

I spent another eventful and hot summer with the people of our project in India. There were many remarkable events happening around and I did participate in some of them. I was really proud to be with those women in blue sari, our 'Mahilamandals' from Ramnagar. They took the opportunity to invite me and their village leader for a meeting, they wanted their pending demands to be addressed. One of them was repairing the road to their village. The leader promised them that he will do his best to meet all those relevant demands and that in one year time their road will be repaired. The women responded immediately saying they would invite me again next year and if the road is not ready, we all together will be going to his home directly ! This is a deal between the women and the leader and lets wait and see how far he keeps his promise. In another occasion, I was in a rally with around 700 women from villages around. This rally was organized to promote the education of girl children and to stop female infanticide.

Just before I reached the school, the computer system crashed badly in the St. Anthony's



Warm welcome in the Tahirpur leprosy colony.

school of Dugawar and I was afraid that I would have to spend a lot of time to fix things. As I guessed, lot of my time was spent in updating the computer labs and network system. While in Belgium, I am surprised why electronic devices do not last long in India. Staying over a month time, I realize the problems the school faces in this regard. The heat, the dust, the frequent power cut etc. make it difficult for the system to last longer. Thanks to the rapid postal system, I could order needed devices from Europe and the US, and put back the system on track before I came back. This enables me to control the system in the school directly from Belgium !

I also visited our other project, the St Anthony's school in Rahrai, a few times. Kids in the Rahrai's school look very happy, interested and curious. The first floor of the school building is now completed, we have modified one wing of the first floor to design an area for the teachers to stay. There are 7 teachers living in this campus now. The admissions for the new sessions were still going on in August. Many training programs for women are also organized in Rahrai... the social projects are on right track.

Marc Valentin
Président



I was invited by the « women in blue sari » for a new meeting in August 2018...

New Schooling Support Program in the Tahirpur leprosy colony

As you may know, during the last 12 years we have been sponsoring children from two leprosy colonies in the states of *Delhi* and *Haryana*. We organize the admission of these children in good English Medium school close to their living place, and take care of their educational expenses. Our staff regularly visit these schools and the families to follow up their progress. Some of the older children have already finished their schooling successfully and are now doing higher studies.

We could not expand this program because English medium schools in cities are very expensive and we had to limit our budget. Besides that, through this sponsorship, we could help only some families and there were more and more requests from parents to sponsor their children. It became really difficult for us to say yes to one and no to another.

Meanwhile we have been thinking on how we could reach out to more children from these colonies other than selecting individual children for sponsorship. One of the proposals that came from the field was to start a *school supporting program* for the children who are already going to the public schools, to improve

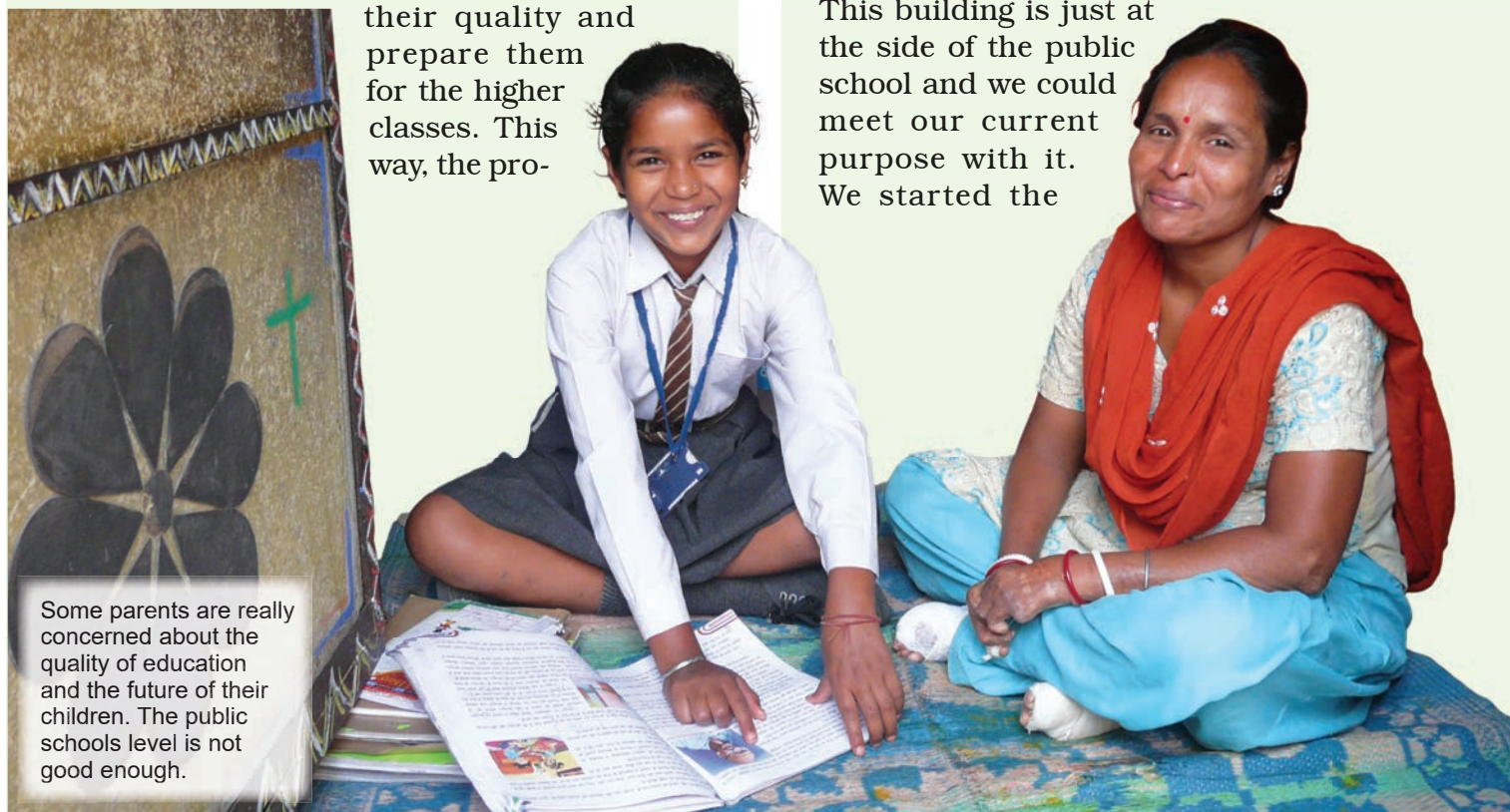
their quality and prepare them for the higher classes. This way, the pro-

