



## **Chairperson's Report 2014**

Amanda Stone

Partners in Aid has, with some relief, experienced a year which could be described as "steady state". Our partner projects have continued as expected, providing skills, services and support to those who need it in India and Bangladesh. Our generous sponsors have continued to provide the resources needed to ensure this work happens, and our board has provided the leadership and stewardship which ensure that those funds are spent where they are needed, as promised and with accountability.

Internally we have continued our review of how we function and where we can improve. For the second year we have alternated regular board meetings with longer planning days, to ensure we are getting best value for the donations we receive, that we function as effectively as we can as a board, and to meet our regulatory obligations.

Partners in Aid has, for a long time, operated without any paid employees which means that well over 90% of funds raised goes directly to projects where it is needed. We know that is what our donors value, and it's also what motivates the volunteer board. However, the board can only stretch its energies so far. And even the most efficient and economic board cannot escape the increasing regulatory obligations facing not-for-profit boards.

This year we have sought the guidance of Leadership Victoria and a dedicated mentor has worked with us to conduct a strategic review. Today, before the Annual General Meeting, we will have spent several hours with an experienced board director doing just that and we hope to develop a Strategic Plan in the coming months.

Our project partners— SEDS in Southern India, ABWU in Kolkatta and Symbiosis in Bangladesh – have continued this year to improve the livelihoods of the people in their regions, through environmental management, skills training and education, community development and local economic development. Our child sponsorship programmes in India remain strong. Project directors will report on each but these projects and the commitment and passion of our partners is what drives the board to keep doing what we do.

Our financial position remains strong thanks to the reliable support of our many generous donors, and thanks to the tireless advocacy of Lyn and Ian Pickering who continue their speaking rounds at various organisations, inspiring and informing current and potential new donors, and building excellent networks of supporters. Thanks also to our Treasurer Andrea Pickering who not only maintains financial records and ensures compliance, but who also again this year hosted the World Food Day event which raised over \$8000 for our projects.

I would like to pay tribute to Mary Dunne who is leaving the board today after 5 years. Mary joined the board during the period of transition to our new name and public identity in 2009. Mary played a crucial role at that time, interviewing long standing supporters about their perceptions of Action Aid Australia, as we were then,



and the identity of the organisation as we sought a new name. She identified what was important to supporters and members which assisted us choosing our new name "Partners in Aid". Mary also led the development of the new logo and branding. When Roger Hughes left the board after more than 20 years, Mary stepped up and took on responsibility for the project in Bangladesh, with her usual thorough, supportive and practical approach. Mary has contributed a great deal in 5 years and we thank her most sincerely. Graham Moore has agreed to take over responsibility for the Bangladesh project.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of other board members: the support of Graham Moore in his role as secretary and sounding board for me in my role, to Kristin Aitken for her amazing social media and web skills as well as producing a newsletter reliably and with good humour each quarter, Anne-Marie Maltby for her quiet, consistent hard work in managing the onerous but rewarding ABWU child sponsorship administration, Glenys Hughes for liaising with an allied project in the Philippines, negotiating communication challenges, and Phillip McMillan for his practical insights as we progress to improving our operations.

It's been a good year for Partners in Aid and we are in a good position – financially and as a board. However we know that the landscape is changing for not-for-profit organisations and philanthropy in general. We need to be continually reviewing how we work to ensure that we can deliver on our mission:

***"to undertake local community and economic development projects directed at improving the standard of living in rural areas in developing countries through environmentally sustainable approaches"***

and that our supporters know that donations go directly to those who will benefit from their generosity, improving livelihoods and the environment.

## All Bengal Women's Union 2014

Anne-Marie Maltby

### **Cutting, Tailoring and Knitting Training Project**

This is the only vocational training that we support and \$3,726 was sent for this year's project. Twenty girls were trained including one girl from Bangladesh who was waiting for repatriation back home.

As always, the project is invaluable to give the girls skills that are useful for their families as well as to become more economically self-sustainable. We have been funding this for 19 years and it is considered particularly helpful for girls who are slow-learners or are unable to continue with their studies. Although it is a strange concept for us here in Australia, it is regarded as important that these skills improve the girls' prospects for a good marriage. Products of the training can be sold which subsidises the girl's personal needs.

