



The Dignity Project Monthly operations update

August 2024 update

Introduction

In August we travelled to Khajuraho to visit the new Wonderkids school premises; a second sanitary pad distribution meeting occurred in the tribal village of Banki and planning continued for the second Wonderkids School Annual Sports Carnival and the TDP AGM next month.

Overseas operations update

Wonderkids School (Khajuraho, India) : With the new school year commencing in India and the shift to the new campus, August was a time of settling in at Wonderkids. The school has welcomed 35 new admissions this year, with several large families joining the school community who have children across multiple year levels. Admissions have now paused for this school year at roughly 175 students, though Wonderkids will seek to enrol the children not attending school that have been observed in the community adjacent to the new school site. Additionally, the school has hired six new teachers ensuring all classes have individual teachers and bringing the number of teaching staff to 12. Some of the new teachers bring specialist skills in science, which is needed for the school to expand to Class 12, and one teacher joins the school who is a past student. In establishing the new school, desks have been sourced and painted (with some classes acquiring desks for the first time), a new CCTV system has been installed and a dedicated library and computer lab created.



In August the school celebrated Independence Day, commemorating 78 years of independent rule for India, with a half-day of festivities. Celebrations included song and dance performances, special sweet distribution to the children and staff lunch with samosas, biryani and cake. To mark the day, all teachers dressed in saris and looked fabulous!



Looking ahead, the staff will focus on additional support classes for students with low literacy in Hindi, with a hope remedial classes will run on Saturdays for identified students for the remainder of the year. The school will also seek to develop a so-called 'no-bag Saturday' which will introduce more creative learning lessons, activities such as chess and sport or games on the Saturday school day. During the month of July, 3,373 breakfasts were provided to staff and students at Wonderkids. Further work on the roster of breakfast meals is underway and a new meal plan should be in place starting in October.



Items of significance (overseas)

The most notable item for reporting this month is the ongoing transition by Wonderkids to the new school campus. More details are provided in Madelene's report below. Secondly, a follow up sanitary pad workshop was held in the tribal village of Banki during the month.

Banki pad workshop

In August we returned to the tribal village of Banki with NGO partner Baavan. TDP first visited Banki, located about 90kms from Khajuraho, in February for a female health workshop and pad distribution. At the time, we distributed 40 packets of reuseable pads to women living in this remote community. A follow-up visit was arranged to gain feedback from the women who had been using the product and to provide more to women in the community. The common issues raised in the feedback session were the difficulty in drying the pads during India's rainy season and the insufficiency of the 4-pad package for menstruation periods lasting 7 to 8 days. (TDP has since moved to providing an 8 pad packet to all women). Recognizing that some women faced challenges in using the pads, a detailed demonstration on proper usage also occurred. Importantly, all women and adolescent girls who had received pads previously are consistently using them and expressed satisfaction, despite living in a remote area. This positive feedback indicates the growing acceptance and impact of eco-friendly reusable pads in the community.

At this month's meeting, a further 30 pads were distributed during our visit and eagerly accepted. It was especially pleasing to see so many young women at the workshop and accepting the pads. A second meeting was held in Banki during this visit at the family compound of the village head Mr Manmohan where 20 women in one large, joined family reside. A further 20 packets of pads will be sent to Banki for these women. Looking forward, TDP is now also investigating whether some underwear should be provided to women receiving the pads, particularly in remote areas, to ensure proper and comfortable use of the product. Madelene also plans to visit pad manufacturer Ecofemme at the first possible opportunity in order to discuss the issues of drying the pads and whether our packet should be adjusted to include more super pads. The issue of drying cloth pads in a monsoon climate may have limited solutions. TDP forecasts it will have exhausted its current supply of reuseable pads by the end of October and will seek to raise funds to acquire more.



From the board

The following report comes from Madelene's visit to Khajuraho in August

I returned to Khajuraho in August to inspect the new school site and to spend some more time in the classroom with students and teachers. At this time of the year, Khajuraho is incredibly hot and humid as the tail of the monsoon sweeps over the country; in these conditions the focus and concentration of students in classrooms is highly commendable and it's hard to imagine some Australian students applying themselves to learning in such conditions!

The new school site is a blessing. All classes now have their own rooms, all students have (or are due to get) desks, there are additional toilets for students and a dedicated staff toilet, a large kitchen in the centre of the school where the meals program is provided from, and a dedicated computer lab and library. The school is much lighter, fresh and full of energy. However, the outstanding feature of the new school is the grassed playground. I often paused and sat on the steps of Class 9 while I was there to admire the new playground. Having made do with a tiny dirt carpark where cows, dogs and cars inhibited play at the old school, this private play space is simply marvellous! While I was there, we put up the volleyball net and the kids were delighted to be able to play volleyball and badminton on the new ground. The teachers will aim to provide each class with at least one lesson per week to play sports or games on the new ground. Both the staff and students are positive in their feedback about the new location.

During my 12-day visit I was joined by fellow board member Kanwaljit Singh from Delhi for a few days. In that time, we worked with school principal Ganesh-ji completing the school set up - including some issues of grounds and facilities maintenance, investigating the possibility of new uniforms, reviewing the breakfast program and planning for the upcoming September sports carnival. Kanwaljit also arranged and supervised the planting of 14 trees around the school grounds including mango, blackberry, chikoo and local wood trees, which will provide fruit and shade. It was amazing to see the students participate in the tree planting, despite the incredible heat.

The new staff, all young women, are enthusiastic, well-qualified and bring a positive energy to the school, complementing the existing teaching faculty we already have. I look forward to getting to know them further and working with them going forward. During my visit, much of my teaching time was spent in class 9 - where I continue to work on critical thinking and conversational English with the senior students - and in Class 1 - where the teacher Shivani is keen to develop her skills away from rote learning. Shivani and I spent a half-day each day over a week team teaching, with a focus on brain breaks and warm up activities, teaching activities that incorporate the body and movement and teaching so that students all can learn regardless of their pace of knowledge acquisition. Shivani and I have discussed a plan for her mathematics lesson for the next 4 weeks and a focus on teaching the 100 high frequency words in English over the next school year, with only 3 words taught each week. She will also try to add movement or a warmup to her daily routine.

Looking forward, in the next 12 months TDP wishes to develop some teacher training workshops that have specific foci, identify and support individual teachers who want to develop specific skills and evaluate the potential for an app-based English program which could be introduced at the start of the 2025 school year.

I was also fortunate enough to be present for a pad distribution workshop at the school during my visit, and to attend the pad session at the tribal village of Banki. While there are still some challenges with the cloth pads, overall women in the community are asking for them and using them consistently. Our new school teaching staff have all received pads and every mother, female child, staff or family with menstruating women connected to the school have now all received and use our reusable pads.

Moving to the new school is a major milestone and will boost the potential for teaching and learning, and for sports as well as the meal program. It was a privilege to visit the school once again, especially to be in the classrooms with the children and teachers. I leave Wonderkids each time sure that I get more from the visit, from the generosity, joy and goodwill to the kindness and appreciation from staff and students, than I give. My resolve that education is the key to wellbeing and dignity is fortified with each visit. The more time I am able to be there, I witness with each visit the children gaining confidence, a change, though small and gradual, in how some students think (and some teachers!) and an expression of their desires for learning, for sport and to be engaged with the world beyond what they know.

