



VEERAYATAN
compassion in action



Veerayatan Volunteer Programme 2019

27 July to 10 August



Veerayatan Volunteer Programme 2019

- ✧ Awakening to a 5.30am Yoga session...
- ✧ Spending spiritually enriching time in the company of Acharya Shriji and her learned Sadhvis...
- ✧ Heading off to do a full morning's teaching of students at Tirthankar Mahavir Vidya Mandir, Pawapuri and Harikeshiya School...
- ✧ Debating with the students at Pawapuri whether homework should be part of the curriculum
- ✧ Working in the hospital, talking to patients, reflecting on their lives, learning to do eye screening and providing advice on essential dental care...
- ✧ Visiting the beautiful and serene Jal Mandir in Pawapuri and the amazing centre of Buddhism at Bodh Gaya...

and the list continues and continues...

These are just a few things the twenty strong group of 15-20 yrs old volunteers from India, Kenya, UK and USA experienced in the two weeks they spent at Veerayatan Rajgir.

✦ Learning to check patients's teeth



✦ Tall structure created by students as part of a lesson



What did the volunteers gain from this programme?

'We reflected on the 2 week volunteer programme and thought about what has changed within us since coming back.

Generally we all thought that our thinking and outlook on things had definitely changed; to be more appreciative and grateful for what we have. We also thought that acts of kindness and friendship, along with simply smiling, go a long way.

The language barrier was a particular issue while in India, yet we all managed to form friendships and bonds with the people we met.

Finally, through doing acts of seva, shiksha and sadhana, it was evident to us what the language of love and respect can bring about.

We had made such a big impact in a small space of time to so many people, that we will be remembered and appreciated by them for far longer than we think.

And for us, we had forged meaningful relationships with the people we interacted with, each one unique and special.'

'It was truly an unforgettable experience...'



Volunteers Speak

At the hospital in Rajgir, a boy had come into the eye clinic to get his eyes checked. After talking to him, I found out that his name was Dharminder and he was 18 years old, the same age as me. However, we both had completely different lives. He works at the stone-chipping mill in Bodhgaya, but was far from his family who live in Agra. He works 7 days a week and receives no holidays, earning about £100 per month. He had a chip of stone that had entered his eye, which needed removal. This encounter and conversation taught me that not everyone my age has the same opportunities in life, such as education and being able to spend time with family, and that I should not take this for granted. It also showed me how hard some people have to work just to make ends meet.

Jinal, 18 yrs

In a lesson about careers and the future which I was teaching to Standard 8, I asked the questions “who is your inspiration?” and “what do you want to be when you grow up?” One girl's response really struck me. She said her greatest inspiration was her father, who had sadly passed away. He never had a formal education, but always encouraged his children to be the best at school because he saw how important education was. She said she remembers those words every day and he still motivates her. As for the latter question, she told me that she wants to become a teacher, saying that it's amazing how one person can inspire a whole class of students. This experience showed me how life changing Veerayatan's work is from one generation to the next, and that through providing education a family's prospects can change so much. It also made me appreciate my parents and the support they've given me throughout my life – not every child is fortunate enough to have that.

Malvi, 18 yrs



Together we both taught Standard 7 and Harikeshiya classes at the Pawapuri School. On the day we went to visit the Jalmandir, at the lake shore we spotted a girl selling lotus flowers to passers-by. As we approached her, we recognised her as a student from our Harikeshiya class, and that we had taught her the day before. We only recognised her as she was wearing the same clothes as the day before. She had skipped school that day to help provide for the family, which taught us that for a lot of the children in the area, life was about survival and not much else.

It showed that these children had a lot more to worry about than just education, and that they face many obstacles from such a young age, making up appreciate that we have financial security and our main worry is simply school for example. However we can see that having the opportunity to getting educated will break this cycle of being in such extreme poverty!

