

Kathmandu, Nepal

DISASTER RELIEF PROJECT

Monthly Report - August 2015



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18 AUGUST 2015

The paint was still drying as we bid a fond and emotional farewell to Sunrise School. Flags with inspirational messages lined the brand new classrooms, a spot of colour on an otherwise damp and dreary day.

The space has been transformed following the hard work and determination of our Projects Abroad volunteers, a place of learning now stands on a former rice paddy field. Brand new bathrooms have replaced the once makeshift toilet, two bamboo rods and a tarp. The excitement and gratitude is palpable, the staff emotional and thankful... these children, their old school a victim of April 2015's earthquake, now have a safe area to read and write, to study and grow.



Flags with inspirational messages in the new classroom.

The closing ceremony was especially poignant as we left the site for the last time, others leaving Nepal to return home with the knowledge that they made a difference in Kathmandu.

19-20 AUGUST

Our shovels are never idle long and there is always more work to be done... so the Sunrise group joined the other volunteers at the Suryodaya site the very next day. There will be a total of 14 classrooms here, seven already underway on the lower part of the property; today we broke ground on seven more located on the upper area.

While some had the more pleasant task of brick soling or brick laying.



Volunteers brick laying.



The brick laying for one of the classrooms.

21 AUGUST

It was a wet and rainy end to the week, but that barely put a damper on the spirits of our volunteers as they worked through the drizzle (and sometimes downpour) to get as much accomplished as possible.

Usually Fridays are a day to cut out of work early or take an extra-long lunch (we had chicken burgers today) but this group was determined to finish what they started, begging for just a few more minutes to lay bricks so they could walk away from a completed wall.

25 AUGUST



Two volunteers working on the trenches.

And continued digging... it's hot and sweaty work, but a necessity. One of the volunteers used his pocket knife to cut us a few measuring sticks so we could stick them in the ground or across the top to know when the 2ft by 2ft marker had been reached.

While part of the group worked on the trenches, others continued on the seven lower classrooms, sorting through an old pile of bricks. The broken ones are used for 'brick soling', which act as part of the foundation between the mud and concrete. The full bricks are used for the walls, although sometimes they need to have cement or imperfections chipped off to make them easier to fit like a puzzle.

With their pans of cement mortar, the other volunteers are filling in any gaps between the bricks to make the wall extra durable. Dish soap was used to make the mixture (cement, sand and water) easier to mix and use.

26 AUGUST

While in Nepal during monsoon season, the weather can be sporadic; you never know what to expect. Blazing sun one afternoon, followed by a torrential downpour the next morning.

Our trenches - which will soon be transformed into seven classrooms (haven't started digging the last one yet) were filled with water when we arrived on site. The pumps had stopped working overnight and it was time to fix the problem manually!

So... with a little team work, determination and buckets we were able to 'bucket' out all the water and build a mud wall to cordon off one of the classrooms from the rest of the lagoon.



The cement mixture.

As a couple volunteers levelled the area, making sure it was 2ft by 2ft, others took shelter from the rain under the roofs of the classrooms we'd already built. A very important task, one that's done daily, is mixing concrete. That usually means we have to utilize everyone to make a chain to pass the necessary materials... so we had about ten people filling 20 buckets of sand and 20 buckets of stone to mix with one 50kg bag of cement. Whoever is looking for a bit of a lighter job is happy to run back and forth for the odd bucket of water.



Brick soling.

Finally it's time to mix; four people dig their shovels into the bottom of the pile and dump it into the hole on the top. Grab a shovel from the bottom and into the hole on the top... again and again. It usually takes about 20 minutes to half an hour to get the mixture ready. Concrete is different than cement, which is used on the brick walls. Concrete is used as the floor of the classrooms and will be laid over the broken bricks (brick soling) work that was done earlier this week.

A local mason always assists when laying the floors of the classroom. He measures how much concrete is needed as the others provide it from the pile they've just mixed up. They then use a tool to flatten and smooth it out so it's even and level.

27 -28 AUGUST



The start of the foundation.

The sun was back, the floor was hard and the trenches were dry. As we'd levelled earlier, we could now start with the foundation. First, 3 inches of sand topped with brick soling and then 3 levels of 14 inch bricks until ground level. After that is completed, the team will start on a wall, which will be 4 inches wide.

A peaceful vibe settled over the site as everyone knew exactly what to do... laying bricks, one by one, mixing more cement when needed and forming bricks chains or filling up the wheelbarrow to transport more when needed.

We never forget for long that we're working in the heart of a functioning school yard - when the bell rings, the space is filled with shrieking kids and laughter - you can often hear young voices reciting the alphabet or singing 'baa baa black sheep.'

We got a lot accomplished and worked right up until the farewell ceremony. We do this almost daily as there is usually at least one person finishing the project and heading back home. It's a bittersweet moment as volunteers are recognized for their skills and time with a thank you from the schools' principal. First, a tika is applied, which is a red paste that leaves a mark on your forehead. A khata, a traditional ceremonial scarf is worn, which honours departing guests.



Volunteers farewell.

31 AUGUST

Our 15 member group was eager to get started after a beautiful weekend exploring and enjoying Kathmandu. We had a couple of new arrivals who were given the tough but necessary task of digging that final trench for our seventh classroom. Luckily, the 12ft x 15ft square, which needs a depth and width of 2ft x 2ft, was completed by the end of the day.

Effort pays off, as part of the group stands back to admire a job well done. This 4 and a half inch wall, built to be three feet high, is shorter as a precaution. In the case of another serious earthquake, the walls will not be as dangerous to children if they come down. The roof is also lightweight, made of aluminum, for the same reason.



Volunteers hard at work.

Finally, we go back to the first classroom on the upper area of the property. Seven ft. (from the ground level) square iron posts have been inserted these 2 inch by 2 inch rods will eventually be used to hold the roof. More concrete was mixed and poured around the posts to keep them firmly in place. August proved to be a good month in Nepal.