'm talking kids eating their weight worth of rice in one meal) lunch, and most importantly their new clothes! As I sat down with the children waiting to receive their clothes and have their official photos taken, I chatted to them, learnt about life in the village and exchanged all sorts of compliments with the girls about; bangles, earrings, nose studs, anklets, flowers in hair, hair styles, nail polish, and of course their new Salwaar Kameez. The boys were intrigued by the digital camera, and loved jumping in photos and seeing themselves on the small screen. Many were also fascinated as they sat in a group looking at the pictures from our recent trip to Mumbai, Agra and Delhi, excited to see national monuments that they had only heard of but which they aspired to visit one day.

Photo – The four children sponsored by Rebecca and her three brothers (with Rebecca)
From Left to right – Suguna, Parvani, Harish and Gowthamma. The photo was taken before the children received their new clothes.

The transformation of each of the children as they stepped out in their new clothes was fabulous, their big smiles at receiving their gift, and air of confidence as they had their photos taken shone through. Later in the day, after the children not living at the farm went home, we went out to the village where some of the sponsored children live. Seeing the school they attended, and hearing from the teacher that my sponsored child, (the cheeky smiled) Harish, was a good student, was so nice. Watching the kids who were a little shy earlier at the farm, open up within their village was really good to see.

As our weekend was coming to an end, we were invited to have a look at some of the areas involved in the Watershed Management Program. Listening to Rajen explain to us about the program, and the way the communities are involved was inspiring, particularly as I could see first-hand the dramatic positive impact the program was having on the landscape and in turn on the lives of many people.

I cannot accurately explain how important my visit to the SEDS farm was for my personal and professional development. Having been in South India for my Internship with another organization, I was feeling fairly hopeless about the field of community development. To see the way SEDS and Action Aid Australia was making lives better, not by just giving, but by empowering communities with skills and knowledge, taught me far more in those three days, than what I learnt in three months of my Internship.

Photo –
Rebecca
With Harish

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The meeting will be held in FITZROY this year to give some of our Melbourne City and Western suburbs people the opportunity to attend a meeting should they wish.

VENUE – Fitzroy – the office will advise details when booking in.

Time – 8 pm

Please advise the office of your attendance for catering purposes.

Phone – 9704 6315

Email – lipickering@bigpond.net.au

'LOVE LETTERS'

What a great night of food and fun, and outstanding entertainment from Jenny Leslie and David Wearne who performed this two person play so wonderfully well.

So much so, that we have had requests to let those who attended know when we have another evening and show. Jenny and David have offered to perform again in the future.

In excess of \$1000 was raised for project work. We especially thank Roger Griffiths for organising the evening, Glenys and Roger for opening their home, Andrea, Grandma and Glenys for the food, and Kirra for being a great hostess and seating those who attended, and assisting with serving meals.

Thanks also to the 40 plus people who made this intimate dinner and play so memorable. The lounge room was packed to capacity.

ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION HISTORY

Anne Marie Maltby

AAA members will be aware of our support of All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU) in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) but we thought some people might be interested to know how the organisation started.

In 1923, a new law known as The Calcutta Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act and the Children Act was passed to enable the police to rescue women and children from the brothels.. A few years later, this Act was later extended to become the The Bengal Suppression of Immoral Traffic Bill. The Bengal Presidency Council of Women and the All Bengal Women's Conference decided to form an independent organization for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Bengal. This society came into being in 1933 with the name of ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION and is an officially recognised and registered body.

The first Children's Welfare Home was in Dum Dum Cantonment, the old British military area, which is a fair distance away from the city. The first residents were three bewildered girls who had been brought to the Home by the police. They were very young and had no roots, no family and were unused to routine of any kind.

Since that time, the home was closed during WW2, reopened in several locations, and at different times, accommodated refugees (particularly after Partition of Bengal), the famine destitute, young girls in moral danger and mothers with their newborn babies. Increasing focus was on the need for, not just basic food and shelter, but for care, affection and education to allow for a future. What had begun as a home for rescued women had become a real home for all uncared for women and girls in distress.

