

# Young Round Square Conference

## October 2014, DAIS

### Pre-Conference Service Project - Kumbharghar Adivasi Wadi

The theme of the Young Square Conference this year was '3 S - Save, Sustain & Survive'. What better way to gain a working understanding of what these concepts mean than to see them in action at our 'Empowering Rural India' village project?

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 2014, 23 middle-school students & 5 high-school students from 5 schools around the world (India, China & America) came together to be part of a positive change in the lives of the people at the Adivasi Wadi at Kumbharghar, Maharashtra.



The goals of the Village Project are to build a community on the pillars of education, infrastructure and empowerment. A common thread linking these three pillars is 'sustainability'. Kumbharghar Adivasi Wadi is an example of the most basic rural Indian village. Before it was 'adopted' by the Village Project, the village had houses built only of sticks and mud, there was no running water or sanitation facilities nor was there a school. Since 2011, we have been working to provide all of this and more, but in such a way that the village itself can continue to develop and maintain these after our input has ceased.

Participants in the pre-conference service project had three jobs in the village; completing the flooring of the primary school, building the walls of a house for one of the village families and digging the foundation for a new house.

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. Given that the majority of the materials are locally available, this is an economical and sustainable venture that could, in time, be turned into profit once the bricks are sold on the market.

If you don't expect middle-school children to have the strength and stamina of their high-school counterparts, you would be committing a grave error. These students poured their heart and soul into the work on each of the three days. They were able to lift the bricks (each weighing approximately 9 kgs) and transport them to each worksite. Despite the heat and the physicality of the work, they did not once waver. As usual, there were a fair share of bumps and scratches and scuffed elbows, but what was noticeably absent was the accompanying complaints. Each and every single child soldiered on and finally, at the end of the trip, they were able to look proudly back at all they had accomplished. It was truly heartwarming to watch them discover



these their own hidden abilities and really push themselves, even though this work is challenging and not something that they are accustomed to.



Of course, the mid-project break at Imagica served to brighten even the most tired spirits. On the evening of the second day, the group visited the Imagica theme park and spent a fun evening on the rides and various activities the park had to offer. It was a perfect opportunity for them to relax and bond while having a good time. The cheer that the park imparted carried on through the following work day, and it seemed that the whole trip had lasted too short a while, because before we knew it, we were packing up and washing the last of the mud off our hands.

Each participant in the Service project learned a lot about themselves and the world they are trying to build and we hope that they are able to take this forward with them, not only to the conference, but also to all other avenues of their lives.

