

Letter from long time volunteer Raphael Bate to Susila Dharma France, December 2006

62 years old, retired art educator and Chairman of Susila Dharma France

Dear Henrietta,

I have been in Bangalore for three weeks now and am living at the Mithra Campus in the guest quarters. On this site there is a primary school, a pre-school and a vocational center that has training in tailoring and a pre-school teacher's course. There is also a department for production with orders from companies.

Mithra also has a Human Rights Education unit, which promotes learning in 200 high schools in Karnataka on human rights issues.

My tasks have included:

Contributing to the training of the primary teachers in creative and active methods of teaching and learning. The predominant ways of teaching in government schools are "command style" and passive learning.

I have been trying to enable them to teach through a key theme or topic known as "Live Project". This enables all the subjects of the curriculum to be experienced in a meaningful way.

The project I am taking them through at present is "The Garden".

There is a large piece of land on the campus and we are making a design for its use as a play and learning garden. We have included:

- Measuring
- Recording appearances through drawing and through language.
- Planting and maintaining plots. (The girls are very enthusiastic about watering their gardens every morning before school)
- Observing existing children's play on the area.
- Discussing and planning with the children what they would like.
- Designing a sustainable, interesting and garden for the imagination as well as for playing formal team games.

With the pre school teachers and students I am introducing the concepts of creative, active and child initiated learning. Child development in drawing.

As well as these teaching sessions I have been involved in discussions with various Susila Dharma project teams. Problems of management of existing long term projects.

Mithra is a model of good practice as it brings professionalism and sound experience to the work of empowering the poorest in the slums of Bangalore.

I will be attending the meeting of Susila Dharma India and I have been asked to describe how we (Susila Dharma France) have gone about recharging SDF, reviewing through SWOT (analysis of strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and Mind mapping and producing target goals for our development.

I have also been interviewing Volunteers and Project directors about volunteering experiences. Sonia ,a young Australian volunteer is working with me on producing an induction pack for future volunteers at Mithra. It will include how to conduct fitness tests, personal and social development activities and English coaching with the children.

I will be assisting with preparing the three-year evaluation of the primary school for SD Germany and the BMZ (German governments overseas development Agency) who supplied the majority of the finance for the school.

I will be visiting Anisha a project with street people in the city market area where families live in alleyways and sleep on roofs by night and have to come down by day. Valli The director is a young woman who is a lawyer and she helps the people to get schooling for the children and health care for the women, micro credit, legal advice and legal counseling .

On November 15th at Children's Day at Mithra School I presented Bella the Director of Mithra with 35000Rs from SDF. This money will be used for creating a garden for play and education.

These are some of the things that that I have been getting up to. I hope all is well and you will send me all the news.

Love to all,
Raphael in Bangalore