The current premises (located centrally in Kolkata) were given by the Government in 1949. There were 70 women and 40 children in the home at the time. The Childrens Welfare Home and Primary School was founded at the premises a year later.

Since then, ABWU has grown considerably in scope and size and, apart from the children's and adult homes, now includes things as diverse as old age women's care, a bakery and restaurant for training, a counselling training program and legal advice for destitute women. New projects continue to be implemented, always with the aim of supporting and providing a future for destitute, abandoned or traumatized women and children. ABWU is held in high regard in the Indian community and we welcome the opportunity to be able to contribute to their work.

Photos – depict some of the beautiful embroidery and sewing the young women prepare.

BANGLADESH - SYMBIOSIS

The following two pages are taken from a Symbiosis publication – Ten Year 1995 – 2005.

This page covers three areas of support.

BANGLADESH – SYMBIOSIS

WORLD FOOD DAY

WHAT CAN YOU DO????????????????

- Attend a luncheon at Bright or a dinner at Bayles, or initiate or become involved with one of the following ideas. (Information below on each venue)
- SCHOOLS – Dress Free Day – a gold coin donation
- Donate what you would spend on a meal
- Supply food for your work colleagues and request a donation
- Family dinner – one family to prepare the food, and invite your relatives for the meal
- Coffee morning – Scones with jam and cream and other delights – again with family friends or work colleagues.

Please send us a note if you were involved in an activity to raise awareness of World Food Day, and we will use it in our Newsletter, with your permission.

All funds raised will be used in project work in India and Bangladesh. If you have a specific request for your funds raised, please advise when sending money in. Please also advise us of the names of people for receipting. Names of people and addresses can be sent in, or you may choose to collect all receipts and pass them on.

(All donations are tax deductible.)

Two special functions have again been arranged this year – a luncheon at Bright, and a dinner at Bayles. .

BRIGHT LUNCHEON

Date – Monday 30th October, 2006

Venue – Bright RSL Club

Time – 12 noon

Provided by Patrizia Simone of “Simone’s of Bright”

Cost - \$20 per person

This luncheon is being organised by Joy Handley with the support of BPWB (Business & Professional Women Bright) of which Joy is a founding member. Patrizia Simone, owner and Chef of the restaurant Simone’s of Bright is very generously providing all the food at no cost.

It will be Spring Festival time in Bright, and if you are planning a trip to the area, this would be an opportune time to enjoy a lovely lunch and meet great people. Please contact the office if you are interested and we will pass this on to Joy.

DINNER AT BAYLES

Date – Saturday 25th November

Venue – Home of Geoff and Andrea Pickering at Bayles - Time – 6.00 pm

Cost \$35.00 per person. BYO alcohol. Tax deductible

Our annual dinner at Bayles has become a talking point for those who attend, with many coming “just for the food”. The meat is home grown on the farm at Bayles, with many salad vegetables being donated. All food is home made with the desserts the highlight for many. This year we will again offer a wonderful array of donated foods, catering for all needs.

Entrée – many and varied. Roast lamb, beef and pork, with potatoes and salads. Vegetarian selection. Sweets – to sigh for!!!.

SEDS – INDIA

Ian Pickering

News just in from SEDS has advised that they are experiencing very high temperatures and believe another drought is on the way. Last year was a very high rainfall year and the drought was broken, they believed. These rains were the best they had received in fifteen years. The hoped for follow up rain this year did not occur.

On a positive note, our watershed projects has continued to deliver new catchment areas for needy villages, and whilst these have not solved all of the problems, the water table in the area has improved due to the heavier than average rainfalls of 2005.

