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COUNTRY DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Living in a collective society could be a new experience for many of you.

But for most of us, living in a group was part of growing up. We have not had a separate room , a separate drawing room , a separate TV. This is one of the reasons why, we were able to quickly adjust to the apartment system.

Being communal comes naturally to us, and we were always flooded with guests and relatives. Most of the Indian children would be familiar with at least three generations preceding them. We want to eat together, watch TV together, go for a walk together. Vacations would always have an arranged tour which would be a concerted effort of few families and friends together. This could be very unusual for a volunteer and when community is a part of their living in Host Families , this could be a little hard for volunteers who has never lived such a life. But, cultural immersion or appreciation can happen only when you are able to come out of your comfort zone.

Understanding the way of life of another people in another country by oneself is a thought process. Indian don't pride in possession of their belongings, but rather would like to share. This could be the reason why they are curious to know about you, which is just another way of exchange of ideas. Usually, most of the Volunteers get used to and it is a great feeling to be a part of a sharing community. One can see that they are easily accepted and can easily integrate, if they are willing to open up.

There is an interesting system of four phases of Vedic life, which teaches people on the living phases of humans starting from Brahmacharya (the celibacy life), Grihasta , Vanaprastha, and Sanyasin; Only the last phase makes us move outside of the communal living, which on our path to Spiritualism (means communal with God).

Jagadish Kumar

Country Director
Projects Abroad | India



COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

Story By Nirmala Periasamy | Medical Programme Manager



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As the demands from the Medical interns increase, it's our pleasure to find more and more placements to partner with. Through the April'13 edition, we would like to update our readers about our new placement, Shant Manas.

Shant Manas means peaceful mind. The purpose of its creation is born out of a deep commitment and dedication to help support people with mental health difficulties, and their families, and help promote positive mental health in rural communities of Southern India. Four villages consist of around 11105 populations. Most of the people are unorganized workers living under poverty line. These inhabitants are not able to utilize the Mental Health services available in the urban centre. Moreover, these people are not aware of the importance of mental health. Most of the affected people are living in the age group of earning stage between the ages 18 and 45. So their families suffer because of their mental illness. Shant Manas

community mental health teams consists of Service co-ordinator, Senior Psychiatric consultant and Mental Health outreach workers. The daily programme of Shant Manas includes,

- 1, Staff approaches the patients who are suspected to be mentally ill, at their doors steps
- 2, Initial home assessment is done
- 3, Then comes building rapport with the patients
- 4, Refers to a Psychiatric consultant
- 5, Further Diagnosis is done by Psychiatric consultant
- 6, Medication given with care
- 7, Follow-up visits are made
- 8, Family Therapy/counselling
- 9, Rehabilitation and linkage with other NGOs
- 10, Utilizing existing resources
- 11, Good Rapport with the local influential leaders
- 12, Participating in the other health related programs
- 13, Contact with Health care providers to get more referrals

As a medical Volunteer, you can work along with service coordinators and you can also do fund raising for Shant Manas. This amount will help Shant Manas provide 4 months' worth of essential psychiatric medication at free of costs, for its mental health service users in 8 poor rural communities near Madurai. ☒

NICOLAS ESCARGUEIL'S VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE IN FRENCH



Pour moi l'expérience en Inde se termine. Cela va faire deux mois et demi que je suis ici, à la "Model Farm" et je vais tenter de vous expliquer comment cela s'est passé.

Je pars de France avec un BAC STAE - production végétale (bac agricole) et 14 ans d'expérience en viticulture et viniculture. Normalement, je maîtrise le travail effectué dans la ferme. Mon arrivée en Inde fut un peu mouvementée, je suis resté à Madurai un jour, avec d'autres Français, dans un appartement avec peu d'informations sur ce qui devait se passer pour nous, mais bon, vous allez vous apercevoir que c'est leur façon de fonctionner ! On s'est retrouvé à 4 dans cet appartement, et tous pour des missions différentes. Le lendemain donc je pars en taxi pour Chinnupatti, à une heure de Madurai. C'est le village où se trouve la ferme. Toute l'aventure se passe ici. J'arrive en début de matinée, on me présente l'équipe, les autres volontaires, et les personnes travaillant

sur la ferme. On m'explique que l'après-midi on a rendez-vous dans une ferme pour aider un agriculteur. Malgré ma fatigue, j'y vais. On part dans un village voisin, en bus, puis en rickshaw, le moyen de locomotion le plus prisé des Indiens (le moins cher et bien souvent le plus pratique).

