

CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

February 8, 2018
by Bill Locke



INDIA TRIP
JANUARY 2018

"Our trip was incredible."

Manon Mitchell, Rotary Club of Calgary

The village of Thurakapalem, India



Manon Mitchell inducted into the village of Thurakapalem



Kids, kids, kids everywhere



Denis and a new friend



A meeting with Rotary partners at Chillikalurapet Club

Executive Summary

Exciting New Events

A motley group of nine Canadians including four Rotarians - Bill Locke, Manon Mitchell, Kurt Kowalchuk (Rotary Club of Calgary) and Bala Balasubramanian (Rotary Calgary Olympic) - travelled to India in January 2018. They were able to see first-hand how the Champions For Change Project in Thurakapalem village is shaping up, and met villagers and partner Rotarians in Andhra Pradesh. Thanks to ASSIST, our host NGO, we had a nonstop inspiring experience visiting development projects.

Just before the trip, TRFC informed the team that Global Affairs Canada “will no longer fund projects in India.” This reduced the project to \$75,000 US. The Rotary team discussed options, met with community leaders, and a Rotary partner club in Chilakaluripet. All agreed to maintain support for the project in villages but to return to a ‘Wash in Schools’ (WINS) focus.

The meeting between Calgary district and the Chilakaluripet Club members was exciting. Everyone wants to work together. In fact, we discussed a possible Rotary exchange between clubs.



Meeting with villagers in Thurakapalem

Background

From Housing to Clean Water and Education

This project began in 2011 as a housing project led by Bill and Laura Locke and close friend, Fr. Joseph Nagothu. It was entirely a grassroots affair, with volunteers handling all of the planning and fundraising, while villagers handled all of the implementation in the field. \$200,000 was raised entirely from donors in Calgary and area and a family foundation in Vancouver. The Catholic Diocese of Calgary acted as fiscal agent. Village leaders selected their neediest recipients and completed all of the construction impeccably; the electrical, water and sanitation facilities function beautifully; the stoves, cots and lockers enable them to cook, sleep and maintain security. The housing project was a huge success. It was a dream come true for the village of Thurakapalem.

When Bill, Fr. Joseph and a representative from the foundation visited the village in 2017, they decided to take a more collaborative approach and expand the effort to other villages in the area, focusing on clean water, sanitation and hygiene education in schools (WINS.) CAWST sent its India Technical Advisor to India in February 2017 and agreed with the WINS approach. ASSIST, a highly respected NGO in India, performed a comprehensive needs assessment in March 2017 with villagers. It also agreed with the WINS approach. Then Bill joined Rotary Club of Calgary in June 2017 and set up the Champions For Change Project with help from Walter Haessel. However, the Government of Canada refused to fund WINS related infrastructure. The WINS focus was pushed back to Stage Two. Stage One would focus on leadership and hygiene education in 15 villages and 26 schools with a budget of \$110,000 US.

Soon after, numerous clubs committed funds, including RCC, Calgary Olympic, Calgary Chinook, Canmore and Chilakaluripet, India. Eight Canadians agreed to join Bill to visit the project and numerous other exciting projects in rural Andhra Pradesh, India in late January 2018. One week before the trip, The Rotary Foundation of Canada informed us that the Government of Canada was no longer supporting development projects in India. All of a sudden, almost \$50,000 of funding disappeared. What to do?

Bill and Team were unsure what to tell villagers or what would happen to the project. They set out on their journey on January 25, 2018. More surprises and a wonderful adventure awaited them.



Welcome by Thurakapalem villagers



A family in Thurakapalem give thanks for their new home

The Trip

Calgary-Amsterdam-Hyderabad-Chilakaluripet-Villages

It was going to be a jam-packed trip. We started out by pampering ourselves at the Radisson Blue Banjara Hills Hotel, a 4.5 star venue in Hyderabad's version of Beverly Hills - the neighbourhood where Bollywood actors live. We were not disappointed. Upon arriving, the team set out for the softest beds they could find, after 24 hours of nonstop travel. After a couple of hours of napping away our jet lag, we set out to see local sights.

Two days of tourism over, we set out for Chilakaluripet, head office for ASSIST. They are great hosts with apartment-style rooms on their grounds.

Then we set out for five day-trips, including a visit to Thurakapalem village, home of the Champions For Change project.



