

Bodhicitta Foundation News 2013

(Kalyanamitra Fund Australia) www.bodhicitta-vihara.com, email: moondakini@hotmail.com
Socially Engaged Buddhism and Spirituality for our Time



A girl we sponsor for education enjoying traditional clothes

Dear Friends,

Time waits for no man... This seems to be a pertinent statement for life in India right now. Children that once slept in my lap like a tiny kitten are now 8 years old, assertive and energetic! People that were once poor now tile their tiny slum house with marble and couches. Others that were once ok now have to sell their house to pay for a wedding and debts. Things definitely change.

In a world where so many things try to grab our attention, with long working hours, financial uncertainty and personal demands placed on our time it's easy to just want to curl up in a ball in our spare time and try to find a little peace and happiness in a bubble. It's too easy to forget that half the world lives in poverty. The half that makes our clothes, grows our food, mines for our jewellery and makes our mobile phone parts.

Personally I've found great satisfaction and meaning reaching out to apply balm on the suffering of others. Not only does it make me aware of my good fortune, it makes me more loving, connected and fulfilled. I think love and good fortune mean more when they are shared with many. The smiles and unaffected love the slum children show me when I visit them assure me of this.

With the wonderful generosity of Buddhist Global relief and our Australian sponsors we continue to run our women's job training centre -sewing classes, computer classes, beauty therapies, health clinic, malnourished children's food programmes, tuition

for slum children, counselling, meditation for children and women and our community centre.

We recently held a day in honour of the Dalit leader Dr Ambedkar, who is like the Martin Luther King Jr of his people. We fed 200 people (mostly slum children), set up a tent and sound system so people could talk about issues relevant to social rejuvenation such as women's rights, health, domestic violence, anger management, economic development and not to mention – bollywood dancing! We did this all for \$250!



A girl dancing at our Event

With the recent spate of crimes against women – rapes on young girls and children in the news, it's a timely reminder that many of the rights women have in the West in the last 100 years were hard fought for and do not exist in many developing countries. This is why Bodhicitta foundation focuses on education and health for children and women.

According to a survey by the world health organisation, a woman in India is twice as likely to experience violence from their partner than women in Australia.

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Our job training centre directly empowers economically deprived women to become independent and start their own businesses.

One of our sponsored children recently came first in her class in school. Her father is an alcoholic and her mother only passed 8th class, but 10 year old Pinky is the captain of her class and dreams of a career as a maths teacher.

Another girl who was about to drop out of school, Prianka, now can read and write in simple English because we found her the right method of learning for those who are learning challenged.

I love my job, not many people are embraced by their clients when they come to the office, but that's what small children do to me when I bring them something to eat in the morning. Mind you, not many office workers go to work in 47c heat in a filthy slum!

There are so many stories I could share with you about life here, life on the 'other side of the moon'... I could tell you about the child marriage of a 15 year old girl (the legal age is 18) who ran away with a boy for a month and now has to cover her families shame by marrying a twenty year old boy in a village and living in poverty for the rest of her life. I do not know what the outcome of my actions will be, but I know in the eyes of her family I'm ruining their honour and tarnishing the girl's name forever by trying to stop the marriage.

Our Women's sewing class



Reflections of a Seriously Ill Woman

My name is Mandika. I'm 25 years old. I grew up on the outskirts of Nagpur. My father is a labourer (he earns \$80Au per month – barely enough to feed our family). I finished my 12th school exams and then ran away with my boyfriend (now husband), he is a hair dresser in a village outside Nagpur. We were happy for many years together, although money was always tight.

My family was very shocked by my actions, in a society where 80% of marriages are arranged. They found it hard to accept my husband and didn't talk to me for many years. They felt I brought shame on the family.

My problems began when I got pregnant. After 6mths my child miscarried. I was really devastated. After a year I again got pregnant. In my 7th month I got pre-eclampsia and miscarried. At that time my kidneys were severely damaged. Now, 6 months later both my kidneys have failed and I have to come every 10 days to the government hospital where I spend a day having all my blood pumped out of my body into a machine that purifies it.

