



NEW PROJECTS – CHILDREN OF THE BRICKFIELDS

Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) Executive Officer, Sr Janet Palafox, recently travelled to the Darjeeling and Kolkata regions of India to review MWIA funded projects. There is a significant opportunity for MWIA to become involved in funding schools in the thousands of brickfields in Kolkata.

In Kolkata and the regions of Shillong and Satarda (near Goa) Janet observed significant progress in educational and building works. Primary and secondary education is the main ministry and the sisters work as principals or teachers. Items funded thanks to our MWIA generous supporters include electricity for coaching centre and schools, school canteen co-operative, masala grinding, barefoot teachers training, vocational training for women such as baking and sewing and teachers' salaries.

Janet was very impressed with the outreach to very marginalised people: from babies through to elderly in Kolkata, Thakurpukur and other areas of West Bengal. Fellow Loreto Sister, Sr Cyril, has set up many programs in the area, assisted by local NGOs, state and national governments; and local and overseas corporations.

The Loreto Sisters in India are undertaking significant work to educate children within the brickfields of Kolkata. Each brickfield employs 200 to 300 families with about 175 children. Families are very poor and income is deplorable. Each worker receives Rs 65 (\$3 AU) for every 1000 bricks they make. It takes two workers plus helpers to make 1500 bricks in one day.



The Loreto Sisters in partnership with local NGOs: Society for the Upliftment of the Nation, Amalendu Smriti Niketan and Koikala Chetana have opened 20 schools in the brickfields that cater for 1200 children. The project started in November 2008 and now includes 36 trained teachers teaching children three hours per day.

Children in the brickfields aged 7 to 9 years take care of their smaller siblings. The Brickfield School Project started for children aged 5 years old, but the majority of 5 years olds come to school with their younger siblings. The program therefore had to expand to cater for the younger children. Children in the brickfields aged 11 to 12 years old are required to work, but they are showing a keen interest in study, attending the schools in their midday break.

Workers are seasonal, travelling to different brickfields for six months every year. Their families accompany them. To ensure children have access to education they have been provided with a student card to help them enroll at different brickfield schools.

New schools are established depending on where families take up work; based on the permission of the brickfield owner and on the condition that productivity is not affected. The scheme is running well and the sisters hope to open more schools so that wherever workers go, education is accessible.

A sports day was recently held for the children, funded by the Inter-religious Center of Development. Parents took leave from work without pay to see their children perform - a new and historic experience. The teachers have gained the trust of the parents and brickfield owners, making this project a harmonious reality. Without the Brickfield School Project, children would have no access to education and would therefore face a bleak future. Mary Ward International Australia could help more students with your support. An entire school can be set up and operational with just AU \$3000. Please help us continue this life changing project.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND HOW CAN YOU CAN HELP

To find out more about Mary Ward International Australia, current projects, and how you can support us through volunteering or donations, please visit www.loreto.org.au or email mwiaustralia@loreto.org.au