

# VOLUNTEER SPEAK

## Vividhara, Nahikalan, Dehradun

Vividhara is a community that practices organic farming and works towards raising and maintaining environmental consciousness. The SMILE intern at Vividhara conducted a health survey in the village, conducted activities like reading, role play, painting and recycling paper with the children in the village, helped various families in their day-to-day tasks, learnt about agricultural practices, and explored the forest to get a feel about the ecological issues.

"I realised how our lifestyles in cities imply injustice for traditional communities, and the urgent need to come up with livelihood alternatives that are both ecologically sustainable and creatively satisfying for such communities. Also, interacting, visiting, and eating with one of the Dalit families in the village, and the subsequent reactions amongst the high caste villagers (including the family that I stayed with) allowed me to see the injustice in communities that have themselves been wronged. The journey has made me more confident about my abilities, and I now have greater faith in my ability to build relationships."

Akshi Singh, 3rd Yr, BA English, Lady Shriram College, New Delhi



SMILE (Students Mobilisation Initiative for Learning through Exposure) runs as a program across India with an aim to involve young people in activities which help them to belong and take more responsibility in whatever they do. We at Pravah run the Delhi Chapter of SMILE while continuously trying to spruce it up with endless cups of chai.

How we actually do these abstract things? In SMILE you can do whatever excites you the most films, theatre, writing, songs or even abstract art! There is however only one condition you have to get involved with issues and people around you in ways which affect both.

To know more about the SMILE program, log on to [www.pravah.org](http://www.pravah.org) or contact Neha/Sulab at 011-26440619/26291354 or mail us at [smile@younginfluencers.com](mailto:smile@younginfluencers.com)

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Publication supported by The Ford Foundation

# YOUNGINFLUENCERS

[www.younginfluencers.com](http://www.younginfluencers.com)

A Pravah newsletter • For private circulation only • September 2009 • Vol. IV Issue III

## VOLUNTEERING IN INDIA



Students Mobilisation Initiative for Learning through Exposure (SMILE) runs as a programme across India with an aim to involve young people in activities which help them to belong and take more responsibility for whatever they do.

One of the components of the programme is a Rural Internship which exposes young people to the various developmental organisations and grassroot movements across the country. As a part of their journey, the interns interact with different communities and get a deeper understanding of the issues that confront the local people and organisations, and also translate these learnings into action-based projects.

This year's programme brought together 30 young "SMILers" from varied backgrounds and areas of interest. Their chosen areas included gender sensitisation, indigenous art forms, role of media in development, disaster relief and rehabilitation, organic farming, education and livelihood etc. This diversity in backgrounds and chosen areas greatly enriched the scope for learning and action.

The current batch of interns is now implementing its learning through action projects, which are focused on college-level sensitisation and mobilisation through film screenings and interactive discussions. We are happy to celebrate their journeys, and hope to inspire many more to explore such territories, and realise the potential within.

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## Abhivyakti Media for Development, Nasik, Maharashtra

Abhivyakti is a registered voluntary organisation working in the field of media to initiate a process of democratic communication, promote learning within different sections of the populace and further people's cause and their empowerment. The SMILE interns here were actively involved in the Media Resource Centre - cataloguing the books and movies in the library, writing synopsis of some, participating in screenings and discussions, doing production and publication related work for the newsletters and the community video, designing CD covers, etc.

"One of the highlights of the internship was my attempt to learn a new language and converse in it in bits and pieces. I was given a free hand to choose my way of learning and gaining experience, which made the atmosphere very conducive to learning. Every step turned out to be a new experience and there was a lot to explore and discuss." -

Apoorva Bajaj, 3rd Yr, Mass Communication, MBICEM, New Delhi



"This internship helped me grow and develop, and made me aware of problems around me. I learnt how to work with limited resources, and fight for the rights of the people. One interesting aspect of the internship was my inability to comprehend the jokes shared by the staff members owing to the difference in language and their attempts to make me laugh."

