

Making sense of oneself and one's world:

Service-Learning/Volunteer Tour to Prajna Vihar School, 18/9 – 2/10 2016: Bodhgaya & Varanasi

Purpose: to provide opportunities for participants to experience differences and similarities between their culture and that of another culture and so step outside their own culture to view such interactions critically.



Our tour aimed to engage members of our local, Australian community who either heard of or are supporters of the Bodhgaya Development Association's (BDA) various projects including the Prajna Vihar School (PVS), with the community of Bodhgaya. The central idea was to create strong and respectful relationships between Australian volunteers and Indian students, teachers and the wider community; through learning and sharing knowledge and experiences and maintaining those networks once volunteers returned to Australia.

Our group comprised of 12 people ranging in age from 21 years to 71 years from a wide range of professional backgrounds.

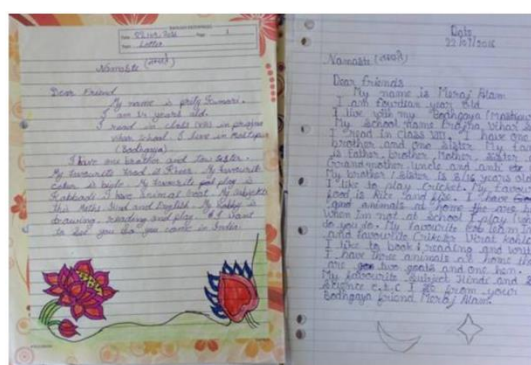
Each day the group engaged with the students and teachers of the PVS in English conversation sessions, reading, games, creative drawing, singing and in rehearsals of traditional Indian dance. A whole school Rangoli (Indian sand painting) display, a touch-typing computer competition and a concert were some of the other events that took place.



Building Bridges – Making Connections

In 2014, two Australian university student volunteers (from QUT and UQ) spent several weeks with the school community in Bodhgaya teaching English.

From 2011 onwards, a letter writing project was set up and reignited every other year with several primary and secondary schools in the wider Brisbane area. The purpose of the letter writing project was primarily to embark on a very basic exchange of life stories between Australian and Prajna Vihar School students. During both previous S-L tours in September 2015 & 2016, an exchange of letters was successfully accomplished.



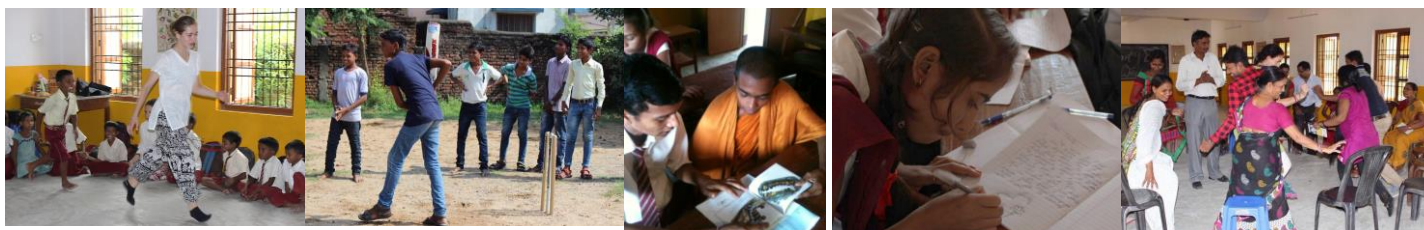
In December 2016, 14 Brisbane students from Churchie (Anglican Church Grammar School) travelled to Bodhgaya under the guidance of Mr John Collins (Director of Service-Learning) and two other staff members. The group engaged with PVS students in a variety of teaching and learning activities; sporting, art & craft displays, games and conversational English among the Indian and Australian students as well as a professional exchange of ideas and reflections between their respective teachers.



Attempts were made to engage the group in activities that foster and develop an awareness and understanding of all human beings; thereby fostering an environment that helps to create an acceptance and a provision for transformational relationships and a sense of solidarity. Opportunities for participants were provided so that they could 'step outside' their own and experience to some extent another, new culture whilst recognising and experiencing differences and similarities between their culture and that of another culture.

Various activities volunteers and students of PVS engaged in:

- Teaching and learning
- Dancing and singing
- Rangoli drawing
- writing introductory letters to each other's communities
- Sporting and game activities



We contributed donations, resources or personal involvement in these places/projects:

1. *Gyanjyoti Trust Fledgling School near Sujata Village*



2. Jeevan Deep: Health project & informal education project



3. Vocational Tailoring Training Project for Women – co-ordinated by Sr Manisha SRA



4. Residential School for the Visually Impaired girl students in Sarnath, UP, India



Varanasi: Staying at the Krishnamurti Centre at the banks of the Ganges



How your donations help in concrete ways ...

- In 2013, the BDA purchased computers and a designated computer room was set up. In September 2015, the installation of a reliable internet connection at the school followed and it is envisaged to have this fully operational soon. In 2016, the first



- The long-awaited building of additional toilets to cater for the 530 students (K-10) has now been completed. A project 7 years in the making, was finally completed in September 2015. See blog "From little things big things grow" for further information: <http://kliebchen.edublogs.org/?p=1096>



Your donations make a difference

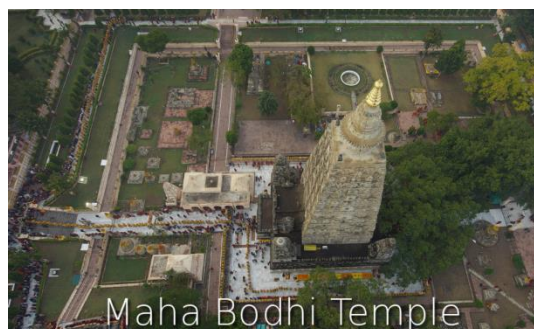
Donated resources including mobile phones, ipads and stationery are invaluable to the teachers and students of Bodhgaya. Thank you to our many supporters including Brisbane schools and businesses as well as many individual friends from our local and national community.

Success stories with BDA specific and general support

PVS past students, are now employed in many fields including as IT specialist at the Delhi Public School (a prestigious private school) and as teachers at PVS, including in early childhood teaching after receiving support in form of a scholarship from the BDA. More recently, scholarship support was provided to past PVS students in the field of nursing and foreign language studies: German at the *Goethe Institut* in Delhi.

As part of the Bodhgaya Development Association (BDA) and current chairperson, I have been privileged to be involved with the PVS since 1991. Fundraising for the PVS and for other programs had been the major focus of the BDA. This work has given me the opportunity to learn about the region and more importantly to meet the people and to gain mutual insights. It has been an ongoing and rewarding journey and one which I would fully recommend.

As a teacher and teacher trainer, I have been fortunate to be able to work with professional development sessions and English language conversation classes and to follow several new initiatives and projects of the school including in classical and modern dance; letter writing projects between PVS students and students from local Brisbane Primary and Secondary Schools. These projects bring great benefits and insights for both PVS students and Brisbane students.



Read more here!

The history of the school in engaging the most underprivileged children in and around Mastipur village and the role of the BDA can be found here:

www.pvschool.in & <http://www.dharma.org.au/bda/> & <https://youtu.be/E-IUCo6NyPc>

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<http://kliebchen.edublogs.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pvschoolbg?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/BodhgayaDevelopmentAssociation>

<https://www.facebook.com/JeevanDeepBodhgayaNGO>



Change in the making: The PV school in 1990 and in 2015:



These links to short video clips depict the various building and construction stages of the new classrooms:

<https://youtu.be/BKd1ytg0FXU> or <https://animoto.com/play/cDTcpMBUGHpl1omBLqkKUG>

