

Action Aid Australia Ltd

www.actionaidaustralia.org.au

Our new logo!



Partners in Aid

In our recent letter, we updated you all on our name change and timescales. We are pleased to report that everything is on schedule and we are delighted to be able to show you our new logo. We feel that it reflects the values of our organization and our partnership approach to combating poverty. From 1st July, all of our communications and administration will be under the name 'Partners in Aid'.

A visit to our projects in Bangladesh

Roger Hughes

At the beginning of this year, I had a wonderful trip to Bangladesh to see our projects. Members of the AAA community, correction PIA community, will know that we have two major projects in Bangladesh. These projects being a technical training programme, TTIS, and an island based schooling programme, JRDP.

Much of my time was spent looking at TTIS projects near, or in, the Mymensingh district to the north of the capital, Dhaka. These projects consist mainly of training in sewing, embroidery and hair dressing. Most of those being trained are the poor, who receive a highly subsidised training, but there are a few members of the various training groups who are of greater economic means and are fee paying. The latter subsidise the former. There are numerous PIA groups and as I moved around the countryside looking at other aspects of the work of Symbiosis, our implementing agency, I kept on coming upon such TTIS groups - often in places where my guide did not know that they were operating!

Concerning the sewing groups of the TTIS project, all initial training in both hand and machine sewing is done on sheets of newspaper before graduating to material. There is a tremendous demand for the work of graduates. I gathered that a woman working part time with a machine might earn typically \$AUS5000 per year while a woman working full time might earn three times this amount. Occasionally a man takes part in the program but the vast majority of graduates are women. I was initially a little concerned that while the training in the use of sewing machines was going well, graduates were finding it hard to obtain the sewing machines necessary to continue their work. However, such difficulties are transient in that after graduating participants are highly motivated to make the most of their training and become very keen members of their savings groups and so sewing machines soon follow. I was highly delighted with the results.

The embroidery programme does not receive the same demand as the sewing programme because the demand for the finished product is smaller. Embroidery is seen as a luxury while sewing is a necessity. Our embroidery programme is not as well established but the work produced is exquisite. I purchased a large tablecloth to go on the table during our PIA board meetings which my wife, Glenys, regards as too good to put on a dining table!

The remaining programme is that of hairdressing. I had been a little cautious of us starting training in this field but the boost that I clearly saw given to both the hairdressers and their customers dispelled my opposition. Being a man, I could not see the hairdressing taking place. Going into the room would have been culturally insensitive. However, by good fortune there were other Australians visiting one such centre at the time of my visiting and the women of this visiting group reported that the training was going very well.



Photograph of the hairdressing classroom and teachers following the end of the class

Turning to the JRDP, I had one day at this project, which is located on an island in the middle of the Jamuna River. The island is subject to flooding associated with the annual monsoon. I had envisaged a much smaller, more densely packed community but the community covered most of the, variable, 250 km² of the island. As I usually find in Bangladesh, the community is much more intricate than I had been envisaging. The school that we built occupied a mound that had been built by human labour. (And, yes, there on the mound was also a TTIS outpost!) I was treated to a display of marching followed by the unveiling of a plaque to our main benefactors of this project. We then went into the school building, a long corrugated steel building, where I witnessed class work.



Photograph of the terrain on the sand island. Note the built up parts of the island with trees and housing. This photograph is taken from near the centre of the island (not the edge, as it may appear).

The school is certainly needed. Only about one sixth of the children on the island are able to attend. The rest do not receive any education, although I noted that a new 'missionary based' school has recently started on the island. Also of concern is the necessity to move the school as the island moves southwards. The school cannot be moved far each time as the children attending would not have access to transport if it moved too far. What is needed, in my assessment, are a group of schools, all with the same curriculum, spread across the island. Then when one school needs to be moved it can be moved the full length of the island and all students on the island can have continuity of education. Maybe the TTIS programme can be used to produce graduates who could be employed to generate the income to pay the cost of staffing such schools. Bangladesh is a beautiful country but it presents so many challenges in development!

By the way while I was in Bangladesh, I understand that the Lonely Planet Guide organisation named Bangladesh as one of the best tourist destinations in the world! I think it is near tops for a wonderful experience but not a relaxing holiday!

Why the Philippines?