There is now a shop set up within the compound which displays all the work very well and they have quite a lot of people come in from outside to make purchases.

They have two sales each year, Spring Sale and Pre-Puja Sale.



Joy Handley and her friend Carol Forrest opened the Spring Sale this year. The girls are always very happy to see their finished articles being purchased. At each sale approx Rs.20,000/- was taken. The girls are all paid an incentive from the sales and this makes them very happy. Also other sales from the shop give them a bit more money.

The Knitting program took orders from the Primary School for woollen jumpers for all the children.

### **Educational Training**

Due to specific donations, we have again been able to support two additional education training programs:

**Life Skills Training for Adolescent Children.** Total cost approximately \$390. This takes place over three days and is attended by both teachers and pupils. This training is aimed at helping them to become more aware of themselves, their rights and capabilities. It also deals with the threat of trafficking and other relevant issues which will help the girls to make better informed decisions and make safer choices so that they can assume great control over their lives.

**Education for All.** Total cost approximately \$1,100. This is a pilot project of one year to be extended if positive results are visible. The Children's Home very often has girls come in through the academic year but they are not able to go directly to a conventional school as they do not take new students in the middle of the year. As India's Right to Education Act specifies that the child has a right to education till 14 years, ABWU feel that it is their legal and moral duty to give these girls access to schooling until they can be admitted to regular school. They also feel that it is important to start the girls in schooling as quickly as possible as studies have shown that adult women who have had access to schooling in childhood display better social and literary skills. Literacy improves with time even after a girl has left school. The home are employing a teacher who would be available five days a week during school hours. Her primary work will be to teach those girls who are unable to attend regular school during the year to keep them abreast with studies, prepare them for the next class or coach them in the subjects they are weak in. Additionally the teacher could help with some slow learners of the primary school who require individual attention in some subjects.

ABWU girls are generally from lower socio economic strata of society who have little or no access to regular schooling. It is well accepted that all children in schools be it a regular or non-formal, benefit hugely from education. Even with a poor academic record a child in school is better off than a child outside school. Primary schooling is associated with rise in economic productivity in almost all developing countries. ABWU's aim in trying to provide some fundamental schooling is to increase the girls' ability to negotiate the modern world in future.

### **Karate training**

Again from specific donations, we were able to extend karate training to the After Care Home at a total of \$576. These weekly classes are regarded as beneficial for not only imparting self-defence skills, physical fitness and improved confidence but it



is known to be an excellent supplement to counselling, dance therapy and other therapeutic methods used at ABWU.

Many of the girls in CWH are doing really well with Karate. 45 took part in recent external exams with great results. 32 were promoted from yellow belt to green and 13 from green to orange.

### **Sponsorship**

Sponsorship numbers have again decreased. 68 sponsored girls, 4 less than last year, largely due to the death of several sponsors, and some girls completing their studies and now in employment. We have been gratified with the continued improvement in achievements of many of the girls –four are continuing tertiary education; five are in Nursing Training; two have applied for Nursing and several have completed Year 12 including one girl who was complimented by the Social Welfare Dept. of the Govt. for achieving 1st Class in her Class 12 Board Exams.

This is a significant increase over previous years which is not only a great achievement for the individual girls but is providing a great example for the others and greatly encourages the staff. Given the background of these girls, it's quite amazing.

### **ABWU General**

Home searches conducted for some girls have been successful with a few of the girls being restored to their families which is a happy outcome.

One girl has married with the wedding taking place at the home and the 'Reception' in their Suruchi Restaurant.

The girls are all given many opportunities to participate in many and varied activities outside of ABWU. They would not have any of these chances if they were not a resident of ABWU.

Overall, ABWU has made effective use of our funds and, as always, we are very happy with the outcomes achieved.

## **Bangladesh 2013-14**

Mary Dunne

Partners in Aid continues to have two projects in Bangladesh, these being the Jamuna River Development Project (JRDP) and the Technical Training and Information Support Program (TTIS). Both projects are designed and implemented by Symbiosis Bangladesh, with Partners in Aid funding and monitoring the projects.