The social worker from Bodhicitta Foundation asked me if I have any dreams left for my life. The answer is I don't. I'm satisfied with what I had – 6 happy years with the man I love. My husband and I still talk on the phone, but he says he know's I'm dying and he can't watch me die. It's also very expensive for him to get me medicines. I'm very sad about him leaving me.

Now I'm back home with my parents. They are not happy I'm here and my father doesn't speak to me, but at least I have a place to stay. My little brother has been amazing. He takes me to the hospital. He is studying at University.

I know the President of India lived for 15 years on dialysis, but I know my time will be much shorter because of the dirt in government hospitals. My family doesn't have money for medicine and good food. We are only travellers in this world anyway. We can't afford a kidney transplant or the medicine and I know that would also only give me 10-15 years also.

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Bodhicitta Foundation paid for me to have a permanent surgical opening for dialysis. They also gave us some food and spoke to our family trying to repair all the divisions. I'm grateful for this life I've had. I hope you will all be happy and thanks for the help you gave.

-Mandika Ghajbye

***38000 Girls under 18
will be forcibly married
today due to poverty and
ignorance***

**But A Little Dust -
The Courage to Work in the face of
Great Suffering**

- Ayya Yeshe Bodhicitta

I know the story of the Buddha's life. When he got enlightened he sat under the Bodhi tree for a few weeks, he didn't teach immediately. He thought 'This realisation is so subtle and profound, few people could understand it.'

But then Sakka, the King of the Gods appeared before the Buddha and said, 'There are those with but a little dust in their eyes who will understand what you say and attain final release from the world of suffering, please turn the wheel of the Dharma for the multitude of suffering beings.' I have also heard the story of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion who shattered into a thousand pieces when he realised that even though he'd been working to liberate beings from suffering for thousands of years, the ocean of worldly existence was still overflowing with those in misery. Out of this 1000 armed Avalokiteshvara, Tara, and Dzambhala were born.



Some children from our malnourished children's

programme/health/human rights event

When I was young and went to Catholic Sunday school (which I liked mostly because the crayons tasted like bubble gum!) I remember the story of the man who planted seeds. Some fell on rocky soil and didn't germinate, others blew away, others were eaten by birds and a few fell in rich soil and flourished. This story seems so relevant to me now. For many years I've foregone a normal life in order to share my life with slum people. Often this has come with a great personal sacrifice. There was certainly no place for me within Patriarchal mainstream Tibetan Buddhism which is largely controlled by Tibetan males and supported by Western and Asian women...

Often in social work we have put a lot of effort into a project or person only to see that person go backwards into their old destructive habits or not use what we've given them well. People will also walk away after taking so much of your time, care and energy without a backward glance. It can be hard and exhausting. In truth not all social work stories end happily. It's a very long term process. You provide people with skills to help themselves and a different way of looking at their lives. Those seeds you planted may germinate in 1 month or 20 years. Perhaps only after a lifetime you'll see all the good you did.

Shouldn't monks and nuns do social work without expectation you ask? I'm human is my only answer. Sometimes it's hard to see the same needless suffering again and again. What gives me hope or makes me keep doing this work? Because I know what it's like to go without, to be a street kid, to have an empty hand and for no one to put anything in it. Compassion? A sense of justice and empathy? Not being able to tolerate suffering and injustice? Wanting a meaningful life and to serve? All of the above and some other things I can't put into words is why I do what I do. I just know that if I died tomorrow I'd have no regrets. I'd rather have a hard life that is of tremendous benefit than an easy one that is of no benefit. That doesn't mean I won't change and evolve in the future, as everything does.