Cecily Neil

A number of people have recently asked why AAA is sponsoring a project in the Philippines, when the main focus of AAA support for international development is the Indian Subcontinent. It may therefore be helpful to explain how the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project in the Philippines came about.

In 2005, Marie Neil died in a house fire that led to a lengthy police investigation. To try and conclude the prolonged aftermath of the tragedy with something worthwhile, her daughter Cecily decided to donate sufficient money to AAA to fund a small project in Marie's memory.

Cecily Neil had been a member of the AAA Board for some years, until her overseas commitments made it impractical to continue in this capacity. However, she has continued her association with the Board in the role of Special Advisor. A Community Health Development Consultant, Cecily had worked in the Philippines for a number of years on an AusAID Project, and had developed a strong commitment to the country and particularly to some of the Filipino Community Development Officers with whom she had previously worked. Accordingly, she made a specific request that the Project in her Mother's memory be carried out in the Philippines, recommending that the location be Kalinga, one of the Provinces in the Northern Philippines in which she had previously worked. There were a number of reasons for suggesting Kalinga as the project site. Firstly, in order to enhance sustainability, it was intended that the Project was to be carried out in close partnership with a Provincial Health Office, and there was already a good working relationship with this Office in Kalinga. Secondly, in Kalinga it would be possible to employ a local Community Development Worker who had previously been employed on the AusAID project, and was known to be excellent at her job. Thirdly, and most importantly, Kalinga is an area with many rural environmental sanitation problems that affect health but which are problems that communities themselves could resolve with a little encouragement, technical support and minimal external financing. However, Kalinga receives relatively little external aid, most of which, these days, is concentrated in Mindanao where the terrorist activities are most prevalent.

The Project has now been running for two years. In a recent visit to Kalinga, Cecily was delighted by the progress that has been made by the local Project Coordinator, Valerie Pis-o, and her partner in the Provincial Health Office, Rose Alundaay. A close working relationship has been maintained with the Provincial Health Office, a number of whose staff now assist with Project implementation, without any extra inducement, in addition to fulfilling their designated duties. Training, followed by ongoing mentoring, has now been carried out in 41 villages (barangays). In many of these villages, families have now established backyard gardens, drainage has been improved, people are now keeping their pigs – previously free roaming through the village – in pens and sanitary latrines are being built to eliminate open defecation. To date, 26 of the villages in which training has been carried out have been provided with small amounts of funding (up to AUD300) to purchase materials such as cement, reinforcement bars etc, to facilitate the construction of latrines, pig pens or drains. An unintended, but very pleasing, outcome of the Project is that it is now acting as an integrating mechanism for the implementation at the village level of the health-related components of a number of the Provincial Health Office Programs. A full report of this visit will be provided in the next Newsletter.

Unexpected heavy rain forced a delay in tank desilting work at SEDS in the Ananthapur District earlier this year. However by the end of the financial year, and despite a broken dredger hose, work had recommenced and all scheduled tanks were completed by June.

SEDS has continued its work in integrated socio-economic and rural development for over 29 years. The families targeted by this work are dependent on agriculture in rain fed areas and are among the worst affected by poverty in India as neither the Green Revolution nor the economic boom have been able to enhance their livelihoods. SEDS interventions in natural resource management, including watersheds, community organisation, health and education have seen a marked and sustained improvement in the quality of life for many, especially women, and a dramatic rehabilitation of the natural environment.

Partners in Aid has approved funding for continuation of this work for 2009 -2010 with a focus on rejuvenating 40 more water tanks, providing more water for humans and animals and recharging the groundwater supplies. There will be further work to empower the women in the area economically and socially by supporting Village Organization's and Women's Self Help groups with seed collection for oil processing and marketing.

A proposal to establish a seed oil extraction plant was finally abandoned when it became clearly unfeasible. However SEDS has applied for Gold Standard Accreditation for a Biogas project (reported in the September 2008 edition) and this week has been nominated for recognition in the BBC World Challenge 09 competition, which identifies and recognises outstanding projects or small businesses which have made a substantial difference to the welfare and environments of others and have shown enterprise and innovation at a grass roots level.

SEDS will continue its work in raising awareness among the local population on issues such as community resources (tanks), gender issues and women's well being, and community health. And of course the school at SEDS, under the direction of new staff member Mr. Ramana, will continue to provide a stimulating bi-lingual learning environment for local children, especially girls.

