



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

Environmental education benefits everyone

For small village schools in southern India, environmental education and improved infrastructure impact not just on academic results, but also on the health and wellbeing of the students. Nadukuppam High School in Tamil Nadu is one such example. And the best thing is that they're now sharing the benefits with others.

'Six years ago Nadukuppam High School had no water, no toilets, no shade. It was hot and dusty everywhere,' reported Mr.V.M. Shankar, the government teacher who teaches maths at the school. 'We had two classrooms, three teachers for 550 students and the worst academic record in the whole of Tamil Nadu.'¹

Now, thanks largely to the involvement of QSA partner the Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre (PBRC), the situation is very different. They have water and toilets. The place is greener and there are more classrooms, more teachers, new ways of teaching and the pass rate for Year 10 has improved dramatically from 10% to 76% in a couple of years.

Nadukuppam School, with the support of PBRC, established a number of initiatives to improve the environment of the school and lift the performance of students at the same time. Teachers were trained in child-centred learning techniques, and funds were

sought for additional teachers, to assist those students who needed additional support. 2,500 trees were planted on the campus, and there is now a vegetable garden which contributes to lunchtime meals, and a 'healthy drink' for those with nutritional needs is concocted from locally grown medicinal ingredients. A water sanitation system was established in the school, recycling grey water from the toilets to make it suitable for use on the garden. A water pump has also been installed, ensuring that there is sufficient safe water for drinking. Solar panels have been set up for the provision of energy.

An important part of these changes has been the development of an environmental education program. On Saturdays, some of the children from local schools meet for 'Eco Clubs'. These clubs are fun groups where they

learn more about their local environment and how to maintain it. They are shown how to grow indigenous plants and about the many birds, animals and insects that live locally. Along with their teachers, students have been cleaning up the village areas as well as the local pond, and caring for the trees they have planted.

Now that they have seen the impact in their own lives, the children at Nadukuppam are involved in sharing their knowledge with students from neighbouring villages. The environmental education program has been expanded for use in five primary schools in the surrounding villages of Vandipalayam, Kottikuppam, Devikulam, Thirukkanur and M. Pudhupakkam.

The Eco Club students from four of these schools visited Nadukuppam in October last



Lourdes Epinal with students at Nadukuppam Environmental Education Centre.

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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year. They saw the waste water treatment plant, and the solid waste management in the garbage separation unit at the school. They also learned all about the different varieties of traditional seeds. The visitors were allowed to interact with the local Eco Club students to understand the methods of maintaining a nursery in the school.

The production and benefits of Spirulina (a nutritional supplement) were explained to them during their visit to the centre and they were taught to identify the locally available medicinal plants and their uses in the demonstration medicinal garden in the field. A school visit package is being put together for the Eco Club students and teachers and as a follow-up to this package, some of the activities are being replicated in the schools of the visiting students.

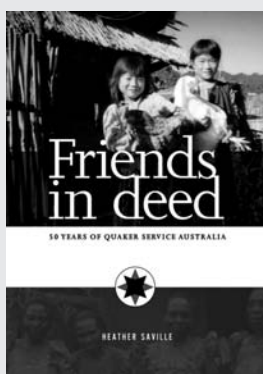
The environmental education teachers are also helping with the academic syllabus and health and hygiene programs in the school during the morning sessions. Based on what they have learnt, children are using innovative methods like drama, drawings and field mapping to convey the ideas to others.

What a wonderful example to all of us! Lourdes Epinal, the Environmental Educator at PBRC, will be visiting Australia in May, and we look forward to benefiting from his experience and sharing ideas about what could be done in Australia to educate and motivate schools and community groups to follow India's lead.

1. Source: http://www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday/Dec_2008/Nadukupam.htm

Friends in deed!

At 2:15 pm on 7th January 1959, a minute of Australian Friends' General Meeting marked the establishment of Friends Service Council (Australia). This year, 2009, marks the 50th Anniversary of that decision, and a half a century of international development work done on behalf of that organisation, now known as Quaker Service Australia (QSA).



To commemorate this important milestone, Heather Saville, former convenor of the QSA Management Committee, has written a book entitled *Friends in deed*, which includes the stories of many Australian Quakers and others who have been involved in the work of QSA over the past half a century.

Friends in deed will be launched at 12 noon on Friday 20th March 2009 at the Australian Institute for International Affairs, 124 Jolimont Rd, Melbourne. Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development, will launch the book, and Margaret Reid, AO, President of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) will officiate. We hope that as many Friends as possible will be able to attend.

For more information or to order your copy of the book, please contact the QSA office on 02 9698 9103 or administration@qsa.org.au or visit our website: www.qsa.org.au or fill in the *Friends in deed* order form overleaf.

Buy a badge

If you want to let everyone around you know that QSA is 50 years old this year, why not purchase a badge? For just \$3 you can become a walking, talking source of outreach for QSA, and at the same time contribute to our work. Contact the QSA office.

Visit of Indian environmental educator

In May, Quaker Service is looking forward to the visit of Lourdes Epinal, community educator at the Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre in Tamil Nadu, India. Lourdes will be visiting Friends School during the QSA week in late April and will speak about his work with school students and others to raise awareness about the local ecology, reforestation, and sustainable technologies. If you would like Lourdes to visit your Meeting, please contact the QSA office as soon as possible to see what can be arranged.

QSA Donation Form

A copy of the Quaker Service Australia donation form will now appear in every copy of *The Australian Friend*. If you would like to donate to QSA this month, please simply fill out the slip at the back of *The Australian Friend* magazine, and send it to us with your cheque or credit card details.