



The Sebastian  
**Hunter**  
MEMORIAL TRUST  
*Creativity, education & leadership.*

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Seb's Projects India is the Sebastian Hunter Memorial Trust's team working in Tamil Nadu.

Seb's Projects India is a grassroots organisation working in the regions of education, livelihoods generation and community health, based in Vellore, Tamil Nadu. Our areas of work are based around the Vellore region, with a focus particularly upon the remote tribal region of Jawadhi Hills, where very few NGOs reach due to lack of accessibility and facilities.

We are seeking volunteers to assist us with the planning and implementation of these projects-the more volunteers we have, the further we can reach into some of the poorest parts of Tamil Nadu. We have found in the past that volunteers from developed countries are indispensable, often having strong leadership, planning and organisational skills that are essential to the success of these projects, and can prove perhaps the greatest inspiration to those living in challenging situations. In return, it is an amazing growth opportunity for the volunteers themselves to live in such a different context and develop invaluable project planning experience.

A Community Development Volunteer is a young person that helps us in the planning and implementation phases of a project. Once we have identified a need, we match volunteers with projects based on their skill set, who then raise funds to cover their stay and any necessary project costs. We provide all necessary support and expertise to make the project a success, including any follow up work that needs to be done after their stay to make the project sustainable.

We currently have vacancies for Community Development Volunteers to join us on the following projects for periods of 2-6 months. A placement itinerary will be designed based upon the selected project, number of volunteers and length of stay, once we have been notified of prospective volunteers.

### **Education**

#### *DREAM project*

English and computer skills have become essential skills in most professions in India today, and it is very hard to pass a certain level of education without a good grasp of the concepts involved. Without English and a basic knowledge of computers, professions such as engineering, medicine and nursing are impossible, as is travelling for work outside the state. For this reason, many bright students from rural schools where computers and English speaking teachers are unavailable will progress into unskilled labour positions, where they may otherwise have succeeded in further studies.

This project works to address the need in rural schools to apply a creative and interactive mode of teaching English and computers through fun activities in an area where the traditional mode of learning is rote based, and many of the staff may not have a good grasp of English.

The program is designed as a 16 week curriculum, wherein volunteers work to both expand the capacity of the teachers as well as the children, through a fun and effective mode of learning centred around dance, multimedia, music, art and play. Weekly lessons for all standards are held, with the opportunity to hold both school and community events promoting the importance of holistic learning and clear career goals.

### *READ (Rural Education and Community Development project)*

Many of the children in the Jawadhi Hills tribal villages are beginning to complete primary schooling in this generation, although many still live in remote areas where their lack of proximity to roads mean that schools are not built as teachers cannot attend on a daily basis. For those that do attend, there are many challenges to continuing into Higher Secondary education; for many, lack of money to pay for hostel schools might mean the end of their schooling at 10 years; for others, it may be that a lack of a community certificate to prove their identity will make it difficult to sit the vital exams at the end of their schooling.

This program started as a sponsorship program wherein private donors sponsored 6 individual children to go through Secondary School in Vellore. It has recently expanded to over 20 tribal children from villages where no one has completed a secondary education.

Volunteers on this program will work with these children to develop their career goals and ensure that they have the skills, capacity and support to overcome the bureaucratic, financial and cultural hurdles that stand in the way of realising their dreams to become tribal leaders in government, engineers, doctors, nurses and even police! They will organise career counselling and trips to places of work for the older students, advocate for the certificates they need to freely pass through their education, and lectures from professionals in their desired areas of work.

They will also work with the hundreds of other young people in these villages who do not have access to secondary, or even primary education. This will include community consultations, baseline studies, writing proposals and petitions for schools to be built, organising scholarships for needy students, helping young adults into community colleges to learn trades, ensuring welfare schemes reach right out to these remote areas, and working with community leaders to build their capacity to ensure the next generation of children receive a good quality education.

### **Livelihoods**

#### *ILLUMINAE (Livelihood project for slum dwelling women)*

Walking along the banks of the dried out river Palar in Vellore, there are many slums to be found. In these slums low caste, illiterate people are to be found, with no land to farm, no permanent housing and very little opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty. Alcoholism is rife in these communities, and a lack of awareness and education mean that diseases such as Polio, TB and HIV/AIDS are widespread, despite being within a short distance of CMC hospital- one of India's best low cost hospitals.

We work with the women of these communities, finding sustainable livelihoods projects to suit their capabilities, and working with them in a supportive capacity as we build up their physical skills. Many of these women will work as prostitutes; and some of the young girls will also be destined for this profession. As we teach the women skills, we also work to build their awareness about health seeking behaviour, sanitation, awareness of basic diseases common in their communities and how they are spread, as well as helping them through issues such as debt management and dealing with domestic abuse, literacy and account management.

