

Teaching healthy lifestyles in India

JOSEPH HO and GAYATHREE MURUGAPPAN

Posted: 10/12/06

Think of a bus load of students dancing to loud Bangla music tuned up from the radio as the school bus driver drives haphazardly through the streets of a local village in Chennai, India.

The image of a "school bus party" was the best memory that junior Bonnie Wong brought back from her trip to India this summer. Together with 19 other Hopkins students, Wong participated in the trip led by Educational Perspectives (EP), a volunteer organization under the Center for Social Concern, to educate orphans on public health, HIV issues and English in Sevalaya at Kasuva Village in Chennai, India.

"The bus driver told [the children] to dance. He turned up the music and we had a party on the school bus ... It was very dangerous but definitely the most fun thing ever," Wong said.

The 20 Hopkins students spent two weeks in the village sleeping in classrooms and eating three meals a day with at the Sevalaya orphanage. They were divided into groups, each responsible for conducting health workshops or English classes.

"It was fantastic, the kids were just adorable and excited about everything," junior Jacqueline Clauss said.

Inspired by Swami Vivekanada, Mahatma Gandhi and Mahkavi Bharathi, the Sevalaya orphanage was founded on May 29, 1988 with only five children in a small rented house at Sivanvoil village. Today the orphanage operates on its own premises and houses over 300 orphans from age three to 17. Children are educated in high school and are assisted in finding gainful employment while being constantly encouraged to develop their unique talents.

Outside the formal setting of the classroom, the EP team had plenty of opportunities to experience the hospitality of the locals.

"They were so overwhelmingly welcoming. One day the bus driver brought us into his house and his wife served us tea and snacks. The children always tried to bring us home. They would bring us eggs laid in the morning and climbed trees for coconuts," Wong said.

Clauss also describes of an unforgettable experience when she and her teammates were walking to town to buy water. A mother with her child saw that they were heading to town and invited them to her house.

"She took us to her house and showed us pictures of her family. Her whole house was smaller than my dorm room but she was so kind and hospitable," Clauss said.

Seeing locals living without what affluent societies consider basic amenities, such as hot showers and beds, allowed Clauss to appreciate what she has more.

The EP team also partnered with a college in Chennai in organizing the trip. The local college students translated for the EP teammates.

"We learned a lot from them -- they were college students and none of them have been to the U.S.; it was a really good cultural exchange," Clauss added.

Led by junior Carmen Kut, EP was founded two years ago in an effort to improve "basic education of underprivileged sectors or society" both in Baltimore and in developing countries. Kut has led two trips -- one to China during the inaugural year and another to India this summer. During the school year, EP provides workshops for new immigrants and refugees in Baltimore.

EP not only has taken roots at Hopkins, but it has also emerged as an international movement with chapters in developing countries across the world including Hong Kong, Canada, India and China. The India chapter of EP was officially inaugurated by David T. Hopper, United States Consul-General of South India, at the M.G.R. Janaki College for Women.

Sections

- Editorial
- News
- Opinion
- Sports
- Science
- Arts and entertainment
- Features
- Focus
- Your News-Letter

Options

- Login
- Register
- About Us
- Message Board
- Events Calendar
- Letter to the Editor
- Classifieds
- Back Issues
- Search

Channels

- World News
- Technology News
- Wired News
- National News

PDF

- View print edition pdf

Links

- College Publisher