gram is more widely open for all those who wish to join.

How did we organise this new program ?

The government has built up a Public school for the children of the *Tahirpur* colony inside the colony itself. As in many of the public schools, the quality of education in this school is very poor. Most of the children from the colony are registered in this school, however, many of them are ignoring the schooling. On the other hand, there are parents who are concerned about their children's education, they are sending them to this public school but are also sending them for private tuition, which cost 8 € per month. The purpose is to improve their standard. However, this tuition is not effective as this tuition class is crowded with many children. So it seemed useful to help those children who really want to study better, through a *school supporting program* created by us. Since the public school is working in two shifts, we organized our program in two shifts as well.

The colony is a very congested place and it is very difficult to find a suitable room to run a centre. Our coordinator, *Raju*, who is also an inhabitant of this colony, proposed us to start this centre on the first floor of a house which has two rooms and one corridor plus toilets. This building is just at the side of the public school and we could meet our current purpose with it. We started the



Some parents are really concerned about the quality of education and the future of their children. The public schools level is not good enough.



Mr. Raju explained to us how he organized the school support program.



centre on first of June 2017. Two teachers are teaching the children in two shifts. We started with classes 4,5, 6 and 7.

They scot on the floor and there is enough light and shades and it seems to be fitting our purpose at the moment.

Mr. Raju supervises and coordinates this program and Jena our field work coordinator is regularly visiting the place. The two young women teaching the children are from the colony itself, they have finished their degree course and are very capable. It looks to be a good start.

Background of Tahirpur Leprosy Colony

The leprosy colony in *Tahirpur*, Delhi has a population of around 10 thousand people and it is one of the biggest in Delhi. This colony was built by the Delhi government in the 80s to provide a home to leprosy patients who have been abandoned by their families and communities. Once this colony was established, patients from all over the country took the train to reach *Tahirpur* and made it their new home. They were given a house with one bedroom and a small kitchen. During the last 4 decades, the populations in this colony increased. Many of them found their partners in this colony itself

and got married. Many of them who came in the early 80s are now old and have children and grand children. As the families grew big, the place became very congested.

The pension they get from the government, 1800 rupees (25 euros) is not enough even to feed their family. Those who have physical deformity go for begging to make a living. Many of them make themselves even more deformed, to get more sympathy and support from the public. The social stigma of leprosy is still strong. They have to hide their identity if they are to get any job. Good schools don't accept their children, shop keepers are afraid



We started to sponsor those children 12 years ago... As you can see, the small girls became young and bright women fully busy with their higher studies !



to given them a job, nobody will buy anything from them, their children cannot get married to outsiders...their identity is fully attached to leprosy. Those who cannot cope with this reality get addicted to drugs and alcohol.

There are leaders elected from within, who are in charge of running this colony and maintaining the law and order. As we enter into the colony, the first building we see is a jail for those who violate the law in the colony. There are few medical clinics run by NGOs to take care of the habitants.

Good education and training is the only way out of this vicious circle. Without an external support they cannot afford it. Those who get opportunity through some NGOs to get better education have settled down outside the colony with jobs. Here below we have example from our sponsored children who are on their way of making it.

Deepika is one of our sponsored child from this colony. Her both parents were badly affected by leprosy. We admitted her in one of the good schools in the area and constantly followed up her progress in the school and at home. She did well in her studies and finished her schooling successfully. She was also good in many extra curricular activities. Her parents were very supportive of her all along. After finishing her class 12, she got sponsored by an another NGO to do Nursing studies in a good hospital in *Delhi*. Currently she is perusing her nursing course and this gives her the possibility to make a life of her own choice.

Normally our policy is to sponsor one child from a family. However, we could not close our eyes to *Susmita*, the little sister of *Deepika*. When she was three years old, her parents noticed that she had a problem of hearing and talking. During our field staff's visit to this family, we proposed her parents to seek medical advice for her. *Susmita* was taken to an ENT Specialist and as per the advice of the doctor, we provided her a hearing aid and then admitted her in a special school for the hearing impaired. She is doing well in this school and she is very happy as well. Her mother is very supportive of her and help her out a lot to get along with her life in a better way. Many girls whom we sponsored along with *Deepika* had done well and gone for higher studies !



The two young women teaching the children are preparing the support session of the day.

