

Piali Ashar Alo School

Report May-September 2015

1. AT HOME IN SLOVENIA...

We again spent part of our summer holidays in Slovenia this year. The month of May was very special and will remain in our memories for years to come. This marked the first time a charity concert was held to benefit the work we do in India. The charity concert was organized in cooperation with the Humanitarian Light of Hope Association and held on Monday, May 18th as the closing event of this year's already seventh environmental-humanitarian action project Preserve Slovenia - Help India, the sponsor of which is former Member of European Parliament Romana Jordan, Ph.D. The cultural programme of the concert was put together by the students of I. High School Celje in cooperation with Fran Kranjc Celje Elementary School. We were very happy to have the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Borut Pahor, attend this event as our honourable guest. Among other words, President Pahor said: "When I thought about the fact that India is one of the most populous countries in the world and that about one hundred children are helped through your school it seemed like just a drop in the ocean. But we must remember: whoever helps one child, helps all of our children. The decision to help others beyond the borders of your own country is noble and makes us all better people."



We also successfully carried out the action project "Dolls for Girls", in which we collected over 140 dolls for girls in an Indian orphanage where Anup had also spent a part of his childhood. Tamara Bizjak was the instigator of this project and Manja Eder organized the collection. A



special thanks to the Bračko family, their friends and the students of Second Primary School in Slovenska Bistrica, who carried it out.

Thanks also to the POTA volunteers who helped make sure the dolls got here safely.



We visited the students of class 4A at Anton Tomaž Linhart Primary School in Radovljica, who've already sent us two big surprises this year. In April, we received toothbrushes and combs and at the beginning of August, four large packages of toys and candies that warmed and sweetened many a rainy day. In between, we've received letters and drawings that are really starting to nurture closer ties among our students.

1. AND AT HOME IN INDIA...



After a short summer break, we sat behind our school desks again in June and started preparing for semi-annual examinations. Even the strong monsoon rains failed to sap our determination as all of us – teachers and students – tried very hard to make sure we all came to school every day. It's important that the children

learn to keep to a schedule and that they come to school even during poor weather conditions or when they aren't feeling well... and even when some of their parents tell them: "Well, no, you don't have to go to school today." These are things we talk about regularly with students in



homeroom and with parents during parent-teacher meetings. At our morning assembly, our teachers and elder students check to make sure that the students are wearing clean uniforms, that the students themselves are clean, that they've brushed their teeth and trimmed their fingernails. It does often happen that some students will need to first wash and change themselves before stepping into a classroom.

Monsoon



Because of the heavy and long-lasting rains during this year's monsoon period, many homes were



flooded, access to houses was nearly impossible and the everyday lives of villagers made very difficult. A number of families found shelter in schools. Our

school also gave shelter to two families with small children. In these difficult weeks, we decided to donate some food to those villagers who were in greatest need. Because we also want our children to know how to share with others, we encouraged them to also donate some money so that through our common effort, we could ensure at least one meal for a number of villagers. And so it was that we loaded rice oatmeal, sugar syrup and soup onto a

bike wagon in the early morning hours. These were very emotional and intense moments, when the sharing of a simple meal from hand to hand also brings about caring and the promise that we're not alone in a time of crisis.

Independence Day



On August 15th, India celebrates Independence Day – which we also mark with a lively programme at our own school. The students paid tribute to their country through dance, national songs and



recitations. This holiday certainly doesn't compare to the bleak celebrations I remember from my own school days. In India, Independence Day is a real spectacle, full of patriotic emotions and love for the nation. You are welcome to come join us next year and see it for yourself!

Visits, Volunteers from Slovenia



We were very happy to have again received a visit from Jana, our first volunteer and one of our first sponsors. We first met Jana in 2008 at our meeting for sponsors. She soon came to visit us again in what were then our small rented spaces. She was very happy to see the progress we've made in the last several years. Her sponsor child Raju was especially glad to see her - he's grown from a young boy and is now already attending the 8th grade. We visited Raju's home together, walked around

the monsoon paths of Piali and even treated ourselves to a visit of Kolkata.



We again hosted members of group POTA, which operates in the framework of the Youth Information Centre in Slovenia. 15 young people decided to spend part of their holidays doing volunteer work. We really value and appreciate their dedication and perseverance and the fact that prior to coming to India, they spent several months presenting their work at parishes across Slovenia and collecting donations for our projects. We'd especially like to thank coordinators Jerneja and Petra as well as Neja and Teja, who spent 14 intensive days with us. They helped us make pom poms, bracelets and cards and danced with us to the rhythms of zumba and the Slovenian polka. Welcome again next year!

Active Learning



Over the past few years, it's not only our school space that's changing but also our way of teaching. The teachers, pedagogues, students and artists who have shared some of their time with us have helped us – and have helped our teachers – view teaching and learning from various different perspectives. Through workshops and as a result of our own



experiences, we've learned how important it is for students to remain active in class, to ensure that they connect new knowledge with what they've already learned and to relate theoretical knowledge with practical experiences in their own lives. So these days, you won't simply find us sitting behind our desks in the classroom. We'll also be outside, working on making the neighbourhood look nicer and planting shrubs, or on the veranda, using natural materials to try and shape some of the simple tools once used by the first humans.

My Story



My name is Tazmira and I attend the fifth grade. My aunt has taken care of me since I was little - that's what my parents decided because I have two younger sisters. So I ended up living with my aunt in Piali while my parents lived in a Kolkata slum. My aunt loves me very much and I was happy living with her even after she got married and had her own kids. But



unfortunately, the new family hasn't accepted me well and a few weeks ago, they literally threw me out on the street. So now I live with my parents and sisters in the Kolkata slum. I take the train to Piali every day so that I can go to school. The hardest thing is when it rains and there's water everywhere. But I'm determined and I go to school every day, even when my parents tell me I don't have to. When it rains hard in the mornings, I get up by myself and get ready to go to school while my parents are still asleep. I love going to school and I'm doing well in all my subjects. The teachers like me too because I'm bright and I always finish my homework. I try to speak English even though it's difficult. When I grow up, I want to be an English teacher ...

Thank you for helping us!

Mojca and Anup Gayen, Piali Ashar Alo

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