



Atma Mumbai Volunteer in Focus / September 2007 Inka Pibilova

I have been dreaming of coming back to India for the last 4 years. Finally I negotiated with my current employer a 2-month sabbatical and joined Atma Mumbai at the end of July 2007 with the goal to contribute to the development of grass root people in a concrete, tangible way.

We have agreed upon my job description even before my arrival and I was pretty clear that I would like to help SAHAS, an NGO focusing on HIV/AIDS. Then I visited the Nareshwadi school for underprivileged children, which is about 130 km from Bombay, and lost my heart there. I have never experienced such a warm welcome, never felt it so natural to eat with small kids on the floor...



After the initial needs analyses and 3 weeks of continuous chasing of our accountant to give me a budget review, I agreed the priority project goals with Lee Bolding, my guardian angel from Atma Mumbai, and Patricia Gokhale, the school's Chief Mentor. Chalo!



I started to go on regular trips to Nareshwadi and talked to the staff and children. On the first big staff meeting, where I shared my project goals, one of the few teachers who could speak English expressed the staff concerns: "You volunteers come with these great ideas and everybody has to run around you. Then you go and we are left here with yet other tasks on top of our responsibilities, till a

new volunteer comes again with some new, excellent ideas. But we are teachers and we need to teach." I realized that it just made no sense to push any of my projects forward if there was no common vision and above all, if the staff does not feel the ownership of the new ideas, that are about to be implemented.

So we started from the scratch. Together with the teachers, we have organized a school logo workshop, where the children shared their ideas about the ideal Nareshwadi school. It was done without much preparation



and still, everybody was astonished that at the end of the day, the school had a new logo created by a student from 7th standard! Hurray!

However, it took me some time to prepare the next step, a vision workshop, and to convince the stakeholders that we need it. Finally, the workshop was conducted by a professional, Marathi speaking facilitator Amit Murugkar and all the staff including teachers, houseparents, nurse and civil engineers put together the Nareshwadi vision, mission and basis of the strategy within unbelievable time of 7 hours! Great teamwork, wonderful ideas generated by mixed groups, a lot of enthusiasm and hope that at least a part of our long-term vision can be implemented, despite of our limited budget.

Now, after 2 months, we are at the very beginning. I have decided to stay in India and help "Nareshwadi Learning Centre" to start implementing what we have agreed together. All are enthusiastic and willing to do their best and so am I. Many thanks to Atma Mumbai for this incredible experience!

In case, you plan to become a volunteer too, let me share some learnings with you: involve all stakeholders, be patient and listen, be persistent regarding priorities and follow-up, but be flexible and open to changes even at the very last moment (they will definitely occur!). Last, but probably most important –think positively and do enjoy!



To find out more about the projects at Nareshwadi school, see <http://inusska.blogspot.com/>.



Atma Mumbai Volunteer in Focus / June 2007 Nyke Karrenbeld and Klaas Haveman

Summer Camp in India 2007



On the 16th of April Nareshwadi's first summer camp started. Atma Mumbai found two sports students who were looking for an internship project abroad. As the two needs came together the plan for this project was born. We wanted to arrange a camp for the children of Nareshwadi who, for whatever reason, cannot go home during summer holiday. Besides it would have been very nice when platforms were arranged for the children's talents, which are present but can hardly be developed.

After having investigated the children's and staff's needs with regard to the summer camp we arranged the program for the summer. Children mentioned a lot of sports and other activities they would like to do. With great pleasure we worked on this program, with sports classes early morning and workshops in the afternoon. The love of the children, the hospitality of the staff and the smiles on children's faces during the bunch of activities we organized were fantastic.

In the big list of activities we've done it's hard to choose a few highlights. We went by jeeps for a real outdoor trip for river crossing, mountain climbing and a picnic, had lots of dance contests and workshops. We plotted a big treasure hunt with visiting students, we went to Mumbai for two days, we did warli-painting workshop of ten days (!!), we learned a lot in the astronomy weekend and we had a live music band playing just for us!

Above all these highlights was the pleasure of children in sports classes. In the mornings the children learned a great variety of sports like: hockey, athletics, volleyball, football, rugby, basketball and cricket.

For us as volunteers it was very nice to coordinate this first summer camp and teach children so much, but the greatest memories will come from just the interaction with the children. The children teaching us Marathi (the language spoken in the province Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital), all the times we played with the children, the great number of wadi-walks, and the many dance-experiences.





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Fun at Summer Camp

Just being there gave us these wonderful memories we'll never forget. As the children tied Nynke up when she'd like to leave and yelled to the both of us they wanted us to stay gave us a thankful feeling as well.

Thanks to Atma Mumbai for this wonderful experience

Nynke Karrenbeld & Klaas Haveman



Atma Mumbai Volunteer in Focus / May 2007 **Annemarijn Boersma**

India... A country with such a vast amount of colour, people, life and most of all: incredible contrasts. Living in Mumbai you will encounter many examples every day.