The JRDP has now been running for nearly 12 years and started with the building of a four-room primary school on land donated by a local man, Ali Asraf. This was the first school on the island, and the only one until a second school was built with funding from Partners in Aid in early 2012. Having primary schools on the island removes a significant barrier to attendance as it means children do not have to take



a long boat trip to the nearest school. Both of the schools are portable and will 'leap-frog' down the island as the island shifts downstream due to erosion from monsoonal flooding, although the newer school is of a more substantial structure to better withstand cyclones and will be harder to transport.

More than 200 children are enrolled in the two schools and are making good progress with their studies. The Class 5 children took their Primary Education School Certificate test and did well. The parents are supportive of their children going to school but sometimes insist children stay at home if they need them to work and Symbiosis continually needs to reinforce the message to parents of the importance of sending their children to school. Child marriage is also an ongoing issue.

The number of children enrolled only represents around 20% of the potential school population on the island; however recruiting teachers remains an ongoing challenge and is the main impediment to increasing participation rates. Through the funding provided by Partners in Aid, Symbiosis is able to provide some skills development training for teachers but the schools are significantly understaffed. Interviews for two new teachers took place recently. A new activity this year was the levelling out of a piece of rough land in front of the school which is now used as a recreation area for the children.

The pre-school class continues to operate well, with the participants now able to read, write, do basic calculation and recite a poem. Symbiosis reports that parents are seeing the value of this for their children and are keen for them to attend. In very hot weather, the pre-school children suffer from the heat so classes are sometimes not held or take place for a shorter duration.

The existence of the primary schools underpins the broader community development work undertaken by Symbiosis. This work encompasses a range of activities including savings groups, functional education (literacy and numeracy), food production, increasing awareness of a range of social issues such as child marriage and women's rights, health workshops and child health monitoring, arsenic testing and training of Traditional Birth Attendants which reduces rates of infant and maternal mortality. Arsenic testing resumed this year, having been on hold due to unavailability of testing kits. The borewells which were tested as safe were painted a different colour so the community can easily identify where to get water from. Building of sanitary latrines also commenced this year, with materials provided through Partners in Aid funds and the villagers supplying the labour. This initiative is an important step in reducing disease and is supported through workshops which provide information on good health and sanitation practices.

The Technical Training and Information Support project continues to go well. This well-established program provides vocational training, empowerment and improved socio-economic status and health to women (and a few men) over a wide area of northern Bangladesh, centred in Mymensingh. The focus of the project is to equip participants with vocational skills in sewing and related skills such as block batik and hand printing, which enables them to earn an income at home, or save money on buying clothing for their families by making their own.

Four hundred and thirty three trainees received their training in basic (village level) sewing, 59 graduated from the block batik and hand printing course, and 13



completed embroidery. The demand for basic sewing and batik/hand printing far exceeds targets, due to high levels of interest from the community. Embroidery is less popular as trainees believe it to be hard, and they cannot afford to buy machines. Pressures at home (practical and social) and disapproval from religious leaders act as a barrier to some women wanting to train; Symbiosis is therefore encouraging trainees to equip others in their community with some basic skills at home. Bad weather and lack of transport also prevent some women from attending their classes.

Recently the community has asked Symbiosis about providing training in making mats (for doorways, walls, floors, etc). This is being explored.

As with the JRDP, the TTIS project is holistic, with participants being members of savings groups and taking part in workshops on women's rights, health education, child nutrition and related topics. Project staff also receive training, including computing skills to enable easier record keeping and preparation of reports.

During 2013-14, an independent evaluation on both projects was conducted by researchers from Murdoch University. This evaluation makes some valuable recommendations, particularly around making activities more self-sustaining and developing exit strategies. Whilst these are sound principles, the reality is that particularly for JRDP, the environment in which the project operates means that without donor funding much of this work will stop.

At this AGM I am stepping down from Partners in Aid and Graham Moore will pick up the coordination of our Symbiosis projects. Unfortunately I was unable to visit Bangladesh; I hope Graham will be able to make the trip soon as I am sure that seeing these projects in action is the only way to fully understand the impact and importance of this work.