Rushil and Eva, both 17 yrs

At the school in Pawapuri we were doing the eye screening of the children from three classes in Harikeshiya School. These little children come from such poor backgrounds that having an opportunity to get eyes checked will not even be in their dreams! So we could see and feel the gratefulness of the kids for having this check. We found that some kids had very poor eyesight at such a young age, which was upsetting to see. By doing the eye screening we learnt to have patience with everyone, including the teachers. Not only this but to communicate with these children whereby they spoke Hindi and we spoke in English was almost impossible, yet this did not deter us at all and learnt that when carrying out good work communication just happens! We also appreciated how lucky we are to have such good vision, which we take for granted on a day to day basis. It also raised the question in our minds that “if we didn't come along to help these students, who would?”, showing what an impact we have managed to make in such a short time to so many people.

Nikita and Niam, 15 and 16 yrs

My Experience of Visiting Tirthankar Mahavir Vidya Mandir, Lachhuar

by Rushil Shah

Lachhuar is a holy land to all Jains: the birthplace of Lord Mahavir. Yet in the many centuries since then, the town has become one of the poorest and lawless areas in Bihar. In 2001, Acharyaji led Veerayatan to construct a school, despite the persistent and often dangerous scepticism from the locals and the Jain community. Yet hard work and determination led the initiative to prove successful, now providing critical education to over 1000 children, which indirectly changes the lives of the families and communities of these students positively forever.

Having spent the majority of our time volunteering in Rajgir and Pawapuri, this was a change to our regular routine and something we were all looking forward to. Following the three-hour journey through countless villages, we arrived at the school buzzing with energy. But this was nothing compared to the incredible welcome we were given by the students. It was evident they were eagerly anticipating our arrival, with each and every child greeting us with a

beaming grin on their face. We had barely met them, yet their instinctive expression of love for all was a delight to see; it is something we could all learn from and attempt to replicate at home in Western society.

Following our greeting with the headmaster, we were assigned to our classes, where we would spend the next hour teaching and spending time with the children. Eva and I went to a Standard 5 class, where we began to undertake the activities in our lesson plan. Understandably, there was an apprehensive atmosphere, with the children still shy to ask questions about us and our lives, so we persevered with our pre-planned activities. As they began to be more comfortable with us, a girl raised her hand and asked the most simple question, "What is your favourite colour?". That was when they all came out of their shells. We were taken aback as a tidal wave of questions poured upon us, the pupils being intrigued about us as people and our lives. Their excitement was captivating and we could see their enthusiasm in



their eyes. Their positive energy was contagious as a sub-conscious smile seemed permanently adhered to our faces. It got to the stage where the tables were falling down and the kids crowding us, standing in utter joy, as we told them stories about our lives. It was as if we were oblivious to the outside world, residing in a bubble within the classroom engulfed with curiosity and gratitude from this class. Even the teacher got involved requesting a selfie with us and the rest of the children.

So naturally it was a shame when we got a knock on our door telling us we had over-run by 90 minutes and that the rest of the group were waiting for us! And this was followed by a swamping of unparalleled love and gratitude from all the kids. We were treated like royals, as they asked for autographs and grabbed onto our arms and legs begging us to stay. It was an astonishing experience I am sure never to forget. Wishing farewell to the entire school was just as incredible; the boys and girls seemed to forget any and all hardship they may have faced and were squeezing their way to the front of the hall trying to say goodbye to us. Although it was inherently sad, as we'd thoroughly miss them all, it left me awe-struck and giving the utmost respect to the children: I had never seen so much love and appreciation at once.

On the way back from the school, we had a chance to stop over at a tiny village. Walking inside the makeshift thatched hut, it seemed a thing of the movies with the inadequate living conditions. Sympathy turned to empathy as Sadhvi Sanghamitraji began giving advice to the

residents, from water collection to treating each other within the family. The concept of compassion to all was evident here, as the entire community would have been helped by this small offering of advice. What really struck me though, was the generational increase in appreciation for education, because one of the residents was in fact a former student of the Lachhuar school. Sadhviji explained to us how this knowledge and education will be passed on, as the resident's child would now also go to the school, but instead stay at the school for longer to gain a better education and hence achieve a higher quality of life.

This trip was a truly unforgettable experience. The unrequited compassion and gratitude with which the children treated us, was something incredible to behold. It showed us in first person, how we live such fortunate lives, something that we take for granted. And just spending time with these children to put a smile on their face was truly satisfying. But most importantly, as mentioned throughout, there were countless things we can take from this trip, and transfer to our daily lives.

▀ *Feeling joyful after completing jigsaw puzzle*