This is a young project, and there are so many women needing our help. Volunteers will work in the field, identifying new communities to work with, assess their needs, identify sustainable livelihood options based on personal and material resources available to them, help the younger women/girls into schools and community colleges and conduct these health and welfare education schemes.

### *SLP (Sustainable Livelihood Project-Jawadhi Hills)*

The Jawadhi Hills is a beautiful, peaceful group of hills hosting around 224 tribal villages and hamlets of the Malayali tribe (literally, 'of the hills'). Though a beautiful place, illnesses such as anaemia, malnutrition, TB, rabies, Neurocysticercosis and heart problems caused by familial intermarriage lead to an average life expectancy of 46 years, and a high infant mortality. Literacy and numeracy is extremely low, and as droughts ravage the hills every year, the land is becoming less fertile.

We work with the women of Thandayankottai village, running an Eco Trail program wherein college students come on yearly educational visits as part of their curriculum to learn about the cultures and traditions of these tribes, and about the social and economic challenges that they face. In exchange for the knowledge and perspective they develop, they pay a fee that goes into the women's account, to be saved for school and hospital fees and for feeding their families.

This project has had a wonderful effect thus far, and from a membership of 6 women that had few skills and no education 5 years ago, the SLP membership is now comprised of one woman from each house in the village, who are now largely numerate, handle their own bank account, can stitch and screen print reusable bags as part of the Eco-Trail package, are teachers in their own rights, and run a highly successful education package including food and camping facilities. Each family now benefits by over 600rs/month, which is enough to send 2 children to secondary school each year.

We have recently begun an extremely successful handmade soap project in the same village, based on a model provided by an NGO working with tribes in Kerala, and while this project is still in the marketing phase, it promises to increase local family incomes by at least 25%.

However, this is just one village out of 224. We need volunteers to help us expand into the hills surrounding, identify the needs and capacities, and to develop a truly sustainable livelihood option for those living within on a microcredit based project. This will involve house visits, baseline surveys, market research, working with the Forestry Department to access relevant schemes and carrying out project planning and skills training session where needed.

### **Community Health**

#### *HEAL (Health Education and Learning-Jawadhi Hills)*

Many of the health problems in India arise from a lack of awareness and basic education. In a tribal region, such as the Jawadhi Hills in Tamil Nadu, there are many traditional beliefs and homeopathic medical systems that have existed for centuries, and will continue to do so, and many of these are highly effective.

However, too many of the people in these regions live with devastating illnesses or die far too young because their traditional systems are unable to cure the problems. Many of these diseases, such as Polio, are easily preventable, but highly contagious. Some of them, such as those that cause seizures, are very easily treatable but if left untreated, can cause a lot of damage.

Recently an ex-volunteer returned to our organisation to carry out a community health research project. In interviewing doctors from government and private facilities, unregistered medical practitioners, towns people and tribal people, it became very clear that the reason that tribal people do not seek biomedical healthcare is not based in cultural resistance, but in fear, and that education and hands on support is the best way to overcome this.

We are often called upon at Seb's to act as medical case workers and bridge the gap between the tribal

villagers and the hospitals in Vellore, taking those that are in need of medical intervention to hospitals and supporting them through their admission. However, to make a lasting change, we must start with education and awareness, to change health seeking perceptions and behaviours from the root upwards through a community led intervention. Only then can change be truly sustainable.

We are proposing to begin a health worker training program for each village in our target area of 7 villages in Jawadhi Hills. Our targeted areas have no access to roads, and no outreach programs visiting. The majority of people who fall ill in the villages will live and/or die with these illnesses for this reason. We need to empower people in the community to access hospitals, ensure that culture does not stand in the way of accessing healthcare, educate them as to how to prevent diseases, and to learn to recognize/treat ailments in their early stages.

Our experience and research across these villages has shown that fear, lack of understanding and intimidation are the major reasons Malayali tribal people do not access registered medical facilities, and that where a trusted person is available to take them to the hospital, they will go.

We need volunteers to identify and coordinate training for one tribal woman and man from each of the 7 targeted tribal villages to be trained as a Primary Health Worker, as well as support them through this amazing transition period. The health worker will be a huge catalyst for change in their community and all the surrounding communities.