Sukhveer Singh Heer, 3rd Yr, Mass Communication, MBICEM

## Adharshila, Madhya Pradesh

Adharshila is an innovative school for Adivasi (tribal) children in Madhya Pradesh with a curriculum that combines academics, world issues, practical skills and cultural heritage with a lot of fun. It is an effort to inculcate the Adivasi children with a value for learning and an awareness of important issues facing their community. The SMILE interns here were actively involved in teaching various subjects using practical methodologies and imparting creative skills such as painting.

"The internship helped me understand rural life and how the people are essentially the same in both rural and urban areas. Due to the intense engagement with the school students, I saw how enthusiastic students were about education despite all odds in their lives. Earlier, I was hesitant to take up academics but this internship helped me in developing my interest in it. I have also started taking responsibility for myself and for people around me."

Rakesh Kumar, Aman Biradri Home, New Delhi



"This internship gave me a sense of belonging with the larger community. During the internship, I was able to mix with other students from Adharshila and share my skill of painting. The process made me understand the importance of being patient and I now have the ability to control my anger during critical moments."

Sameer Aman, Aman Biradri Home, New Delhi

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## Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh

Eklavya is a non-profit, non-government organisation that develops and field tests innovative educational programmes and trains resource people to implement these programmes. Eklavya works towards modifying the current teaching methodology. The SMILE intern here was involved in observing the activities in the classroom, interacting with children, giving a feedback to improve teaching methods and training the teachers on ways to improve the teaching curriculum through practical methodology.

"The internship changed my perspective of the educational system, and the urgent changes required in the teaching pedagogy. I also realised that it is very tough to teach a teacher. I particularly enjoyed working with the kids; their questions and sketches were really nice and although persuading them was not easy, I learnt it somehow."

Naveen Khandelwal, 2nd Yr, B.Tech, IIT, New Delhi



## Jagori Grameen, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Jagori is an organisation which works at developing leadership skills in youth, forming team spirit and encouraging these groups to take collective action. It also promotes organic farming and works in the field of violence against women. The SMILE intern here was primarily involved in Nari Adalats - a public forum for women and attended its meeting, took notes and provided feedback on the Adalat's decision.



"The internship was a personal journey for me. I realised that violence is everywhere around us - we are either victims or perpetrators; our sole aim should be to put a stop to it. The perspective I gained, the things I saw made one thing clear - life would never be the same, or rather I would never see life the same way. When I was coming back from Jagori, I was in tears because I was taking back a lot with me but also leaving behind something I could never get back."

Neeru Malhotra, 3rd Yr, Psychology, Mata Sundari College, New Delhi

## Manthan, Kotri (Ajmer), Rajasthan

Manthan is a registered organisation which works in the areas of education, health, and general community development. In the area of education, there are a number of initiatives, like night schools, day schools, baal-vadis, vocational training programs etc. The focus of the SMILE intern here was to develop an insight into how the NGO serves as an educational centre, which, being an outsider's viewpoint, would be useful for the organisation.

"I had a lot of fun during the internship. The thing that fascinated me most was the night sky; at times I felt handicapped for the first time because of my spectacles. In my free time I taught Microsoft Excel and translated some reports into English. I also learnt some very innovative methods of teaching mathematics. Most importantly, I learnt to appreciate my urban life."

Aditi Gupta, Business Analyst



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## Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangthan (MKSS), Devdungree, Rajasthan

MKSS is a grassroots movement that is addressing the causes of social justice, reforms and democracy. The main areas of work of this organisation are related to NREGA National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and RTI Right to information Act. The interns visited different sites to find out the kind of work that is carried out under the schemes. They were also involved in research advocacy, awareness campaigns and the Rozgar Mela.

"This internship taught me a lot. I realised that to bring about change, you must be at the receiving end of it. I also recognised the difference between a need and a want. All this enabled me to make better sense of the world."

