



The Dignity Project Monthly Update

May 2025

Introduction

May was a month of milestones for The Dignity Project (TDP). After many years, TDP was officially recognised as a charity by the Australian Charity and not-for-profit commission. Additionally, TDP delivered its first intensive teacher training program in India, empowering a group of young female teachers with a suite of new skills from digital literacy to English conversation skills.

Overseas operations update

NUTRITION

With the current summer break underway, the Thrive Community Kitchen is closed for the school holidays. When school resumes mid-June, TDP hopes to add a thrice weekly morning tea program at Wonderkids school, to further boost the calorific and nutritional intake of students and staff.

Based on our observations, while most students bring some lunch to school, it is often small in quantity and lacking nutrients. In classrooms, there is a lull in productivity as the day passes as hungry students lose focus. Therefore, to supplement our breakfast program, we plan to add morning tea Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Currently we are sourcing funding to continue the meals program for the coming school year as previous funds for the program have been depleted.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

With most of our near community of women in Khajuraho using our reusable cloth sanitary pads, we are now looking to expand our distribution networks and further reduce period poverty in low socioeconomic communities in India. As well as a follow up visit to the tribal village of Banki planned for September, TDP will partner with NGO Reality Gives (RG) to expand our distribution of sanitary pads in Delhi and the village of Naujheel, located in the state of Uttar Pradesh between Delhi and Agra.

Reality Gives runs community education centres that focus on English conversation and digital literacy in the slums of Mumbai, Delhi and the village of Naujheel. Our organisations share similar values and together we plan to trial a distribution of pads through Reality's community centres in Delhi and Naujheel from September. TDP will provide the product and coordinate training and information sessions so RG staff can become trained facilitators of our reusable cloth pads.



TRAINING AND EDUCATION

In May TDP conducted its first intensive teacher training program for three teachers from Wonderkids English school in Khajuraho, focusing on English language, digital literacy and teaching techniques and strategies. Madelene led this program which began with 3 days of observation and training at the community centre in Delhi run by Reality Gives.

This was followed by 2.5 weeks of training back in Khajuraho. TDP has been planning teacher training for more than a year to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers in our communities and to provide greater career pathways for women working in our projects. A special report on this training is included below. TDP hopes to provide ongoing training to these initial teacher trainees and annual training to a broader selection of staff going forward.

Items of significance (overseas)

We acknowledge and offer our deepest sympathies to Ganesh Tiwari, principal of Wonderkids in Khajuraho, and his wife and family who lost their baby daughter Anvi at just 3 months of age this month.



From the board

After four years we are thrilled to receive official government charity status from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. In 2024 we devoted considerable time to writing policies, reviewing and strengthen procedures and compiling evidence and documentation for our ACNC submission.

As a board, much of our focus last year went into this process, supported by Russell Kennedy lawyers in Melbourne. Having been granted ACNC status, TDP is now a Deductible Gift Recipient meaning donations to TDP in the 2024-25 financial year and beyond are tax deductible. We believe this will significantly bolster our ability to raise funds and propel TDP forward in terms of the size and scope of our projects and work in India. In light of this, TDP's board will meet in June to review and amend strategic plans for the coming years and formulate fundraising campaigns and targets for the future.

Khajuraho Teacher Training 2025 – Special report by Madelene Pearson

It was a privilege to return to India this month and work with Wonderkids' educators Manisha Kushwaha, Jigyasa Tirapathi and Shivani Tirapathi. Manisha is a science teacher and runs TDP's sanitary pad distribution program; Jigyasa is the kitchen manager for TDP's Thrive Community Kitchen and teacher of Sanskrit, and Shivani is an impressive and enthusiastic educator building foundational literacy in Class 1 and 2 with a focus on ensuring development of Hindi reading and writing and introductory, age-appropriate English skills.

After receiving special permission from their families and school leadership on the ground, the three women travelled to Delhi solo (not only their first time to the capital, their first travel experience for two of them and the first time they had ever been away from home) and we thank their families for their trust in us. There, they joined me at Reality Gives' community centre for 3 days of training centred on the conversational English curriculum developed by RG which will likely be rolled out in our Khajuraho community centre.



While they adapted to the traffic, people and general scale of Delhi, the teachers were thrown straight into the classroom and taught on their second day in Delhi! We were so impressed by their eagerness to learn and extend their skills, their willingness to try new things and collaborate and their courage. They were impressive ambassadors for Wonderkids and TDP.

Following the 3 days in Delhi, the teachers and I returned to Khajuraho for an intensive training program led by myself. TDP is aiming to offer a conversational English program through our community centre from September and the main objective from this teacher training was to boost the teachers' English skills and ready them to run this program. It became apparent early on that there are many areas of knowledge and skills that the teachers would benefit from training in. These included digital literacy, with the 3 teachers having no computer skills at all, teaching strategies and planning, as well as English.

For nearly 2.5 weeks, we worked together for 8 or 9 hours a day, learning everything from connecting to the internet; setting up and using

emails; Google meets; Google docs and sheets; conversational English (and the very tricky way we express time!); teaching techniques and strategies; mathematics strategies to move away from rote learning; using story books in learning; classroom games and ice breakers; giving and receiving feedback and phonics. The days were exhausting, challenging, fun and rewarding.

The jump in the teacher's English skills, their confidence and their computer skills were significant in such a short time. While there is still a need for further training, we have made significant progress in such a short time. To see how the teachers' overall confidence, and subsequent enthusiasm for teaching, expanded from the acquisition of new knowledge and skills we take for granted (like being able to send and receive an email) was incredibly moving.

It underscores the belief held by TDP that we need to upskill our teachers and create career paths and opportunities for the women in our community, not just for our school and students, but for the women educators guiding the learning and walking alongside us in our endeavours in education. This training will also support TDP's meals and pad programs and our focus on ensuring children have basic literacy. It was one of the most personally rewarding experiences I have been involved in.

I am grateful to have been able to spend, the time working with Manisha, Jigyasa and Shivani, for the opportunity to get to know them and for the guidance and mentorship of RG's Jonny Clarke, whose support gave me the confidence and skills to do this.

