

OUR SPYM EXPERIENCE

We are humanitarian volunteers with Latter-day Saint Charities who came to India in July 2002 to work with SPYM, and what a marvelous, amazing experience we have had over these many months! It is easy to say that SPYM is a dynamic, multifaceted NGO that provides a large variety of services to a large number of people in many diverse ways, because that is true. It is not easy to describe the process, how it all happens. The versatility and flexibility of SPYM is best explained, in a capsulated way, in our attempt to describe the variety of services we have been involved in.

One of the main focuses of our LDSC humanitarian project here in Delhi was to help form 40 self help groups in the Mewat district of Haryana State, promoting micro-enterprise projects and self-help groups among the disadvantaged women. Well, it took us two years to get here, and SPYM has never been known as an organization that sits around and waits for something to happen. They make it happen. So—they went ahead and set up over 800 working micro-credit groups. We have seen these micro-credit, self-help groups become a model paradigm for introducing other service programs into the communities. It was wonderful to see how this program has strengthened the lives of so many women, children, and their families, in this rural, poverty-stricken area. And from these groups, schools have been formed, with thousands of children (currently 50,000 school children in 43 child development centers) who would have never been able to receive any education whatsoever now going to school, thanks to SPYM. The ongoing impact of this one program developed by SPYM is unmeasurable.

It was a great experience to go with the medical van and visit many of the “cluster” or “unauthorized” settlements that have sprung up around New Delhi, with no health services, nothing, none of the “conveniences” that developed communities take for granted. Just forgotten folks who are surviving the best way they know how. Women’s health issues are such a problem, especially in the villages, another need SPYM is addressing.

We were somewhat familiar with SPYM’s de-addiction program, but became very much involved when we had the privilege of staying at the Darjeeling De-addiction Center for two weeks. Being right there with the patients, day and night, gave us some real insights into not only the problems of addiction here in India, but SPYM’S treatment model as well. While we were in Darjeeling, we also visited SPYM’s office in Kalimpong, to see the beginnings of that developing program. We also were privileged to visit many schools in that area to work with children on drug issues, and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. This experience was one of the highlights of our work here in India.

We have been involved in many aspects of SPYM’s HIV/AIDS program. SPYM has been a forerunner in the work with HIV/AIDS in India, starting in 1989. We visited their Healthy Highway Program, and have been involved with the many individuals from the Canadian Youth Exchange Program who have been working with the hospitals and with the other HIV/AIDS projects and with many other of SPYM’s community-aid and education efforts. SPYM is always improving the quality and efficiency of service

delivery, even going abroad in a partnership way to understand the problem, address the gaps, focusing on needs and addressing global issues.

Another highlight of our work with SPYM was being able to attend the FINGODAP National Conference on Drug Abuse Prevention in Kolkata in January 2003, a major effort to up-grade and systematise approaches by the many local organisation involved in finding solutions to these problems. India has never been known as a unified country. It has many divisions, especially one of diverse languages. SPYM has played a major role in bringing together agencies from all over India to work together in addressing the challenges of drug abuse and alcoholism and in formulating a treatment module that clearly outlines the minimum requirements for drug alcohol treatment anywhere in India. It is a HUGE project, and a credit to SPYM. For us to see 400 NGO's from all over India, working together to tackle this problem, it was an exhilarating experience for us two old folks!

Another highlight of our experience with SPYM was the privilege of being able to host the Canadian Youth Exchange team on Christmas Day 2002 and Christmas Day 2003. This was a hard time for us to be away from our own families and loved ones, and having these dynamic young people spend this special time with us was very meaningful, hopefully to them as well as much as it was to ourselves.

There have been so many projects and activities at SPYM that we have been a part of, but we see that the essence of their activities, the word in the title of their organisation that best describes the desires and efforts of the people at SPYM, what they are all really about, is PROMOTION. It isn't just a word in their name: it is an integral part of their philosophy. The way this is being accomplished is amazing. SPYM is about leadership development, it is about training, educating, encouraging, and enhancing their own staff, promoting all that is finest, deep down inside of them, and then having them go forth and share what they know with others, bringing out the best in all, including us.

SPYM is the Regional Resource Training Center for the Northern Region, involving seven States and 118 NGO's. Networking, leadership development, training and inspiring other NGO, is at the core of what they do. It has been our privilege to observe and be involved in some of these training workshops. These have included: (1) Basics of Drug Abuse Prevention and its related issues; (2) Integration of HIV/AIDS into Drug Abuse Prevention Programs, focusing on how drug issues affect and afflict women; (3) Relapse Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug Users; (4) Training of Trainers, with specific focus on leadership development; (5) Documentation and Report Writing, a critical issue that is often overlooked; (6) and more recently, because of the refusal of hospitals to admit or treat HIV positive people, training workshops have been organized to address the issues of stigma and discrimination as it relates to HIV/AIDS. SPYM is addressing the need to mainstream drug abuse concerns in NGO's and agencies working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention, educating and training in all aspects of the problem.