Je découvre ainsi une des missions de la Model Farm. Aider les agriculteurs à transformer leur exploitation, et à passer à une agriculture totalement biologique. Tout au long de votre expérience dans la Model Farm, on va vous expliquer comment fonctionne l'agriculture biologique, et comment l'appliquer en Inde, et plus précisément dans le Tamil Nadu. Plusieurs techniques sont expérimentées dans la ferme, puis appliquées quand elles fonctionnent. C'est l'essentiel de votre travail dans la ferme. La Model Farm a aussi pour mission de pérenniser les espèces d'arbres et de plantes autochtones. Pour cela elle dispose d'une "banque

de graines de plantes autochtones". Elle a également pour mission, de replanter les zones déforestées. Non loin du village, il y a d'ailleurs une zone de ce type où l'on se rend régulièrement pour replanter ces espèces, ou pour tout simplement les arroser.

Dans la ferme, aussi, se trouve une zone réservée aux plantes médicinales ; pour qu'elles ne soient pas oubliées, et qu'elles soient utilisées correctement. Vous allez aussi vous occuper de répertorier les espèces d'oiseaux du coin. Pour cela, vous allez vous rendre régulièrement dans des lacs ou des étangs pour faire des comptages d'oiseaux.

Tous les travaux de la ferme sont orientés vers l'écologie, dans un souci de maintenir une agriculture naturelle, sans l'utilisation de produits pesticides ou d'engrais chimiques, et vous allez découvrir que c'est encore possible.

Pour moi cette expérience se termine, avec le sentiment que l'on peut encore



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labourer avec des bœufs et utiliser du fumier pour amender les sols. Tout cela est encore possible et je suis bien content d'avoir contribué à développer ces techniques et réussi à transformer des exploitations pour qu'elles arrêtent de polluer la nature et adoptent une agriculture responsable.

Vous allez découvrir un lieu extraordinaire, où le travail est dur, mais adapté à son milieu. Cette expérience a été très enrichissante, les gens, le lieu, la façon de travailler, de manger (chez une famille du village, où vous serez chouchouté), leur manière de vivre... tout peut vous sembler différent, MAIS QUELLE EXPERIENCE !!!!!

A vous maintenant de partager cette expérience, et de contribuer à ce que l'agriculture reprenne ce chemin qu'elle n'aurait jamais dû quitter. ☒