They will be trained in CMC's Community Health and Development hospital in Vellore in basic biology, pharmacology and healthcare, and how to deal with health emergencies. The worker will then be responsible for:

- Recognising and treating minor ailments (such as burns, infections etc)
- Monitoring and ensuring immunization (polio is an issue in these villages, and immunization is not common)
- Natal and antenatal care and monitoring
- Birth assistance where necessary
- Coordinating with health camps that may be occurring in nearby villages
- Referring and accompanying patients in need of hospital care for at least 2 days each week
- Train patients to negotiate the hospital system alone
- Giving basic medicines where needed
- Weekly health education events on targeted illnesses endemic in the area (polio, burns, seizures, chest infections, worms etc)

Once the volunteers withdraw, this program will continue for 1 year. Over the course of the year, we estimate that:

- At least 200 people will go to the hospital, and become confident with the system. These patients will then open the door for their friends and family, and these skills will in time spread across the villages.
- Over 5000 tribal people will learn basic biology and preventing locally occurring diseases
- The health workers themselves will act as a community nurse into the future.

We can expect that the reach of such a program over the course of a year, will have a huge, ongoing impact on behavioural change and positive cultural change within both these 7 communities and the communities neighbouring them through the empowerment of natural leaders and the promotion of participatory, community led health education and promotion.

## **Life on Placement-Teams, Accommodation and Training**

All of our volunteer placement groups will be allocated a Program Coordinator, and will receive training with the whole Seb's Projects team in our Vellore office. On all of our projects local English speaking volunteers will join the team to assist with planning and translation in the field, and the Program Coordinator will assist the team in both project planning and personal support in the field.

*Training:* Training takes place over the first week, and will cover the following areas: Expectations/aspirations, cultural orientation, team building, language skills, project planning, conflict resolution, consultation skills, evaluation, inspirational talks and personal management.

*Accommodation:* This will depend upon the selected project, although a volunteer house will be available near the office in Gandhi Nagar, Vellore for the training period, holidays and any time the volunteers need to stay in the town (e.g. in case of illness etc). We endeavour to place volunteers with local families as much as possible to support their livelihood, as well as immersing the volunteers in local culture.

- ✦ Dream: Volunteers will stay with a family near the school. Depending upon the size of the team, this will be either in Arni, Senjimottur, Kasam, Kilkothur, Odogathur or a combination of these.
- ✦ READ: Volunteers will stay in the Vellore volunteer house when working with the Secondary School boarders from Jawadhi Hills or doing advocacy work, and with families in the tribal villages when working in Jawadhi Hills itself doing community consultations and house visits.
- ✦ Illuminae: Volunteers will stay in the volunteer house for this project, as the slums are all based in the central area of Vellore, and skills training may take place in the office.
- ✦ Sustainable Livelihoods Project: Volunteers will stay with selected families in the tribal villages. There are 4 target villages, and volunteers will select one based on their need evaluation.
- ✦ HEAL: Volunteers will stay with selected families in the tribal villages, as they move through during their campaign. There may be times in which liaison with the Community Health and Development Hospital (CHAD) in CMC is necessary, and during this time they will stay in the volunteer house.

## **Volunteer Welfare: Health and Pastoral Support**

*Health:* At Seb's Projects India, we endeavour to ensure that volunteers are matched with projects that match their personal capacity, and that the utmost care is taken to maintain health and welfare in the field. However, working in developing countries carries with it an inherent health risk, and so we request that all volunteers are fully vaccinated against local diseases. Health and welfare in the field will constitute a session in the training schedule.

All volunteers must come with a basic first aid kit (including water purification tablets/Steripen or other) and have travel insurance. In the case of emergency, the Coordinator will organise evacuation to CMC hospital and ensure the patient is accompanied at all times during admission.

*Support:* On our Dream and Illuminae projects a Project Coordinator will visit the national and international volunteers twice per week, assisting them in program planning, providing pastoral care and managing logistics. On our projects in tribal areas (READ, HEAL and SLP), a Project Coordinator will stay in the field with volunteers, providing welfare and planning support.

## **Debriefing-Life after Placement**

At the end of placement volunteers will undergo a 3 day debriefing session, wherein they will analyse the project they have designed, the impact they have made and the lessons they have learnt. Talks will be given by experts in the field, as well as project evaluations carried out. We will also develop a follow up plan to be carried out by Seb's Projects India staff in the field, to ensure that all projects undertaken are sustainable and make a permanent impact.

We encourage all of our volunteers to maintain contact with their friends and colleagues from their time in India, and many of our past volunteers have gone on to return for research purposes, to visit their projects and see how they have blossomed, or purely to catch up with old friends. Please see our website and Facebook group for testimonies from and links to ex volunteers looking back on the impact working as a Community Development Volunteer has had on their lives.

### **CONTACT DETAILS**

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