## Social Education and Development Society

Amanda Stone

We are into the 4<sup>th</sup> year of a 5 year project agreement with SEDS which includes funding for tank desilting, low carbon farming and a tailoring skills programme.

All projects are progressing well. This year, 5 tanks were able to be desilted, a very positive outcome as usually only 2-3 can be achieved in one year. This much needed and in demand programme removes large quantities of silt from ancient water tanks (dams) to improve water storage when the rains finally do come. Tanks are also filled with fish fingerlings (available as a Christmas gift in our newsletter) and these fish provide another source of food and income for the locals. An example of one such tank is attached.

The Low Carbon Farming project has gone from strength to strength, although more slowly than originally expected.

The programme now includes 30 villages and 806 farmers covering 2718 acres. SEDS is supporting farmers to develop low carbon farming practices, form local producer companies which can trade in aggregated carbon credits, and apply for





further funding through the rural development bank NABARD. They do this through their monthly Farmer Field Schools, run by SEDS staff. A positive outcome of this project is the increasing interest by farmers in trialling new more sustainable practices such as mixed cropping.

The Tailoring Training project has benefitted from donations of sewing machines each Christmas from our donors. This means that Rashna Joshua who runs the programme is able to make machines available to more women who can begin to earn as soon as they have completed their training. The programme has trained 85 women in 4 villages this year. Unfortunately costs are climbing in India and the original 3 training programmes that could be funded in our agreements is now just one. However, the programme has been adjusted to include more "marketable" skills which the women can use to produce items in high demand, such as fabric baskets, yoga mat bags, baby quilts and soft toys. They have also been making school bags and uniforms for the local school at SEDS.

We were delighted to welcome SEDS CEO Manil Joshua and her family to Melbourne last December. It was good to see Manil return to health and take some time away from the demands of the project. SEDS has enjoyed a better year than 2013, and their wonderful work continues to be at the leading edge of environmental management and community development in India; we are very fortunate to be able to partner with them and bring benefits to people in one of the poorest regions of India.

## Child Sponsorship at SEDS

Lyn Pickering

The child sponsorship program through SEDS in central southern India has remained at 202 students this past year.

It remains easy to stay motivated and positive about the child sponsorship program due to the number of phone calls, emails, letters and small notes I receive throughout the year from donors acknowledging our efforts. This usually occurs directly after the school reports or Christmas cards are sent out, but it also occurs at other times throughout the year. Joanne McMillan has again supported me with our three mail-outs this year and has also been invaluable in helping with invoicing and other general office requirements. Thank you to Joanne.

Our child sponsorship supporters come from many different backgrounds, and ages, but they all have one thing in common. They are happy in the knowledge that they are giving a child or perhaps two children the opportunity to complete their education through to Year 10. A number of people feel an ownership of the program, and take a very active interest in the life of the child and what that child is achieving. Other people are quite content to just send their money, knowing it will give a child the education they deserve.

Our success rate again this year was very high with 15 from a total of 16 students passing Year 10. All of the students who have sent a "thank you" letter to their donor indicated they intended continuing their education through Years 11 and 12



which is classified as College. With Government funding now available for Year 11 and 12 students from very low socio economic backgrounds, they will continue their education at Government Boarding Hostels.

Pallavi, a former sponsored girl is now living and working at SEDS in the office and is managing the Child Sponsorship program. Earlier this year Pallavi married a former sponsored young man named Manju, who returned to SEDS last year and was offered work as a driver. Manju successfully completed his Year 10 in 2003 and attempted Year 11 before leaving school. In 2003, our Year 10 success rate was not very high at all, and we were pleased that so many students remained at school to complete Year 10 at that time in particular the girls for obvious reasons.

I was very pleased to meet both Pallavi and Manju again during my visit in late August. They travelled with us on our visits to schools with Manju the driver, and Pallavi in her capacity as SEDS Child Sponsorship Co-ordinator. Their English was excellent and this made our communication so much easier when visiting schools and villages where there was little or no English spoken in some cases. Pallavi and Manju are a delightful young couple and they two examples of how our Child Sponsorship program can help young people achieve success in their lives.