Last week we had one of our enjoyable Atma get-togethers in the elite Wellington club. Walking out to the main road to catch a cab after a night of expensive drinks and Bollywood-dancing, we immediately got swung back to reality as we



walked passed the many many families sound a sleep on the side of the road, even on the highways. I can't exactly explain the feeling that still hits me every time I get confronted by that contrast. It does always remind me how much there is still to do, and how important it is that an organization like Atma Mumbai, and volunteers and sponsors like you are out there to help do so!

After completing Medical School in The Netherlands, I came to India in February to help Atma Mumbai partner NGO SAHAS improve the medical and social conditions of the students of the rural residential school in Nareshwadi. My main aim was to help implement a health centre, but as **I quickly learned in India: flexibility is the key..**, so I also happily helped out with all kinds of other jobs, from buying sandals for the children to helping out with the pre-organization of the construction team (who did an amazing job renovating the school!), and helping with the summer camp which two other volunteers are successfully running at this moment.



Unfortunately my stay became a little fragmented as I had to fly back home for a funeral, making me sometimes feel I would have loved to do more. But to use Adrienne's metaphor: in these past months a lot of seeds have been planted! The health centre is ready to be used (we just need a nurse..) and new toilets and bathroom facilities are being built this very moment. It was such a thrill when we saw the doctor using our centre to do general examinations and filling out our health records.

Postponing my specialization-place to go out and do this was one of the best choices I ever made. It has been such a rewarding and enriching experience to be part of this project, working together with so many good-hearted people spending



their time improving the lives of others. Sometimes it felt like a little emotional rollercoaster: frustrations about the slow progress set against the tremendous need (patience is the second key) and the difficulty of not always being able to communicate the way you want due to the language barrier, but this was always made up by the wonderful feeling I got seeing those happy little faces light up every time we played together. I will miss their happy voices calling out to me "Anna didi!"... It's going to be damn hard leaving them behind!

Thanks to Atma Mumbai and SAHAS for providing me with this opportunity!

Thanks Stacie who I closely worked with for your hard work, care and friendship, and a big thanks to all those people back home, but also over here, who so generously sponsored this wonderful project!



Anna with one her new friends, Varsha



Atma Mumbai Volunteer in Focus / December 2006 **Rogier Jacobse**

The 18th of November I came to Mumbai, India to do voluntary work for Atma Mumbai for three months. In the beginning I had some difficulties in discovering the Indian way of doing business: Multiple hour-long meetings, appointments being cancelled without any notice and Indian sales men overcharging prices of equipment, necessary for Nareshwadi. After adapting the "Atma Mumbai" way of getting things done (thanks Lee and Adrienne) I was starting to get the hang of it.

Nareshwadi

My main project was developing a sports field and program at Nareshwadi. The 11th of December I went to rural Nareshwadi for two weeks, the first week I planned to create the sports-pitch, and I would use the second week to make start with the sports-program. Creating the sports field went surprisingly fast for Indian standards, thanks to the help of Michael and Dinesh. Therefore I was able



to start the sports program sooner than planned. One of my main challenges was language! But explaining new sports (some of the kids never played soccer or hockey) with the help of the local teachers and a lot of sign language the sports program really took off! At this moment the staff of Nareshwadi have decided to hire a sports teacher and we will have job interviews soon. If we find a suitable teacher to lead the

sports program it will mean a enormous boost for the continuum of the sports program. It has been an extremely proud achievement for me, to build the sports field, but to also see the children using it everyday, and having such a great recreational facility, that was not there for them before!

Scabies Treatment

During the weekend of the 16th of December Nareshwadi had a scabies treatment camp. For the treatment Atma Mumbai had engages 6 Expat Volunteers and 15 Indian volunteers from Mumbai, who worked tirelessly during the two days of the treatment boiling the clothes of the 400+ children (to kill mites living in clothes) and apply an overnight lotion to kill the scabies bugs.

To aid in helping the children to understand who the scabies treatments was important, the Atma Mumbai scabies crew preformed a lotion mime play and a scabies song to explain to the kids the how and why of the scabies treatment and applying the lotion. This was returned by the kids with a lot of laughs and applause. Most of the kids understood the necessity of the treatment and some of the older kids helped out applying the lotion on the younger kids. There was even a little party in the boy's dorm during a short electricity fall out. The next day we had to finish up the boiling of the rest of the clothes and return them all to the rooms, which went really smoothly!



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My time volunteering with Atma Mumbai has been an amazing experience and I encourage others who are looking to do a meaningful volunteer placement, to take up the challenge.

Thankyou to all those people in Holland who have supported my work here in India and who have donated sports equipments for these children.

**Greetings,
Rogier**



Rogier and future sports champions