

Newsletter



Year 3,
Edition 2
June 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 the 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.

Classroom
Tailoring training



Newsletters

Much to our regrets we have not been able to get the timely publication of our newsletters up and running. We're doing our utmost best to solve this problem, so that the future newsletters appear on time.

Education Centre Vialisa

A new era has dawned for Vialisa, with help from the Winters van den Speulhof Foundation in Baarlo, The Netherlands. Since the 1st of May 2006 the Education Centre Vialisa has been set up, situated in a nearby slum area. The slum area is rather drab and dreary so the Education Centre classrooms have been made attractive by using cheerful, uplifting colours. The school furniture that was transported two years ago to Bangladesh in Lisa's container has been given a new coat of paint and a floor covering has been laid which is easy to clean.

The Basic Education course, the Tailor training course and the Personal Development course for our youngsters will be held in this Education Centre. To assist and further stimulate our young participants, we provide lunch and at certain times a doctor is available. In the meantime we've taken on two additional teachers and a tailor.



Classroom
basic education

Basic Education

Eighteen youngsters have started the Basic Education course. This course will initially be run by us, so we've chosen for a participative learning method. This means that the youngsters receive lessons in groups, rather than in the classical Bengali manner, in which the teacher stands in front of the class and the students have to repeat everything the teacher says, hoping that they will remember some of it.

English lessons

At the moment twelve youngsters are receiving English lessons. They are divided into two groups; beginners and advanced. The beginners learn the basics, their knowledge at this level is often limited to "Hello, how are you?" The assumption is that through improving their English language skills, their chances of finding a job will be increased. The advanced group of students already has a job with a non-Bangladeshi employer. The idea behind their lessons is to increase their promotion chances by improving their communication skills with their employer

Tailors training course

Eight youngsters take part in the Tailors training course. At the time of selecting candidates for the course, the boy: girl ratio was kept equal. As well as becoming tailors, these boys and girls will also learn how to become entrepreneurs and manage their own tailor's workshop. It is possible for Vialisa to give the Tailor training course because provision of the necessary training materials is relatively easy.

Gulshan Literacy Programme

Gulshan Literacy Programme has moved to new premises, which means that after more than a year of close co-operation the teamwork has had to come to an end. Their new location was too distant for our youngsters: it meant that the travelling time to and from the lessons greatly increased, leading to discontent amongst the employers. After complaints from our youngsters themselves, we decided to put a stop to the joint collaboration.

Our Youngsters

Moshak, 16 years old

After having followed the Basic Education course, and a training course in the Brac Garden Centre, Moshak can look forward to the prospect of a job as dogcarer and gardener. He has just started his three-month trial period, but we're confident that this will lead to permanent employment.

Mazzudin 18 years old

Thanks to the donation of several computers from The Netherlands Embassy Dhaka, Mazzudin has been able to follow several months' computer training at our office. A month ago Mazzudin started his work placement at a Bengali computer company, after which there is the chance of permanent employment.

Loes and Jolijn; volunteers at Vialisa; their impressions

We're Loes Geurts and Jolijn van Duijnhoven, working as volunteers at Vialisa since 22nd April 2006. We're final year students from Social Pedagogic Aid at the Fontys Polytechnic in Eindhoven. During the fourth and final year of our education course arose the possibility of doing our final project abroad. We both regarded this opportunity as a challenge.

Using Internet, we searched for NGO's where there was potential to carry out our project. We also e-mailed Vialisa and received an enthusiastic reply. The Vialisa organization sounded appealing, so we decided, without having thought about it earlier, to go to Bangladesh. Before leaving The Netherlands we prepared a project proposal for Vialisa, which was approved. Finally we could buy our tickets for Dhaka!

We've been working here at the Vialisa Social Employment Desk for about seven weeks now. After an initial orientation in the organization, we began by analyzing all aspects of the Social Employment Desk, including possible problem areas. From our results we concluded that the filing system was not running smoothly and that the social workers themselves found this difficult to organize. As a result, our next step was to create a structured system for filing records, with a training course for the social workers. At this moment in time we're halfway through the training course, and it's going well.

Working in Dhaka is a wonderful experience and we're enjoying it. Every day we're pleasantly surprised with what Bangladesh has in store for us. Working at the Social Employment Desk is a challenge and we hope that we can eventually make a worthwhile contribution to the Vialisa organization.



The school in its original state

Impressions Lisa van Gerven

The last three months have been quite different than usual. In April I was in The Netherlands catching up with family and friends, but at the same time still working. The staff in Bangladesh was finalizing the deal for a school of our own. Being in The Netherlands, the only thing I could do was to supervise the whole process via skype (telephony via the computer). After returning to Bangladesh, the first item on the agenda was to see our new acquisition. Despite the ugliness of the building, I was filled with pride.

The exterior is made completely out of corrugated zinc, half of which is scorched black, probably because it had previously been used in a burnt down house. Nonetheless, I could see that we could use it to our advantage. The landlord was very obliging, and immediately replaced large parts of the roof, laid a new floor, joined two rooms together to create a bigger classroom and connected the electricity supply. After this had been done, we got to work ourselves with paint rollers and brushes to give the place a facelift. The painting turned out to be a real experience, in the boiling heat with dozens of curious people standing around, picking things up, touching things and then with dirty hands leaning against a freshly painted wall...it didn't speed things up, to say the least!. But with help from Loes and Jolijn (volunteers) and Tonnie and Wim (visitors) we were finished faster than we'd expected.

Painting the outside of the school

There has been enormous progress made with the opening of the Vialisa Education Centre in the middle of the Korail slums. The staff numbers have almost doubled, which means that I have seven people to manage. Luckily the teachers all have some experience. With the Vialisa Education Centre we've also become more independent. Of course we still make use of other organizations' facilities, and we continue working towards joint collaboration, but it is a wonderful feeling to be able to do things independent of others. Take for example our Tailor training course. In theory there are several other organizations that provide similar training courses. In the practice though it is very difficult for the students to find a job because the course is limited to printing cloth designs and making clothes.

Owing to the short time period, students don't have the chance to learn both. Clothes design and the drawing of clothes patterns aren't even covered. We have chosen to teach a small group of youngsters enough skills so that they can manage a business independently. Therefore not just making clothes, but clothes design, sewing machine repairs, management and accounts. This of course is not going to happen overnight – we estimate that it will take two years before the first supervised shop can open its doors.

Having volunteers around for two months was an instructive and enjoyable period. Owing to the training courses carried out by Loes and Jolijn, the social workers are striving ahead with their communication skills and self-confidence in taking on whatever comes their way. A big thank you to Loes and Jolijn for their hard work, patience and humour.



Sponsorship

Winters van den Speulhof

Thanks to the financial support from the Winters van den Speulhof Foundation, we've been able to open the Vialisa Education Centre. They will finance the costs until January 2007.

- **Frankort Beheer BV**
- **HIGHQ**
Financieel Interim

*Dhaka American Women's Club
(DAWC)*

After lobbying for one year we've finally become recipients of the DAWC sponsor programme. Thanks to DAWC the medical, dental and hospital visit costs of our youngsters will be financed.

Tonnie and Wim Kersten-Janssen

Not only have Tonnie and Wim helped us with the preparation of the Vialisa Education Centre, they have also raised funds amongst friends and colleagues before leaving for Bangladesh. We're grateful to Tonnie and Wim for their financial and practical support.

Promotion

On the 12th July 2006 there was a portrait of Lisa from Vialisa sent out on the radio via Worldnet from the VPRO. This broadcast can be heard on Internet.

www.vpro.nl/programma/wereldnet/aflevering/28361203

Colophon

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