While AAA was saddened to lose the commitment and support of Roger Giffiths in 2008, his memory will be honoured at SEDS with a driving school in his name which will train some of the young men who are dropping out of school. Roger loved cars, and was always tinkering around and initiating new things. He was also particularly attached to the SEDS project. This was seen to be a fitting way to honour his memory with money raised from donations at his funeral.

Entertainment Books now available for most States!!

Entertainment books are now available. These books are a guide to the best restaurants, hotel accommodation, attractions, sports and leisure activities – all with 25% to 50% off or two-for-one offers, offering great value. Also, we receive a percentage of each book sold as a donation.

Cost - \$65 each – Melbourne, Sydney, Sydney North, Adelaide, Perth. Cost - \$60 each – Brisbane Cost - \$50 – Geelong, Tasmania, Canberra, Gold Coast, Cheques to be made out to Action Aid Australia.

The program continues to grow due to the ongoing generosity of our donors.

In late December / early January 185 sponsored children received a new set of clothes from their sponsors. Many donors like to give a gift to their sponsored child during the Christmas period, and this is not only the most cost effective way to do this, but also new clothes are valued by the families. Sponsors have now been given photos showing their sponsor child receiving or wearing the clothes. The photos all show beautiful young children who, for the most part, enjoy being on the program.

Ian and I have started our plans to visit SEDS in January after an absence of more than two years. This has been our longest time away from India since we began our travels to SEDS, back in 1992 and 1994 respectively.

Since 1995 when this program commenced, Ian and I have watched young people join our sponsorship program, and observed the changes to the lives of these young people. Their stories are always heart wrenching. None of these young people will become rocket scientists (how many do?), but many of them do have goals and the SEDS program may help them to make more informed choices about their futures. During this past year a number of these long time students have gone to College (Year 11 and 12) and even on to University. This is a very long way for the young people who are currently seeking support to remain at school and who are just beginning on a road to a better education.

Profiles of children seeking support

Suneela Bai. Suneela is 6 years old and lives with her mother. They were abandoned by her father, and her mother struggles to provide basic necessities like food.

M Harish babu. Harish is 6 years old and lives with his aging grandmother following the death of his parents.

B. Nandini is 6 years old and lives with her mother, grandmother and older sister. Her father deserted the family when she was a baby. Her mother carries out daily labouring in the agricultural fields.

Lakshminarayamma lives with her mother after they were abandoned by her father. Her mother struggles to earn enough to keep them both, and relies on day labour when available.

K. Roja is a beautiful 11 year old young lady who lives with her Aunt and Uncle after the loss of her parents. Her younger sister is living with her grandparents. The Aunt requires assistance to send Roja to school.

The local VO's (Village Organisation) have all recommended that these families be assisted where possible so that the children may attend school.

If you have not sponsored a child before, please consider doing so, and put a smile on the faces of these beautiful young people.

All Bengal Women's Union Kolkata

Joy Handley

Vocational Training Projects

The projects funded by Action Aid Australia donors have recently been completed for 08/09.

Weaving, knitting and tailoring courses continue to be great successes for all the girls involved. Not only are high standards achieved, but a number of disabled girls are also able to take part. In total over 30 girls have taken part in these programmes and eleven girls from the tailoring course were seen to be able to make a living from their training and were provided with a sewing machine. In fact, the tailoring

program in particular has been so successful that the number of trainees is going to increase over the next year and the budget expanding.

ABWU has also been running their own canteen for the public "Suruchi" for many years now and it has proven extremely popular - there is often a queue waiting patiently for tables! In association with this they run a Cooking Canteen Training Program for girls who have a special interest in cooking. For the first time they are looking to appoint a Cooking Teacher who could give some formal training to the girls and we have been asked if we can provide funding to allow this to happen.

On an individual note, another of our girls has successfully passed the 1st part of her Post Graduate exams. We have had some really good results from many of the girls with their studies as well as those taking the Vocational Training. The financial support the girls receive from their sponsors and our very generous donors obviously helps in providing them with opportunities to excel, so thank you all for all your support!!