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Women's Computer Classes : Quiet Empowerment



Some women from computer class (Kareena holds her child)

My name is Kareena, I am 26 and have two adorable children, one girl (5) and a boy (3). I was married at 20. My father is an alcoholic and my mother does sporadic factory work. I had so much suffering growing up because of poverty. I am the oldest and I saw my sisters go without things because my father was too drunk to work. I have 3 younger sisters, which is difficult in India as women are regarded as 'theives at the table' who will one day take all the family has invested in them and go to another family where they will give children, cook and clean etc. Girls' families have to pay more for weddings than boy's families and in many communities dowry (money and goods) also have to be given.

I failed my 12th class exams because I was trying to work part time and stop my father beating my mother and stealing all our money for food. It's really hard to watch something that you know is unnecessary. My father also came from a poor family and started drinking young. I guess you could say he inherited misery and poverty and passed it onto us.

I'm lucky my husband doesn't drink. He works in as a light fitter. We don't have a lot of money and I really want to work and be independent so I'm not like my mother. I never had a chance for education. I think that's really affected my self esteem. I want my children to have happy lives and be educated and not live hand to mouth or be so desperate they set themselves in fire like several people in our suburb have done.

I can't imagine what the lives of you who are reading this is like. For us it's like the moon. When Ayya Yeshe tells us that not everyone in your country is happy or has someone to love them I can't really believe it. I saw so many rich hotels and fat babies on tv in your country. I really want to thank you for helping me study. No one has ever helped me before like this. I'm so happy to learn about the internet, typing and word. I hope I can get a simple office job now. I'm so happy just to say I studied something.

I asked my husband many times for money for this course, but there's always something more important for our very limited income. We live in a 300sq foot room with our kids and my in laws next door. Now I can hold my head up and say I have something for myself, something I finished, some ability so that I don't just have to scrub floors to keep food in my belly.

I see that so many problems come because girl children are given less of a priority, food and education. I won't do that with my children. I won't marry them young either, as if they are a burden.

Now you know my story, I hope you'll help more women like me. You have really changed my life and I promise you I will work hard with what you've given me.

Now you know my heart, so we are like family. Thankyou!



Some of our sponsored children in their new uniforms.

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Flying Free- How a Young Indian Woman's Life Changed Volunteering with Bodhicitta Foundation

My name is Arati. I'm 24 years old. I've been volunteering with Bodhicitta Foundation for 4 years. My family is lower middle class. We all lived in one room with a kitchen annex. At that time I was trapped in long term depression and had a chronically low self esteem. Basically I had first world problems.

I lost my eye to cancer when I was four. I have cute photos of a happy, chubby girl before that time. But after the time I lost my eye there are very few photos. Self image is a huge thing to a child and people in India are not sensitive towards handicapped people or anyone in anyway different. People would ask my mother why she didn't put a goats eye in my socket. That is the level of ignorance here. Children would tease me. I often felt isolated as a child. I felt I was unworthy of anything good, because I wasn't normal looking. I avoided social gatherings, which is hard if you live in a one room house! In short I withdrew into my own world.

My father is a government officer, he worked hard to work where he is and has a good income, but much of it goes to his medical bills, after years of suffering he found he had sickle cell disease. He has a sister with elephantitis (a bad disease that makes one's limbs swell to twice the normal size) and a brother who's uneducated and very poor, so he's also supporting them.

As a teenager I read many English novels and Indian novels. I wanted to escape my reality and live through others lives. My father encouraged me to study. He's a really loving man who's given me a lot of support. I feel lucky when I see other's fathers. Alcoholism is so common here, as is wife beating. In my home my mother wears the pants. She's really strong and fierce and is involved in many political activist groups. My mother feels trapped by her marriage, she wishes to go out and fight injustice, but instead she has to stay home and scrub pots. But still... She's pretty independent.

I first met the social workers of Bodhicitta Foundation when I was 19. Ayya Yeshe was giving a talk at the local Temple. I thought Ayya was very

fascinating and kind. She beamed confidence and I felt that she was the mentor I had been looking for. Someone sensitive enough to help me come out of my cage of self loathing. Until I met Ayya I hardly went out.

