



The Dignity Project Monthly Update

September/ October 2024

Introduction

September and October were productive months for The Dignity Project. During this time, the full board met in Khajuraho for TDP's second annual general meeting and strategic planning workshop; the yearly sport and community carnival took place at Wonderkids school; our health and nutrition outreach increased with the introduction of a revamped meals program and a group from Melbourne's Richmond Institute visited India for wellbeing and sports activities at our partner programs.

Overseas operations update

The main focus in India during these months was strengthening the health and nutrition program to provide greater relief from distress caused by hunger and malnutrition.

HEALTH: TDP has developed a targeted dual approach to nutrition and health to be rolled out over the coming 12 months, backed by data collection and a new increased nutrient rich menu in our breakfast program. During September, a health check on the 180 children who receive a meal from TDP each day was conducted establishing baseline data of weight and height for age. The results highlighted worse malnutrition in some cases than thought, such as 15-year-old girls weighing only 30 kgs, or about 16 percent less than the Indian average and 24 percent less than the average of girls of that age in western countries. In some cases, the average weight of students is greater than 30 percent lower than global averages. Of the 18 categories (measured in age and gender) 17 of 18 groups are below both global and Indian weight for age averages, meaning most children weigh less than both Indian and global peers. Over the coming 12 months, TDP is seeking to narrow the gap between our meal program recipients and the Indian averages. The 180 children receiving meals will be weighed every month for the year ahead.



Additionally, a new menu has been introduced into TDP's meal program which includes protein rich grains cooked in ghee boosted by nuts and seeds on a fixed 6-day roster. The focus is on increasing macro-nutrients and protein intake. New dishes introduced include sattu halwa (a protein rich dish of chickpea grain with ghee and pumpkin seeds plus peanuts), chana with bread (chickpea stew cooked in ghee served with bread) and vegetable rice among others. All are pure veg to meet the requirements of the community. A new system for ordering the kitchen supplies has also been implemented so that ingredient quality and subsequently nutritional data per serve can be tracked, portion sizes have been increased and meal recipients have been encouraged to increase their food intake each day.

Lastly, a reverse osmosis water purifying system has been installed for TDP's central kitchen as part of the meals program to ensure that any benefit of increased nutrients given to our recipients is not lessened by the negative health impacts of poor drinking water. The United Nations cites access to water as a key step to reducing poverty with more than 2 billion people globally still without access to safe drinking water in 2022. The water purifier will provide safer drinking water to the 180 children during the day 6 days per week.

The monitoring of weight data, the new menu and the purchase of the water purifier are all significant steps toward a greater focus on alleviating distress in our target community caused by poor nutrition. We will provide regular updates on the nutrition part of our program in coming months.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - A key focus of TDP has always been to engage the local community in Khajuraho, especially the women and mothers connected to our meals program and educational platforms. For the second year running, women and mothers were strongly encouraged to attend the sports carnival delivered at Wonderkids School in Khajuraho to boost the role and visibility of women in our community, as well as to promote learning to families via women and small children. Additionally, on the sports and community engagement day, women and families are provided a lunch and snacks and given a space to connect and socialise. This year, as part of TDP's sustainability commitment, all members of the community were asked to bring reusable lunch containers to the day and zero plates or plastics were used. This also had the added benefit that women were also able to take extra lunch home for the families.

The second yearly sports carnival at Wonderkids School was another resounding success, with nearly all of the students attending. Despite the incredible heat, a full day of games, footy drills and races were played. TDP provided the lunch this year, cooking at our central kitchen, to ensure a healthier and more cost effective approach to the meal served. The day concluded in style with much dancing and music on the sports oval.

Lastly, thanks to a generous donation from Relmaged in Melbourne, TDP has delivered new school uniforms to the full school cohort at Wonderkids School. The school was buzzing with energy and delight when 180 children received much-needed new formal and sports uniforms. Many children had long outgrown their old uniforms, with evidence of years of stitching and mending, broken zips, torn skirts and dresses that were increasingly too small. The school assembly carried an air of increased pride and joy when the new uniforms were worn for the first time. We hope to source new sports shoes for the students in coming months. Thank you Relmaged and the Mendelsohn family in Melbourne.

Literacy support - As part of our ongoing efforts to increase literacy in the Khajuraho community, a new focus is underway at Wonderkids School through the purchase of a range simple Hindi readers. The readers have been introduced into class 1 and 2 and teacher training given on reading 1-on-1 to students each day and introducing small amounts of vocabulary each week.



Items of significance (overseas)

Richmond Institute visit - A group of 18 students and staff training in sports management from the Richmond Institute visited Wonderkids school in Khajuraho and participated in the TDP annual sports and community carnival. Through their visit and related tour organised by India Unbound, \$17,176 was raised which will go back into programs at TDP Khajuraho. We thank them for their visit and positive participation, as well as their generosity and we look forward to hosting future groups from Richmond Institute at our programs.



From the board

AGM - For just the second time, the full board from India and Australia met face-to-face during this period for the TDP annual general meeting. Among the documents tabled during the meeting include TDP's first annual report and the projected 2025 budget. Other significant decisions made during the meeting include the establishment of a community health and nutrition centre in Khajuraho where workshops of various aspects of health from dental hygiene to hand washing can be delivered as well as food and nutrition seminars. This is being investigated by the board, costed and community consultations will take place early in calendar 2025.