CHILD SPONSORSHIP

Lyn Pickering

Our numbers have continued to grow, with 145 children currently attending school regularly in the SEDS area of developmental work. This year again we saw a group of 17 children complete their schooling, many to Year 10 standard, and several children relocating with their families.

Thank you to those who have become sponsors. Sponsorship of a child has become a way for many people to do something for a needy child, and I know by many of the letters and notes I receive that you are enjoying the experience.

Excerpt from an email from LUKE

A friend, and sponsor emailed me a letter she received from her grandson who is travelling around South East Asia. Luke wrote very vividly of his ongoing adventure, but some of his words stood out, and are worthy of inclusion in our newsletter.

Luke wrote – “I spoke to a man in Delhi before I started this trip, and he said – leave all your western ideas at home, and don’t compare this place to any other..... And as crazy as it seems, as warped as it may become, I can understand their way of life, just like I understood life in Laos over a month ago. What makes my way of life more acceptable than any one elses - Nothing.In India anything is possible.

Anyone involved with Action Aid Australia may wonder why they get correspondence from a variety of different people and addresses in our small organization. The reason is simple – we have no paid staff, so all of Action Aid’s work is done by volunteers.

Although our “head office” is based at Ian and Lyn Pickering’s home in Narre Warren, with the main office work being done from Narre Warren, our Board members and Honorary Advisors are spread all over Victoria with a couple interstate or overseas. Thus, for example, you might get newsletters and SEDS’s sponsorship information from Lyn in Narre Warren, ABWU girls annual reports from Joy in Bright, or ABWU sponsorship reminders from Anne-Marie in Richmond. Please note that all donations should be still directed to the office for receipting and banking purposes.

We feel that we are basically pretty efficient and well organised, but some delays and the occasional crossed wire are inevitable when people from several locations are involved in projects. It would be nice to have paid staff who could do all of the work and manage the headaches of complying with Government guidelines, but the downside is that it would greatly eat into the money available for our projects.

We believe that one of the great strengths of Action Aid Australia is that our costs are extremely low, and are only required for basic essentials for the office and our annual external audit. Some things that appear in our financial reports as expenses, such as travel to monitor projects, are actually funded by specific donations from those Board members who supervise the particular project. You can be sure that the money you donate is being used effectively for the purpose for which you gave it, and not being chewed up in administration costs.

M & K PRINTING

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talk to KEN
at M & K Printing, Vesper Drive Narre
Warren.
Telephone – 9704 8500

**COMPUTER
INITIATIVES**

Tim Moore
03 9707 4850
Berwick

WEB SITE ADDRESS - PLEASE NOTE THE NEW ADDRESS

Thanks to Board member Jess Fliegner and Ganesh for their recent work on our Web page. Please have a look, and sent comments or ideas to lipickering@bigpond.net.au, Mail can still be sent to lipickering@bigpond.com

www.actionaidaustralia.org.au

ACTION AID AUSTRALIA – REMITTANCE ADVICE

I would like to help Action Aid's work in the following way:

- **Make a general donation : \$ _____**
- **Support Village Communities in project activities**

Bangladesh (Symbiosis) Vocational Training for Women TTIS

India (SEDS) – Watershed Management Project

India (SEDS) - Womens' Self Help Groups

India (SEDS) – School Development

India (SEDS) – Medical Fund for sponsored children

India (ABWU) – Special projects

India (ABWU) – Medical Fund for sponsored children

- **\$25.00 Membership – 01/07/06 to 30/06/07**
- **Information re Bequest (Tick the box)**
- **Begin a Child Sponsorship in :**

India (ABWU) - All Bengal Womens' Union in Calcutta)

India (S.E.D.S.) in Central Southern India

The cost to sponsor a child for :

1 month = \$20.00

6 months = \$110.00

3 months = \$55.00

12 months = \$220.00

Name : _____ Title : _____

Address: _____

Postcode _____

Please advise if receipt to be in a different name to the sender. All gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt issued) P.O. Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, 3805