Radisson Blue Banjara Hills Hotel in Hyderabad



Road to Chilakaluripet

ASSIST - Our Host Organization

Ranga Rao Jashti, longtime Director of ASSIST, personally led the group most of the days. His assistant Vianney Katakomb, a saintly, determined person if you were ever to meet one, also accompanied our contingent and translated.

ASSIST is a highly respected NGO recommended by Rotary South India. It is renowned for its innovative development projects in rural India. ASSIST has developed over 400 communities in rural India in the past 30 years. It has funded the construction of thousands of homes and hundreds of clean water and washroom facilities in schools, and also has developed many schools and vocational training centres, many of which are supported by Rotary International, Rotary Australia and clubs.



ASSIST staff at Chilakaluripet office

The staff at ASSIST are highly committed to the work they do. Many have been with the NGO for over 20 years. The majority live in the communities where they serve.

They have faced many hardships and sacrifices. For example, when they heard that there were over 4,000 children working in the mines in Piduguralla, Vianney and her team set out to assess the situation. They were beaten when they arrived. Undeterred, they returned. Again, they were attacked. They persisted for many years until they were accepted by the owners of the mine, the villagers and families who lived in the surrounding area. As we were soon to find out, they have turned around a dreadful situation. 14 years after they began, virtually all of the children are going to schools that ASSIST has created, the adults are earning livable wages, and most are housed.

Through its comprehensive development process, ASSIST helps the people gain a positive vision of the future, teaches them through song and drama, and installs leadership that leads to buy-in. Within 5 years, they teach them to lead themselves. 150 villages have already become self-sufficient.



*RANGA RAO JASHTI, Director of ASSIST,
with children at one of their schools*

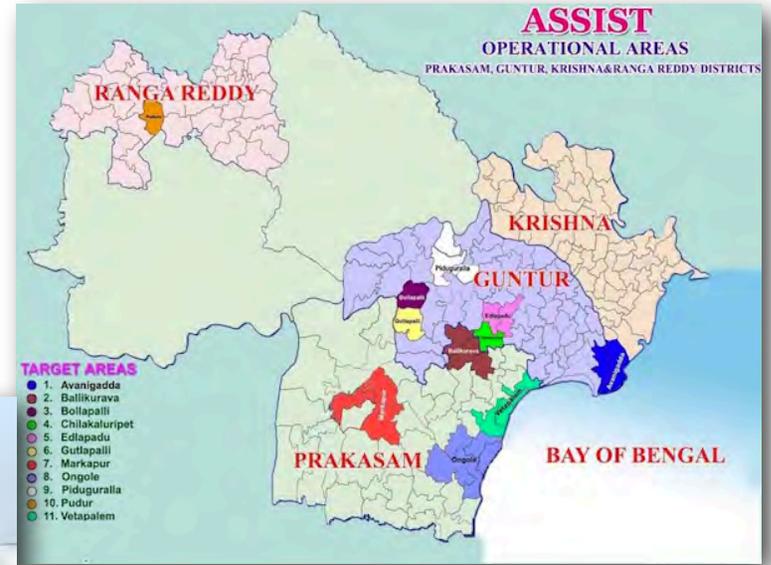


ASSIST
building rural India

Project Visits

Sunday, January 28:

- Presentation of ASSIST and its development process by Ranga
- Visit to Piduguralla (lime industry)
- Visit to the Residential Complex for rehabilitated children and Vocational Training Centre of ASSIST



Ranga introducing Canada team to Piduguralla community members



Liz and Lorrie visiting lime kiln



Lime quarry



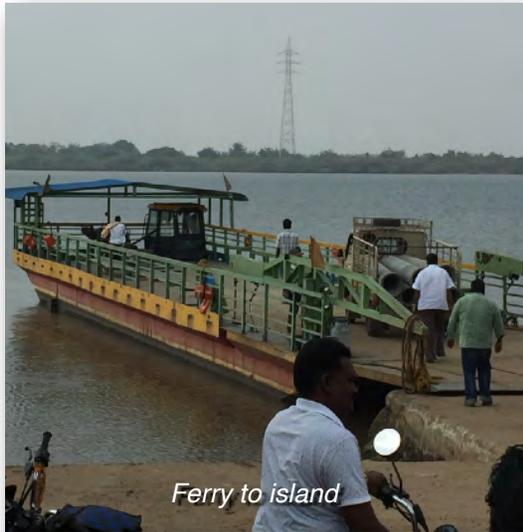
Manon teaching song

Her first balloon

Project Visits

Monday, January 29:

