

Newsletter

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June 2005

*Our team,
Up: Joel (S.W.), Nazrul
(office boy)
Down:
Maria (volunteer), Lisa,
Shazeda (S.W.), Ad
(volunteer)
Absent:
Rinku and Sonia (both
volunteer)*

Introduction

In March 2004 the international development organisation Vialisa was founded, objecting to structurally improve the future perspective of street and working children (of 15 years and older) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The director (and founder) of Vialisa, Lisa van Gerven, has moved to Bangladesh to start the first project "Social Employment Desk". The Dhaka office was opened in October 2004 and in November we welcomed our first Dutch volunteer. In the meantime employment was found for the first children and an education programme was started.



Impression Lisa van Gerven

The past few weeks have been all about heat and shortages. Because of the extreme long summer and delayed rain season Bangladesh and Dhaka especially, suffers from water and electricity shortages. Because of the heat and the high humidity air conditioning units are working around the clock. This however has consequences: because of the low water level there is a shortage of electricity that almost all of Dhaka is up against. Because of the instability in the power network

there are huge peaks of electricity which have hit several computers and stabilizers already. Thank goodness we only had one modem blow. In comparison with other parts of the city the water shortage has been limited. With an average of only three waterless days a week I'm really pretty lucky. A few districts (including the diplomat district) were without water for two weeks. And then the monsoon starts. Within two hours the streets are completely flooded. Public transportation is stalled and meetings are more likely cancelled than met. Our patio is under water almost constantly so when the doorbell rings we roll up our trousers and wade to the gate. Everybody has a dry set of clothes here now.

May and June were busy months. A few schools were out for the summer and all of a sudden we received lots of volunteer demands. With two temporary and three new regular volunteers we were able to do a lot in a short period of time. Thanks to the volunteers we now have a much clearer archiving system so steps can be taken faster and easier. This way we can meet the individual needs of the youngsters as good as possible.

I've been living here for almost a year now and my life has changed completely. Although it isn't always easy I still think my work is amazing and challenging. I sometimes work long "tropical" days. There's a lot of chaos, it's hectic and there's hardly any routine,

Because of the permanent volunteers and the arrival of a second social worker we have more stability in the team. Because some volunteers work for us next to their own regular jobs the working hours are irregular and I often work seven days a week. That makes me appreciate the fact that I live where I work. And by opening up a guest room to students that do internships in Bangladesh my house is always full of life, even after working hours. This is very important to me.



Social Worker Joel is helping Dolna to translate a cleaning manual

Results

Registration

In the year 2005 our goal was to register 60 children. Thanks to the excellent cooperation with the human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra this goal was met royally. We now have registered 78 youngsters with very diverse, but not always easy, ambitions

Basic Education

Until now, most members of this group haven't had any access to education. With the aid of Gulshan Literacy Programme a special education programme was developed to give a group of 12 children primary education at this school every afternoon. This concretely means reading, writing and mathematics. At first the programme was intended to take six months but this wasn't long enough. We decided to extend the programme for three months.

After this period, the boys who stated they wanted to work in an office, have to be able to be trained in an office as office hand. Several offices have been found willing to train these boys.

For the girls who want to work in textiles a tailor was found who is willing to educate.

The children who take part in our education programmes come to Vialisa's office every Sunday to participate in livelihood skill training. Here, they learn how to negotiate, personally hygiene and how to communicate with authorities like police officers.

We expect that for all the children who participate in our basic education we will be able to find a training or employment situation after they finish their education.

We also expect to place another fifteen children in training situations with private people or in regular training centres.

In November 2005 we will start basic training for a new group of twelve children.

Training for the job

So far all the training for the job was created by Vialisa with a tailor, a private household and offices. Six of these ten children already had prospects of steady employment prior to starting their training.

By now, four of them have received an employment contract with pay checks higher than minimum wage. The training on the job will be expanded.

- *Gardener*

Two boys were given the chance to work alongside a gardener and thus gain experience.

- *Private households*

Private households mainly train girls to become helpers in a household of the foreign community in Bangladesh. These helpers can rise to be head of household.

- *Tailor*

A tailor was found willing to train children.

- *Companies*

Several companies opened up their offices to train children to become office hands.

- *Vocational training*

One of the largest training centres has agreed to interview children we propose, to see if they have enough knowledge for a short intensive three month course. If Vialisa provides transport and tuition they will be accepted.

Training on the job

We noticed that a lot of the problems children experiences in their jobs were created because of miscommunication between the children and their employers. Since most of the employers are foreign and communicate in English, Vialisa started an English class in the Gulshan Literacy Programme. Most employers have given the children permission to leave the workplace for two hours every day to take part in this English class.



At school, the teacher explains

Steady/Regular employment

We haven't met our target for finding employment that does not require prior training.

