



### **Saturday 09 February- Arrival**

20 tired but eager volunteers arrived in Kolkata at 8am to be greeted by Alannah & Anne-Marie who had arrived a few days earlier to make sure all was in order for our arrival. First stop was Basanti colony a slum on the outskirts of Kolkata where in January this year a fire broke out. Over 150 homes were destroyed and those who lost their homes were living under black plastic sheeting. We paid a visit to the Hope school in the slum and spent some time walking through the slum giving the volunteers some small insight into how people live & survive day to day. We checked into our accommodation for the week ahead and after a meeting to brief everyone about the site and the schedule for the week ahead it was an early night for all!

### **Sunday 10 February - Day 1 on site**

6.30am alarm! ...not sure that many of us are used to such an early call on a Sunday morning but following a hearty breakfast of omelettes, fruit etc & porridge (Flahavan's of course!) for Noel we set off in a convey of jeeps to the site.

The streets of Kolkata are bustling early in the morning and the journey to the site is a chaotic drive through rickshaws, buses, pedestrians and animals! Beeping the horn is a rule of the road!

The site was a hive of activity on day 1 with the volunteers carrying bricks, sand, water, mixing cement etc. The Lotus T-shirts did not stay white for long! Our presence caused a bit of a stir in the community who watched on with a mix of curiosity & amusement! We bid farewell at the end of the day. Amazingly the group managed to watch the Irish rugby game that night in Kolkata ..disappointing result but a nice way for the group to end the day!

### **Monday 11 February - Day 2 on site**

A little weary & stiff we set off to the site. After warm up exercises (much to the amusement of the local children and the building contractors!) led by Coach Paul we spent the day finishing the brick work & later in the afternoon made a start on the plastering....looks easy to do but is harder than it looks!

Anne-Marie is a very welcome sight & a vision in white around 12.30 with lunch! We said farewell on day 2 by doing a conga line out of the tent led by Noel..they must think we are mad!

After the site we paid a visit to the Birla Mandir Hindu temple built by the industrialist Birla family. The temple is built in white marble and houses shrines hindu gods such as Krishna and Durga

We then went to meet Sister Cyril, a truly inspirational woman who has spent her life in Kolkata rescuing & educating street children and encouraging integration. Her programs extend from opening school enrolment to children in need to sending teachers to the slums as well as countless more initiatives during her almost 60 years in India. Sister Cyril was principal of the Loreto Day school Sealdah for 33 years and following her retirement as principal in December 2012 continues to work as an advisor to the Government. It was an honour for the volunteers to be in her company.

### **Tuesday 12 February - Day 3 onsite**

Plastering...all day : )

A cloudy day kept the temperature down. On the way home we paid a visit to Loreto Day school Sealdah where we spent some time playing games with the children. Ludo and double double (a clapping game that the kids beat us at every time!) were the favourites. These are children from the surrounding streets and slums which have are now educated in this top class and progressive school. Time flew by and we were sorry to leave!



### **Wednesday 13 February - Day 4 on site**

Ash Wednesday – to mark the day a small group of the volunteers were up at 5.30am to attend mass in Mother Teresa house at 6am.

Before heading to the site we spent an hour wandering through the streets of Newmarket where we saw the hustle and bustle of the fruit and vegetable stalls, meat shops etc. We stopped for some chai tea (Indian tea...milky, sweet and spicy...yum!)  
Work on site today was ...more plastering and the tube well was put in place so the school can pump its own water.

A small group headed to Chaulgola to visit the school built by Lotus Child the previous year and by all accounts they were given a huge welcome by over 100 children!  
We rounded off day 4 on site with a drink (in our dusty dirty work clothes) before heading home for dinner and bed!

### **Thursday 14 February - Day 5 on site**

Valentines day!

Major progress on site today..the roof went on & we plastered the outside of the building. More and more people from the community are watching on each day and it is easy to see how important this building will be to the community once complete.

Competition time!..to entertain ourselves on our last night in Kolkata it was agreed that each car would perform a song or dance or combination of both for the other cars so we spent our car journeys for the last two days debating song choices, re-arranging lyrics and practising – we are a competitive bunch!

### **Friday 15 February - Day 6 on site – Saraswati Puja**

Our last day on site and the final push. We spent the morning completing the plastering, some helped install the windows and others helped ready the building for the official handover to the community. It was also a festival day in India to celebrate Saraswati, the Goddess of Arts & Knowledge and therefore an auspicious day for Lotus Child to handover the second school.

The volunteers served lunch to around 100 excited children who will be attending the school. We presented the school to the community, which was followed by dancing and singing for us and by us... *“Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham, Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham, Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham...oh rock my soul..!”*

It was a fantastic day and the community and children were out in force to bid farewell but as the day drew to a close we were all more than a little sad to be leaving. However we said goodbye to the Sonapota community knowing we are leaving something which will benefit the children and families of the community for a long long time to come.

P.S. - Congratulations to Eimear's car for their entertaining performance of the Fresh Prince (lyrics adapted in honour of each volunteer!)

### **Saturday 16 February – Farewell to Kolkata!**

A little weary we made our final stop at the Kasba Little Girls home which Lotus Child co-fund with the Hope Foundation before heading to the airport.

We have hundreds of photos and so many memories of the week we spent in Kolkata and look forward to every report on the progress of the children in the school and the development of the building within the wider community.

We thank the volunteers for their time, energy and great company and as always we thank each and every supporter of Lotus Child.



**LOTUS CHILD**  
CARING FOR THE STREET CHILDREN OF INDIA  
The Lewis and Zelia Martin Foundation