Louise and Paul return to ABWU

You may remember two years ago I met these lovely people in Kolkata and introduced them to ABWU. After I departed ABWU they stayed and helped with many repairs, promising to return. They indeed have returned and after arriving at ABWU in April this year immediately started renovating the toilets and bathrooms in the Children's Home. They have completed tiling the floor and walls and I would like to share some of Louise's emails to me:

"I know you are just itching to know how the tiling is going... well... I laid my first tiles yesterday, only to see them doused with a bucket of dirty water compliments of the ABWU cleaning lady, whilst we were in another room having coffee!! Dirty water (well, any water for that matter!!) does not do any good for freshly laid tiles and Indian tile adhesive!! The good news is it all turned out alright!! Paul the master tiler finished laying them today, and as we were preparing to move onto the next cubicle we were interrupted with the news the plan had changed. This seems to be a regular occurrence in India as you probably already have guessed! Now we can't lay tiles in that cubicle or the other one either as they are both to have new toilets fitted by the plumber possibly on Friday. Oddly enough, the cubicle which already has a squat toilet will be changed to a western type toilet and the cubicle which currently does not have a toilet will be fitted with a squat!!! I gave up long ago trying to work out why some things happen - because this after all is India!"

Tomorrow is Bengali new year Poila Boishak and a holiday for some. We will still go to 'work' even though there may not be anything further we can do, if the sand and cement have not arrived for the grout, which was ordered sometime this morning. Earplugs and masks arrived this afternoon which will be a blessing when Paul is cutting the wall tiles. He has been doing without these bits of PPE (personal protective equipment for those not in the know!) whilst cutting the floor tiles so they will be a welcome addition.

Hi again everyone! Last time I wrote I said I would tell you about Hasi... she is a beautiful 18 year old young lady who has grown up at ABWU and is now part of the staff, helping to serve meals and tea/coffee to the lady members and visitors (including us) and who sleeps with the younger girls in the dormitory. In return she receives a small wage and is continuing her education learning English with a aim to learn about computers. She has the happiest smile and nothing is ever too hard for her... from finding us various pieces of equipment like rope, sticks, buckets, matches and bricks, sharpening pencils, making lime soda, ensuring we get lunch and morning and afternoon tea and teaching us how to do things the Indian way! She reads English very well but doesn't always grasp the meaning (who does??) and I think she is really appreciating the opportunity to practice speaking. We have said over and over and over "I give this to you" so she can practice! She also likes to read from her English reader and have us help her with the pronunciation of difficult words - mostly I get to do this as Paul is usually busy tiling. She can be fiery at times especially when the girls don't do her bidding immediately, although it may be the Bengali sounds more fiery than it actually is. She has beautiful waist length black hair, and instead of braiding it I showed her how to twist it like a rope, and now everyday one of my first jobs is to do her hair this way.

Louise has commented on how lucky all the girls are compared to those whom she passes every day on her walk to the Home and sees the same scene as I have seen many times.... When I step outside the gate at BMS, there are two questions which cross my mind just about everyday - the first is "where do you start trying to help all these people living on the street?" and the second is "when do you stop trying to help?" It is really really difficult to walk past some of the families living on the street and not do anything, especially when you see the children covered in sores, wearing no clothes, a mother trying to make the best of a rotten situation with a brand new baby lying on a dirty piece of cardboard covered in filthy rags no more than a few metres away from a pathetic looking female dog suckling three pups. I haven't yet found the answers to my questions and in fact there are plenty more questions which arise because of the first two.

The girls at ABWU are very fortunate to have a place to live even though it is still very sparse. Fortunate because they have three meals a day, a safe place to live and people who care for them, but no one to really love them. I've been talking to a few of them about their families and their stories are incredibly sad - one of the older girls has been home to visit her mother in hospital for a few days, but was pleased to come back 'home' as she says it is far better at ABWU than her real home. She doesn't know her father as is the sad case with many others."

We thank Louise and Paul for all their hard work. What they have accomplished is difficult enough in Australia, but it is 1000 times more difficult in Kolkatta!!!

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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
 - Womens’ Self Help Groups
 - School Development
 - Medical Fund for sponsored children
 - **India (ABWU)**
 - Special projects
 - Medical Fund for sponsored children
 - **Philippines Healthy Village Project**
 - **\$25.00 Membership – 01/07/09 to 30/06/10**
 - **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 = \$22.00 6 months = \$120.00 3 months = \$60.00
 12 months = \$240.00 Optional Present = \$20.00

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