Amogh Dev Rai, 3rd Yr, Political Science, Shyam Lal College, New Delhi



"During the internship, I came across a wide variety of interesting people, who left a lasting impression on my mind. I was touched by the welcoming nature of the villagers, who invited us into their homes and lives with open hearts. In particular, the interaction with Ms. Aruna Roy gave us a practical perspective in order to form a plan of action that is well-suited to rural settings."

Manjita Khatiwara, Final Yr, MA Sociology, Delhi School of Economics

"The internship has been one of the most memorable moments in my life! It has helped me to get out of my comfort zone and for the first time in my life I traveled alone! The experience I gained out of it was tremendous. Today I feel I am more mature and I also see life in a different way."

Nasreen Ghani, 3rd Yr, Journalism, Kamala Nehru College, New Delhi



"I got experience at the grass root level, which inspired me towards social change. I was able to break my psychological barriers with regard to people, places, cultures, etc. I have also understood the importance of transparency at the individual, societal and governance levels. The internship was also a chance to incorporate the values of humanity, justice and equality into my daily life."

Shivani Singh, Final Yr, MA Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi

## Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), Madhya Pradesh

Narmada Bachao Andolan has been committed for the last 20 years towards working for the rehabilitation and resettlement of affected villagers and villages under threat of submergence owing to the construction of 30 large dams on Narmada River. Here, the SMILE interns were involved in undertaking surveys in villages under submergence, checking the validity of documents and filling the same at Zila court, obtaining important information as per RTI Act.

"The internship gave us an insight into rural India and improved my understanding on development issues substantially. It proved to be a journey that helped us discover the truth, absurdities, problems, happiness and conflicts of our lives."

Abhijit Sarkar, Volunteer, Pravah



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"My internship at NBA has been a beautiful and memorable journey. I am clearer now about social work and people's movements. Working with the affected villages and villagers has also improved my understanding on the issue of dams and development."

Ramavatar Kashyap, 3rd Yr, BA Political Science, Rajdhani College, New Delhi

## Sabuj Sangha, Sunderbans, West Bengal

Sabuj Sangha is registered as a voluntary organisation that works in the areas of flood relief and rehabilitation, women and children with emphasis placed on POP (poorest to the poor) families. 5 SMILEs went to Sabuj Sangha in the wake of Cyclone Aila. They visited the disaster affected areas to get the first hand experience of the situation.

"The internship has given me better insight on various local issues, and the different lifestyles in these regions. It taught me valuable lessons in humility and dedication. I now have more respect for the little things in life that I previously took for granted. My adaptability has also improved. The trip has left me with fantastic memories."

Anurag Kumar, 2nd Yr, B.Tech, IIT, New Delhi



"This internship was definitely different from other internships as I realised the significance of taking an initiative and bringing about a change. It gave me an opportunity to go there, learn and unlearn, share and love them for what they are, because every individual is unique and beautiful in his/her own way... I am glad I discovered it."

Nishu Kaul, Final Yr, MA Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi

"I learnt that impacting the life of a thousand less-privileged people needs conviction, persistent motivation and much more than just a month. The community made a judicious contribution to my spirit of becoming. The experience made me a person who has passed over the limiting stage of "having ideas" and has elevated to the platform of "dissecting existing ideas."

Rashmi Jain, 3rd Yr, BA Statistics, Lady Shriram College, New Delhi



"This internship completely changed my outlook on rural life. It also altered the way I think about various issues. In particular, visiting the Aila-affected areas was a challenge and a learning experience at the same time. Further, this internship made me meet a lot of people, and make some very good friends."

Sudeep Dabas, 3rd Yr, BA Programme, St. Stephens College, New Delhi

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"The experience was one of a kind. It provoked my thoughts, made me more responsive to my surroundings, and brought about a complete change. Starting from the orientation camp in Rajasthan and the rural internship in Sunderbans to the feedback camp at Rajghat, New Delhi, I feel that this was the best time I have had."