- Companies and definitely private people are less likely to hire if Vialisa wasn't involved in the training process. Because of a lack of working experience they want character descriptions and we can only give those if the children have been guided by one of Vialisa's social workers for at least a month.
- Children have been able to see that Vialisa can arrange jobs with higher than minimum wages. They won't settle for minimum wages anymore. Even though they are unemployed and live in the slums or a shelter, they hear and see that there is a possibility for improvement. Unfortunately they would rather wait for that, than choose for something in between, such as a minimum wages job. Also, five children that we offered jobs and two children that we offered training declined, for different reasons, at the very last moment. The primary reason for declining is the fear of regularity and discipline that is needed for the job.

Learning to write in Bangla



We have been in touch with the American International School Dhaka (AISD). They have a community service programme where senior students do volunteer work. We have sent in a proposal so their senior students can teach our children English, so our children will be ready for training with foreign employers sooner. We expect to be able to form more training positions which will increase the chances of employment. Vialisa will take care of transport and training supplies, AISD will provide location and the students.

Vialisa has started a campaign in the foreign community in Bangladesh to stimulate them to sponsor our programme by:

- Sponsoring a youngster so they can enrol in training.
 - Offering a training position.
 - Offering employment.
- Despite the holiday seasons in which many foreigners leave Bangladesh for several weeks, this resulted in an employment position right away.

Employers

DHV Consultants

DHV is an international engineering firm based in the Netherlands. In Bangladesh they guide several large infrastructural projects such as the first 'fly-over', a bridge over one of the largest intersections, to relieve traffic. Not only did DHV offer employment for an office hand, they also offered a training position so one of our youngsters can gain experience as an office hand.

Trainings

HNG Show Case

Several girls from the walk-in centres of Ain o Shalish Kendra told us they wanted to work in textiles, but not in a textile factory. Several of them have some experience embroidering and batiking pillow cases, handkerchiefs and table cloths. During an accidental encounter with Mr. Chayan, tailor and director of HNG Show Case, we told him about our project and our need for training positions. He was enthusiastic right away and offered us three positions. Vialisa takes care of the girls' transportations and Mr. Chayan provides lunch and of course training.

Our girls

Hazera & Dolna, help in private household.

Both girls are 17 years old and come from the slums known as Notum Bazar. We met them through the community leader of these slums. Since March, they have been trained as maids in Dutch households in Dhaka to increase their chances of being hired as help in a private household for embassy staff. Aside from their training in the households, they go to school for

Hazera (right) listens to instructions of the cook (left)



an hour every day for English classes. After working as a maid for a while they can be promoted to head of household, leading sometimes two to four people. Because embassy staffs, when they leave Bangladesh, usually recommend their staff to the replacing embassy personnel, there is only a slim chance that they become unemployed again.

Ruma Akter, tailor training

Ruma is 15 years old and has four brothers and three sisters. As eldest sibling she is partly responsible for the family income. We met her through a walk-in centre of the human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). She has been lucky enough to have had some basic education as well as a three month textile course, prior to meeting us. However, the expenses were too high for her family and when she was fourteen her family decided to marry her off. Her marriage didn't last long. Her husband abused her, and thanks to mediation of ASK permission for a divorce was granted soon. Ruma is now in full-time tailor training at Show Case.

Aklima Akter, tailor training

Aklima is 17 years old and has one brother and five sisters. She is also the eldest, which makes her partly responsible for the family income. Her father owns a little candy shop but doesn't make enough money to support the whole family. Aklima went to school for a little while, but because of a lack of motivation, as well as her parents not valuing for education, she dropped out soon.

After several meetings with her father, ASK and Vialisa's social workers were able to convince her father of the importance of practical education. It helped that we assured him that Aklima doesn't have to travel alone, but can go together with Ruma.

Colophon

*Text: Lisa van Gerven,
Sarah Dobbe
Photo's: Vialisa
Translation: Nicolien
Maatman*

Social worker

Joel D Costa

"My name is Joel D Costa, working as a Social worker in Vialisa. I am 22 years of age and just passed the graduation examination. The reason why I have joined here is because I like children

to talk with and also I want them to be developed by themselves. It would be a great deed indeed when you help a poor youngster to improve his or her skills to take a chance in these difficulties."

Joel is responsible for guiding the youngsters that found employment through Vialisa's guidance. He visits them once a week or every other week. Despite his relatively young age we hired him with confidence. Because he is so young, and because this is his first real job with responsibilities, just like the youngsters, he is able to gain their trust very quickly. Joel is part of the very small minority of Jehova's Witnesses and knows from first-hand experience what it is like to be treated with judgement and bias in this very Islamic society. This makes it very clear to all our staff and youngsters that we are a non-religious organisation that welcomes people of all religions.

Promotion

Thanks to the volunteers in Bangladesh we started a promotional campaign in the surroundings of our office, to stimulate companies and private people to create training and employment position for our youngsters.

Unfortunately the radio show Mundial of L1 will not return after the summer, so May 29th was the date of Lisa's last radio appearance for this show. We are now working on making Lisa a radio correspondent for the VPRO show Worldnet.

Volunteers

To improve our organisation's quality we depend on volunteers. If you are interested in donating your time and knowledge, please e-mail us at Vialisa@vialisa.com. Of course donations are still needed and always welcome.

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