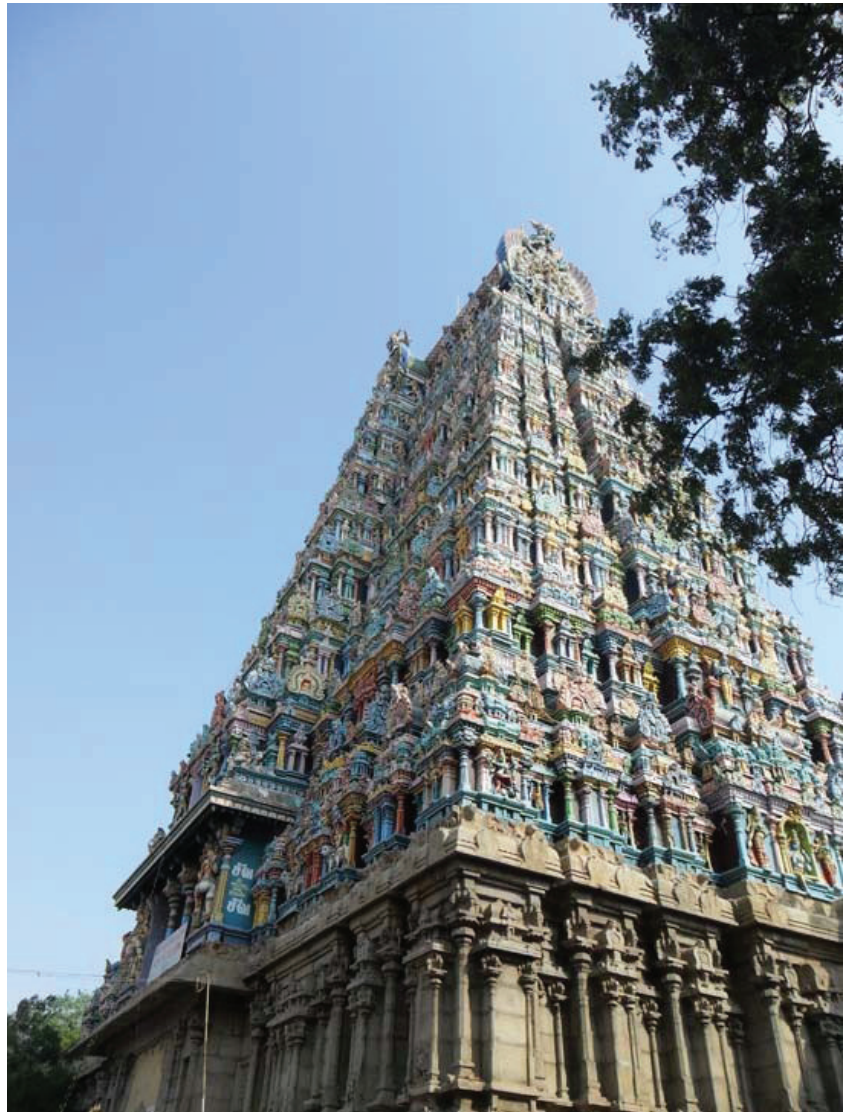
VOLUNTEER LORETTA DEAN'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"Take no expectations; India is nothing you can imagine." I had thought I knew what this advice was about. I had seen the poverty captured in photographs; I could imagine the heat, baking the dry, dusty ground. I could still remember the traffic, the noise, and my silent prayer that I would somehow manage to arrive at my hotel unscathed. So I stepped off the plane at Madurai airport packed with this sense of assurance, an open mind, and some heavy luggage.

Bundled into the back of our taxi, I wasn't surprised to find the absent seatbelts, the families that we dodged, balanced on their motorcycles, the fight for space with the decorated TATA buses, or the bare-footed cyclists that wove between the chaos. I was, however, surprised by my reaction. Gone was my jetlag. Gone was my fear of travelling in India, and gone was my previous concern that I would feel unsettled here.

It was at this point that I formed a newfound trust with India. She was already an intricate pattern of brilliant colours and running threads; somehow I believed that she would take life into her own hands. I discarded my initial fears, identifying a new sense of order hidden behind a façade of chaos.

A level of harmony is prevalent here. The cool evening breeze and shaded walkways relinquish you from the powerful sun. A spicy sambar provides the ideal accompaniment to the steaming portion of rice that lies in the palm of a banana leaf: dinner awaits. Skin, coated in a layer of dust and dirt, will seek sanctuary in the delicate silks on offer that whisper a Carnatic refrain. The soft scent of jasmine moves languidly through the air, relieving your



senses from the astringent petrol fumes that burn your nostrils, while notes of incense surround you in a comforting aroma.

The balance doesn't stop here. At night you can discover the strangest of lullabies. Distant horns will join peals of bells; the low buzz of insects provides a constant rhythm while the beat ascends from the railway line, building up to a

crescendo as the great orchestra delivers its chorus.

One cannot help but feel alive here; there is a constant energy that, at first overwhelming, inspires excitement. Nothing is predictable, especially your first impressions, even on return.



Volunteers during various activities



