

## BANGALORE PROJECT

During the second week of January Mrs Butcher and Miss Kavanagh visited The Oasis India team in Bangalore. The purpose of this visit was to set up a partnership between The Academy and The Bangalore Team.

We were really travelling into the unknown as we were going to spend a week in the 'real' India. We were excited and quite nervous as to what we would be experiencing. We left Heathrow in the snow, in fact we were delayed as they sprayed the wings of the plane with de-icer! When we arrived in Bangalore it was 80F.

Our room was very basic but clean. There was no hot water but you soon get used to washing in cold.

We were met by one of the project leaders, Majella, who became a real friend to us. We were introduced to everyone in The Frazer Town office and they were really pleased to welcome us and to talk about their work and what amazing work this proved to be.

Our first visit was to the Hallegudadahalli Slum. This project was set up to support and to train young men and women who had either been trafficked or been dealing in drugs. Most of them were HIV positive. Their average age was seventeen.

At this centre they are taught basic English and ICT skills. They are given free medical care and supported in their efforts to stop taking drugs. Most of the young people are severely traumatised from their life in prostitution or from abuse from their families. The Oasis team have been able to work with Hindu, Muslim and Christian leaders to support these young people. This has been a great achievement in itself. Students quickly become employable and therefore have a hopeful future. Simple support, such as providing new computers and software, as well as training students to use this effectively costs so little. We are going to do this for them. There was a wonderful positive atmosphere amongst these young people and we are planning a support partnership between them and The Academy.

On Tuesday we were taken to a State Home for children and young people. This was the most harrowing of our visits. The home was a complex of vast buildings. Children were either orphans or had been rounded up off the streets by the police. They were all locked in at night in these cavernous empty rooms with nothing to occupy them. The tops of the exterior walls were studded with glass. There were many children who had been living at the railways and were open to all kinds of abuse. We met several young people and heard their own stories. Most had either been stolen from their parents and sold into prostitution, both girls and boys; some

had been sold by their parents or been abused by them and some had simply run away. Oasis is working to reunite parents with the children that had been stolen from them. Many of these were from the north of India and even over the borders. They also help to rescue children from prostitution and when they are picked up from the streets by the police they are able to offer medical and psychiatric care. You will understand that the children are very traumatised by their experiences.

We had a very good meeting with the Stop The Traffik team and were able to find out where our fund-raising is going to be spent. This charity now works world-wide. We will continue to support this with fund raising.

Oasis has set up a scheme called Jacobs Well. This has provided training for young girls so they can enter the textile industry. They are also taught English and ICT skills. The training unit enables young girls from the slum communities to find work. They would normally have few job opportunities and often be sold into prostitution. The project trains them for real work and gives them a sense of real purpose to their lives. Many of these young girls train to be teachers themselves. The manufacturing unit was very near to where we were staying and we were able to buy some of their beautiful products. We got to know the girls really well and they loved having their photographs taken. They have a website and now sell products on-line. This unit also makes our school ties! We are planning to help this company with its marketing strategies and plans are well underway to do this. More information and shopping can be found at [www.jacobswell.biz](http://www.jacobswell.biz).

We met a remarkable young man called Charles. He was running a youth centre for 14-15 year old boys who have dropped out of school and were getting involved in crime. He and his team aim to get them back into school so they get the qualifications needed for employment and so keep them out of trouble and danger. Charles himself had a difficult background but finds this enables him to empathise with the very people he is trying to help. The aim is to empower these young people so they have the skills to provide for themselves. A lot of the trust that is built up starts with a football match!

Students are taught football and cricket skills, health and hygiene awareness and have evening classes in maths, English, science and ICT. They run a programme called value-based education which encompasses prevention, integration and rehabilitation. They have a hundred boys attending every day sometimes rising to two hundred and fifty. During the day the youth workers visit the slum communities and speak to the boys and their parents in their homes. We are looking to develop a

partnership between our students and theirs to share their love of football and to support each others teams.

Our final visits were to the Doddigunta Community where we saw the free medical camp the Oasis had organised and the Balwadi nursery. The medical centre was free for the whole community and if hospital care was needed this was also free if referred by the doctor. Oasis provides free nursery care. We were impressed with the quality of the activities when they have so few resources. The children were also taught how to sit down and eat properly, to wash their hands and even to use the toilet. We were able to equip this nursery with art, English and maths materials. It was wonderful to be able to start our partnership on such a positive note.

While we were in Bangalore we met with The Country Leader John Nonhebel. He was very pleased that we wanted to set up this partnership and we discussed where we could be of most help.

We met some wonderful, inspiring people and will be going back with other staff and students. We can't wait to introduce them to the Bangalore rickshaws and the traffic!!

J.Butcher and K.Kavanagh      January 2009