**Tanvi Sahni, Final Yr, MA Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi**



## Satpuda Foundation (SF), Melghat Tiger Reserve

The Satpuda Foundation was formed with the specific aim of protecting wildlife, conducting research to support conservation and educating sections of the society about the short- and long-term benefits of protecting the magnificent mountain range. The SMILE intern here contributed to the following projects Melghat Education Programme (Duda Education Van), Socio-economic survey of Tarubanda, Chikhli and Bori, and the Akot Eco-Restoration Project.



"Overall, the internship was a wonderful experience and helped me learn a lot of new things. The field visits to conduct the surveys, the interaction with schoolchildren on account of the Duda Van, and the eco-restoration to combat climate change and global warming were learning experiences."

**Abhishek Surana, 2nd yr, B.Tech, IIT, New Delhi**

## Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh

Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) works towards students' welfare by connecting the students with their culture. The students learn Ladakhi history, English, environmental studies, etc. in the various camps organised by SECMOL. The SMILE interns here were involved with such a camp taking classes in various subjects, and participating in student activities like gardening, cooking, and milking the cows.

"I think SECMOL is a great place to visit and my internship there helped me acquire a different view of life. I was touched by the warmth of the people there. The place in itself is a delight to the eye and I will never forget the one month I spent there."

**Abhishek Choudhary, 2nd Yr, B.Tech, IIT, New Delhi**



"The experience helped me evolve as a person. The problems there have now acquired a human face for me, and I associate with them as easily as I do to gender and communal identity. On the whole, it was a wonderful and transforming experience which will stay in my mind and heart forever."

**Pavneet Kaur, 3rd Yr, BA English, Lady Shriram College, New Delhi**

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## Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), Bhikampura, Alwar, Rajasthan

Tarun Bharat Sangh is an NGO working towards expanding socio-cultural values by setting examples in welfare action, energising human power to harness energy for value-based work with an orientation towards physical labour. Here, the SMILE interns travelled to a number of villages, reported seminars, participated in the local village meetings, informed villagers about the RTI Act, and also participated in the Exposure cum Training programmes on land and water management.

"This internship taught me ways to tackle the problems of villagers, and also to interact with people confidently. My tenure at Tarun Bharat Sangh helped me to collect a reservoir of information on climate change, water harvesting and conservation through participation in seminars and surveys across villages."

**Sandeep Kumar Tada, 2nd Yr, B.Sc Botany, Hansraj College, New Delhi**



"The internship was a wonderful experience, and a learning journey. It allowed me to enhance my understanding on diverse issues such as NREGA, RTI and water conservation through observation and exposure."

**Suchita Panwar, Final Yr, MA Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi**

## Vayali Folklore Group, Kerala

Vayali works in the field of art and culture, preserving dying folk art forms. They aim to popularise local artists of Valluvanad region. For this purpose, they run an eco-friendly product shop. One of their projects, NIAP (Nila Adolescents Intervention Programme) collaborates with schools and colleges to educate them about the advantages of preserving local cultures. The SMILE intern here assisted the organisation in field work, interacted with artisans, folk dancers and other custodians of the folk culture and assisted the organisation in developing the website.

"By challenging our existing notions of life, development, democracy, freedom, justice, peace with familiarisation and sensitisation to issues and ideas I have learned to lay emphasis on an integrated human-human relationship. I believe that rural internship as an interface has enabled this steady transformation devoid of a 'me' and 'you'. Overall, the conscious movement from sympathy to empathy has been one of the great learning of my life."

**Karan Gurung, 3rd Yr, BA History, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi**



"This internship made me come out of my comfort zone. I got rid of prejudices, and learned how to think realistically. I learnt to be patient. I also realised that the words 'me' and 'we' are synonymous and dependent on each other. Last but not the least, the time spent interacting with the artisans, folk dancers and other custodians of the folk culture of Valluvanad was unforgettable."

**Sonal Sharma, 3rd Yr, BA Economics, Kirori Mal College, New Delhi**