

Newsletter



Year 3,
Edition 1
March 2006

In March 2003 the development organization Vialisa was established, its aim being the structural improvement of the future perspectives of street children and working young people, from 15 years upwards, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Lisa van Gerven, the manageress and founder of Vialisa, moved to Bangladesh to set up their first project, "The Social Employment Desk for Street Children and Working Young People". In October 2004 the office in Dhaka opened its doors and a month later in November we greeted our first volunteer from The Netherlands. Since then our first group of youngsters have been found employment and an education programme has been set up. After 12 months of hard work, the results of our endeavours have been so successful that we have received financial assistance from Novib. Since January 2006, the team in Dhaka consists of 3 Bengali social workers, 1 Bengali office assistant and of course Lisa herself.

Guido Spring
talking to one of
the youngsters
taking computer
classes in our
office.



Developments Newsletter

Reorganisation within Vialisa resulted in the necessity to revise our newsletter production methods. The changes have taken time to implement, which is why several newsletters will be appearing shortly after one another. To economise the Board has decided that instead of using an established printers office for production, the newsletter will now be printed by us in black and white format. The e-mail version will remain in colour.

Impressions Lisa van Gerven

We're already a fair way into 2006! The temperature has already shot up to an average of 35 degrees, the consequences being an overburdened electricity grid, which results in an average of 4 power cuts per day. We count ourselves lucky when the disruption lasts only 1 hour, it can of course go on for much longer. There have been 3 days so far that I just had to close the office out of necessity – there was insufficient light and it was just too hot to be able to work properly.

Two occasions spring to mind as being particularly memorable. The first was the meeting with the Dutch members of parliament. They spent a week in Bangladesh investigating the current developmental policy in preparation for the Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Aid. Vialisa was invited to talk about its work during a reception for the parliamentary members, hosted by the Dutch ambassador.

The Second occasion was the meeting with the freelance radio journalist Guido Spring. He came to Bangladesh to write a report on the ways in which sex education is given here. Since we also have a role to play in this subject area, Guido came to the office to discuss the topic at hand and managed at the same time to interview the youngsters who were present (some youngsters learn basic computer skills every afternoon at the office).

Generally speaking my free time is my own, although there have been two work related occasions which have kept me occupied outside working hours. The first was the appearance of an infuriated young man, who we learned was the brother of one of our female youngsters. Both social workers had their hands full keeping him at a safe distance. He accused us of putting impure thoughts into his sister's head, which incited her into secretly marrying her boyfriend, a carpenter. Since the young girl is only 16 years old, the marriage is illegal but, contradictorily, also valid (no idea how such a combination is possible, but this is after all Bangladesh!) After 3 days of discussion with all involved, we discovered (to my greatest surprise) that the girl was not secretly married to her boyfriend, but that it had been arranged by her father, who needed the services of a carpenter!

The second occurrence was the discovery that the family situation of one of our youngsters had changed so much for the worse that it was impossible to make ends meet. Their food supply had been used up, with insufficient funds to purchase further necessities. After further investigation we learned that rural family members had joined this family in Dhaka and all of them were dependent on this young girl's salary. The Vialisa social worker talked it through with the

immediate family who decided to search for other ways to generate income. Following on from this discussion, the family has bought a rickshaw, which is hired out, providing extra financial support.

Training Courses

Basic Education

The second Basic Education course has been started and has reached the halfway mark. The big difference with last year is that nearly all the current participants have a job as well, varying from vegetable carrier at the market to assistant mechanic. The participants are highly motivated to attend school for the 1 ½ hour lessons and the first exam results were very encouraging.

Personal Development Training Course

The number of participants attending the Personal Development Training Course has greatly increased. To facilitate the bigger group size, the training now takes place in the school where the Basic Education course and English lessons are given (previously it was held at the Vialisa office)

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA)

Owing to the networking skills of our social workers we were recently approached by the BNWLA, who were willing to inform our youngsters, via a training course, about their legal rights and duties. To ensure that this training course corresponds to the day-to-day lives of our youngsters, the Vialisa staff will follow a trial course in May.

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Our Youngsters

In Newsletter 1 (Year 2, 2005) we wrote about 16 year old Allaudin for whom employment had been arranged as dog caretaker.

One year on Allaudin looks after the dogs for two expatriate families, follows English lessons every afternoon and has recently started a training course in a car repair garage to learn practical skills he can fall back on when his expat employers leave Bangladesh. Furthermore, with permission, Allaudin has spent some of his savings on purchasing a bike, so that he saves time traveling between employers, the garage and the English lessons.

Our "other" Allaudin (17 years old), after a 3-month trial period working on one of the boats of tour operator "Bengal Tours", has been offered permanent employment.

Masud (16 years old) and Youssef (17 years old) have both done well during their 3 month trial period in the 'Dutch Recreation Club' as kitchen assistants. Since February 2006 they have both become permanent members of staff.

Volunteers

Towards the end of April 2006 two students studying "Pedagogic Aid" in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, will be coming to Vialisa in Bangladesh to carry out their final project. In the following Newsletter they will be reporting back on their activities here.



Moshak with his teacher at the nursery

Sponsorship

- During the opening of his new office space, Mr. Frans Becx, instead of receiving gifts for himself, requested his guests to kindly give donations to Vialisa. We are thrilled with this generous way of supporting us.
- The sponsor contract from "Traffic and Mobility Inc." that was signed for 3 years has been extended from January 2006 for a further one year. We are delighted with this kind gesture.
- The computer system at the Dutch Embassy was replaced in January 2006. Thanks to the good mutual relations we received 3 fully operating computers and a small laser printer. Two of these computers are used as training computers for the youngsters.
- At the end of 2005, the personnel at Jalema Inc. chose Vialisa as "charity of 2005"

Moshak during his training at BRAC's nursery