Visit to villages in the island of Nagayalanka Mandal, Krishna District (comprehensive development programme undertaken by ASSIST in these villages)



Ferry to island



Denis teaching kids Old Macdonald Had a Farm



Edurumundi village family in their hut



Mike, Bill and Manon with ASSIST island staff



Mike tempting fate with local crab



Edurumundi student

Project Visits

Tuesday, January 30:

- Visit to Thurakapalem half-day
- Lunch in ASSIST Head Office, Chilakaluripet
- Meet local Rotary leaders (TBA)
- Discussions on the field visit with team members



Kurt welcomed to Thurakapalem



Liz and Lorrie enjoying lunch # 1 of 3



Mike asking to keep new friend



Fr. Joseph thanking community



Boys in Thurakapalem



Bala meeting family in Thurakapalem

Project Visits

Wednesday, January 31:

- Visit to Markapur (slate industry)
- Visit to the Residential Complex for rehabilitated children
- Comprehensive development programme in 2 villages



Meeting at Markapur



Kurt training future photographers



Welcome at Gurralamadugu



Manginapudi community meeting



Girls dancing at Children's Rehabilitation Centre



Vianney Katakam and Area Coordinator

Project Visits

Thursday, Feb 1:

- Visit to Yarraveni Chenchu Colony
- Tribal village recently reconstructed
- Back to Chilakaluripet for lunch



Aspiring Bollywood dancer



Bala enjoying freshly squeezed sugar cane drink



BEFORE: Tribal villagers in traditional home



Yarraveni Chenchu Colony villagers



AFTER: Tribal villagers in newly constructed home



*Bill Locke with
Rtn. RATNA PRABHAKAR ANNE
Previous District Governor,
Guntur*

Meeting with Rotary Partners in India

The Rotary Club of Chilakaluripet is a very lively and active group. With over 100 members, the group supports numerous local projects in their town and surrounding villages.

We met to discuss the Champions For Change project, to which their club has committed \$5,000 US, a large amount for a club from India. We explained the history of the project, our initial focus on WINS, involvement of CAWST and support from various Calgary area clubs, and change in policy by our government. Without support from Global Affairs Canada, the project budget shrunk to \$75,000 US. Chilakaluripet Club stated that although they support the educational focus, they would rather that the project focus on WINS, since the need for clean water, latrines and hygiene education is so dire among children in their villages. Without further ado, they approved the revised approach and reiterated their financial commitment.

Once business was done, the group started what became a wonderful meal, party and relationship-building time. In fact, the group is keenly interested in an exchange with RCC and began plans for a future visit during the meal.

*Project team meeting with
executives from Rotary Club of
Chilakaluripet*



Results of Trip

All of the stakeholders agreed that there remain many outstanding needs in the villages in the district. 10,000 people in this rural area continue to go without many essentials of life. They lack clean water, sanitation, hygiene education, proper educational facilities, basic health care, transportation, vocational training, and ways to create adequate income.

Our trip served many purposes. It was a great learning experience for the Project Team, other Rotarians and hangers-on. It not only deepened our understanding of the local reality, it gave us a first-hand experience of the villagers' reality. By meeting the families and individuals we began to see what they go through, and to know a small bit about what it is like to live in a rural village cut off from the essentials. We also found out how closely connected they are, and how grateful they are to be helped by others from the other side of the planet. We met many stakeholders who are serving the poor. Local villagers are helping one another to meet day-to-day needs. Community leaders are championing the

locals and seeking policy changes. Trainers are providing skills. Rotary officials are collecting money. They know what is needed to improve lives because they have given of themselves in some cases for many decades.

Bill, Kurt, Manon and Bala hit it off immediately with the 10 members of the Chilakaluripet Club and their previous District General. Everyone agreed that service for villagers in the Mupalla Mandal in their district is of utmost importance. The group also wants to look at a Rotary exchange between clubs.

They are the experts. We are the students. By asking questions, we learned not only about today's issues, but also about potential solutions. We gained a deeper understanding of the people and learned about Indian culture. We gleaned something about what is most important to our potential partners.



School children at Yarraveni Chenchu Colony



Kurt and Bala listening to the villagers

Next Steps

All of us on the Project Team have agreed to continue our efforts, and to step up the commitments required for the implementation of the Champions For Change project and other efforts in Andhra Pradesh.





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*Special thanks to
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