

RSIS DECEMBER 2013

ROUND SQUARE SERVICE PROJECT AT KUMBHARGHAR, INDIA

In 2009, The Village Project – called Empowering Rural India was initiated, where we decided to “adopt” one village at a time and work with them with the objective of eradicating poverty and unemployment through a three-pronged strategy – Education, Infrastructure and Empowerment. This also helps us achieve the UN Millennium Development Objectives as well as the RoundSquare IDEALS.

We were thrilled when the RoundSquare decided to partner with us for their December 2013 Service project. We had students from Peru, South Africa, Australia, Canada, Germany & India.

The focus of our work is a village called ‘Kumbharghar’ situated 3 hours outside the city of Mumbai. This village is what is referred to as an ‘adivasi wadi’ populated by local tribal people. The facilities at this village were basic at best and we had our work cut out for us.

We were to build the primary school that would educate the children of that village and build houses for the villagers. The materials for this project were locally sourced and we were also responsible for making the bricks to be used for these structures.



The bricks are built using the concept of ‘stabilised mud architecture’ where mud and clay is used with a small proportion of cement to act as a binding agent. The resultant brick, when cured, will withstand the vagaries of time and weather.

With all of this, we certainly had our work cut out for us. We arrived in the village on the 9th of December and immediately got to work transporting materials (via a very effective human chain) to the worksite.

Over the course of the next two weeks, we made a total of 700 bricks and completed one room in the school building. The group of 17 students was divided into 3 teams and we took turns working on the brickmaking, house or school worksites. We would rotate places after each break, which meant we were able to maximize our skills and energy through the course of the day.

But it wasn’t all work and no play! We had a 3 day mid-project break where we went trekking to some local forts and were absolutely amazed at the beauty of the place. One of the highlights of the trip was our stays in the tents during this time. After the trek, we went to the second village affiliated with the project, Hassachipatti, where we spent some time teaching local children nursery rhymes and other rudiments of English.





This gave us the boost in spirit to get back to work with full dedication. We worked at a blistering pace in the burning heat of the Indian village landscape. Finally, by the end of the project, we had tangible results of our labour to look at. We finished one house and an entire room of the school. To celebrate our work and to have some immersion in the local culture, we distributed toys and clothes to the people of the village and in return, they dressed us in saris! We had such fun parading around in the bright colours and we all looked so different. I'm sure half of us made up our minds right

there to buy saris as soon as we got the chance.

We had to leave then, for the rest of our trip, but we will never forget the experiences we shared at the village. We truly felt part of something special.