PS During this recent visit in August, a Health Care Camp for all our students was arranged through our friends in Rotary. Five medical Doctors – Two General Practitioners, One Eye Specialist and Two Dentists checked all the children at the camp, with a number of health conditions noted, and treatment to be arranged for some students. The biggest problem found was the state of dental care in this part of Andhra Pradesh. This has been an ongoing problem in this general area for many years. The Dentists along with our Rotarian friends have agreed to try and set up a day camp for the parents and children, with it acknowledged that the parents must understand the need for dental care first, and how to train their children to care for their teeth.

“Another successful year completed for the Child sponsorship program which commenced in early 1995 after my first visit to India, and SEDS, in late 1994.”

### Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (SHVP)

Glenys Hughes

SHVP, located in the northern Philippines' province of Kalinga, continues its community development work in approximately 48 participating barangays (villages). Its focus is to enable communities to reduce the incidence of water and environmental-related illnesses by encouraging healthy behaviours at the household level and by facilitating initiatives at the community level to remove physical barriers to community health and wellbeing.

#### Activities:

**From October 2013 – April 2014:** Due to financial constraints, activities were curtailed during this period but the following activities occurred:





- attendance at and support provided for various trainings and workshops sponsored by Local Government Units & other organisations: Eg Conflict Management seminar, training for Rules Formulation, Leadership & Values Orientation, Gender and Development & various Health Program Orientations and Skills training

- initial screening visits (2)

- renewal of commitment visits (2)

- participated in the Healthy Village Search (competition) as part of evaluation team

- assisted with health program' implementation

**From May 2014 – Sept 2014:** After funds arrived in May, there was an increase in core activities which could then take place:

- attended LGU Meetings & workshops (3)

- conducted training on a variety of topics eg: Health Development, Gender Awareness, project planning & monitoring & evaluation, field visits

- conducted monitoring & evaluation visits at barangays (16)

- reviewed plans or proposals (3)

- handed over funding to barangays (1)

Other activities included:

- coordinated village meetings with the Rural Health Units, oriented nurses and other staff on simplified survey forms to be submitted to the Sinangpad Association Office

- conducted community surveys of agreed indicators in 16 barangays

- co-facilitated 2 Municipal Nutrition celebrations in July

- advocacy and support for various other health programs (eg Blood Donation Program, Family Planning, Immunization)

### **Challenges:**

Communications: During early 2014 in particular there were prolonged periods of disruption to email communication between PIA & SHVP staff. This resulted in delay in sending overdue funds required to carry out full functions at SHVP.

Action taken:

- Staff accompanied the Provincial Health Office staff during their Rural Health Unit visits & other functions in the municipalities & barangays.

- undertook activities which did not rely on funding, such as contributing to organisation of training & attending meetings, providing advocacy & advice etc.

Despite the funding & other usual difficulties, because of their very strong commitment, Val & Rose managed to continue carrying out the mission of Sinangpad, to assist villagers in Kalinga to improve environmental health outcomes for themselves & their families.



## Financial Report

Andrea Pickering

It is with great pleasure I can report that after a couple of years of seeing our income decline slightly, we saw an increase this year from last year. This is a very positive outcome, and reflective of the value our supporters put on the work we do.

We continue to work hard to make a big difference to the life of people in India, Bangladesh and Philippines. During the 2013/14 financial year, we sent off \$134820 to assist people who need our help, which stayed in line with the previous year.

Our administration % for this financial year has run at 7.03%, and this continues to remain well under our stated objective of 15% maximum. If we were to remove the travel component from the report, this would run at 5.71%. Your board, together with our small group of volunteers, work very hard to ensure costs remain as low as possible. This allows the bulk of donated funds to arrive on the ground overseas, and be put to work where the donors have specified. While some costs, such as ACFID membership and audit fees, are unavoidable, we are very lucky to have great support to help cover some of our other costs, and we sincerely thank these people.

As always, I thank our very dedicated group of supporters for their ongoing support, both financially and also with your kind words of encouragement. It is greatly appreciated.