Ayya invited me to be part of her Sangha or Buddhist community. She involved me in the youth group and English class. One day she sat me down and asked me if I wanted to be her translator. I was floored. I had a year off as I'd failed in my studies due to depression. I was so amazed that Ayya thought I was good enough to do a job as important as translate for her Dharma and social work. This job gave me so much confidence. As I listened to and translated the stories of other girls and women I realised I was so fortunate. I was not oppressed, desperately poor or uneducated. I came out of my self obsession and saw that I was connected to the whole of heaven and earth. I saw that I could make a difference in the world and be happy. Prior to this my main thoughts had been of suicide!

Gradually I made deep friendships in the charity. We were the Sangha of misfits and happy to be odd and living a life less ordinary. I met people who didn't worry about fitting in. People who danced to a different beat. I met a boy with 25% vision. We fell in love. I was amazed and elated that someone could love me and find me attractive. I never thought it could happen. My boyfriend had also been teased about his eyes, but he never let it get to him and most of the time you'd hardly know he had a disability. We comforted each other a lot. My boyfriend comes from a slum. For me our class difference was not an issue as he understood me more than anyone in my socio economic group had ever done. I saw middle class people living in hypocrisy – outwardly going to weddings and social events but never really communicating from the heart. Women were encouraged to be docile and domesticated. People talked about young prospective brides as if they were inspecting curtains or a pedigree dog 'she's too dark', 'he's too fat', 'she's not educated enough for my son'. I have also experienced sexism at home. My brother who studies the same as me, but it's me who has to be home by 9.30pm, cook food, clean the house etc. He does no housework.

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Arranged marriages seem a bit like indentured servitude to me. Some fat, sour looking young man would leer at me whilst his mother said how she expected to find nothing less than a queen for him. Boys are always favoured in India. Their birth is celebrated. The birth of a girl calls for condolences. I thought there must be more to life than these meaningless social interactions, this farce. There must be a deeper reason to live.

I had heard that life was bad in a slum.. But middle class apathy dictated that it was their 'karma' or 'tough luck' or because slum people were 'dirty and lazy'... We didn't want to know the problems of those people. But when I saw children not going to school, with no proper clothes or food, I was moved and personally touched. I wanted to help them.

I worked for Ayya Yeshe as a translator for 8 mths and after that did a few hours a week as I returned to Engineering college. Thanks to the mentoring of Bodhicitta Foundation I got relatively good results in my Engineering exams. I have now got into TATA institute of social sciences, which is the best social work college in India. I'm doing my masters in rural development. I want a fulfilling career that makes a difference. I have really come out of my shell because of the influence of Bodhicitta Foundation. Some of my friends are now married or pregnant. Although I'm happy for them, I feel that life is a little narrow if you haven't travelled or experienced life. I have travelled with Ayya Yeshe, met foreigners, feminists, intellectuals and activists and I'm hungry to try new things. My life would have never been this broad if I'd stayed in my house and just planned for suicide or some small banking job!

I see the stream of history of my people. Dalits – broken people. People who were slaves. My ancestors tied palm leaves behind them and carried a cup around their neck to drink because they were considered to filthy to drink from others wells or leave the imprints of their feet. Our Dalit women were raped by high caste men. We were enslaved by the caste system and by our own men. I see how I am the continuation of my Ancestors. I also see how far we have come, how fortunate I am. How emancipated I am compared to so many Indian women who still live in darkness and backwardness. Imprisoned by poverty, discrimination and culture,

punished for being female. I am optimistic now. I want a good life. I even think it may happen. I would like to help my family, my community and become more positive and happy. May all beings be well and free.



Our recent three day retreat for slum people and social workers

A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to be a child that survives.

To donate to Bodhicitta Foundation you can deposit in our bank account -

Name: Kalyanamitra Fund

Acc no: 120204128 BSB: 633000

Bendigo Bank. For \$40 a mth you can sponsor a child, woman, monastic or social worker and bring hope to those in poverty.



Our Yearly Temporary monastic ordination for slum girls