

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

June 12, 2006

Dear Friends,

It is our last night in India and we pause to reflect on our last week here. It was a busy one. The village health fair on Monday was postponed until next week but the rest of the days were full of activity.

We went to a school on Tuesday to donate two water filters and they made it such a special event complete with singing and dancing and of course the mandatory speeches.

On Wednesday we went to the village of Chilapanahalli to kick off the first "Adopt A Village" program that was sponsored by the Rotary Club of North Haven. This includes a donation of 50 water filters to the neediest families. It also includes a paid community steward who lives in the village and is trained as a Bio Sand water filter technician who will help the families with the filter operations for one year. It also includes a donation of water filters for the school and the child center, a bar of soap for each student, and education about basic sanitation issues.

Chilapanahalli was selected by a government rural development officer, Ibrahim Padbidri, as one of the neediest villages in the area. The BPL (below poverty level) in India is 11,000 rupees a year (approximately \$240). More than ¼ of these village families live on half that amount per year!

It was truly a gale event. The entire workshop staff except one who stayed behind as a watchman were there as well as many Rotarians, Ram's son from Bangalore and co-brother and sister in law who came from Mysore, our friend Haroon, local dignitaries and a big crowd of villagers. They actually had invitations printed and delivered them to important people in the area. We started off with puja (prayer) in the ashram and began the program on the terrace of the ashram. There were speeches and entertainment. A singer and his troop that we have hired for special events involving children sang songs about water, sanitation and health issues and put on skits for the crowd. The crowning moment was handing out user's manuals to the 50 women whose families were selected to receive filters. It was a moving moment for all of us. They were extremely grateful for the donated filters and it brought Cathy to tears when one older woman grasped her hands and kissed them.

On Thursday night the workshop staff's families came to meet us. Nothing can be simple here in India, and this was no exception. There was a banner decorated with hundreds of flowers, a specially decorated cake (that we fed to each other like at a wedding!), singing, speeches, and pictures taken of each staff person with their families. We were presented with a fancy trophy and silver tea cups. Afterwards there was food, cake and tea. It was a special night for us.

giving

U.S. dollars go a long way in India.....for example:

Adopt A Family; (Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter)	\$ 25
Adopt A School; (Donation of two water filters to a school accompanied by a clean water education program)	\$ 100
Adopt A Village Partnership; (Donation of up to 60 filters to a needy village, subsidy of up to 30 filters purchased by villagers, soap & educational program for village children, community steward for one year)	\$ 2,500

Make Checks Payable to:

**South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc.
2832 Whitney Avenue,
Hamden CT 06518 USA**

Earlier on Thursday four teachers from the local government school system came to the work shop with a proposition. They want us to donate water filters to all of the schools in the district. We asked for more information and agreed to meet them at one of the schools the following day where a water filter is already in use. The more we thought about it the more excited we became at the prospect of giving filtered water to so many children.

The water at the schools would be used for drinking and cooking. The government supplies a mid-day nutritious meal to each student. For some of them it is the only meal they get.

On Friday we went to a school in Kolar for what we thought was a simple meeting with the school officials. It turned out to be a real "program". All 300+ students were sitting outside in the shade of a giant "Flame of the Forest" tree. We were ushered to a head table and there were speeches made. Three of the students also sang a special song. We were presented with a letter of request from the school officials; there are 411 schools, each with approximately 300 students, so this program would help over 120,000 children. We are hoping that one of the Rotary clubs in the United States might want to participate in a Rotary matching grant to make this dream come true.

On Friday night we attended the Rotary Club of Kolar Central weekly meeting as their speakers. We showed a power point presentation about the Bio Sand water filters. There were several wives and children in attendance as well and they were interested in the program and asked good questions. There was an India dinner served afterwards (eaten standing up or sitting temporarily in chairs) so there was some time to socialize with the group afterwards. They seem like wonderful people. We are happy we had the opportunity to meet the members of the other Rotary Club in town.

On Saturday we said a tearful good bye to the staff and we are now back in Bangalore, packed and ready for our 3:30am taxi ride to the airport. We have accomplished a lot but we are both more than ready to return home right now.

Thank you for your interest and support!

Cathy and Mike

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Taste The Healthy Difference