

Medicine Collection and Distribution (Part 1)

November/December 2008

The aim of this project was to organize free health check-ups for low income families surrounding the school, and to distribute the prescribed medicines to them free of cost. This project was executed in two parts. The first part involved students collecting medicines from donor families and government organizations. In the second part of the project, students engaged in studying about some of the most threatening diseases (Malaria, Hepatitis, and Diarrhea) that are prevalent in their community with the aim of educating some targeted families in the neighborhood regarding the symptoms, causes and preventions of these diseases. Further, the students invited these families to avail of a free medical check-up and consultation with a renowned local doctor who pledged his services free of charge for one day at the school premises. Based on the doctor's diagnosis and prescription the patients then received free medication from the pool of medicines that was collected by students earlier.

The villages surrounding our school are populated by low income families - daily laborers, saw mill workers and rickshaw pullers. With their nominal earnings, these villagers find it very difficult to take proper medical care of themselves and their families. This project was aimed at helping such families. The project was decided upon and planned in consultation with students, teachers and the program coordinator.

Collecting medicines from the local community

Planning

Students were asked to form small groups and identify each member's role in the project. The students decided that they wanted to work on making presentations that they would deliver to donor families and government organizations in order to collect medicines from them. Each student wrote their own presentation which was later shared with the group. Each small group then chose their best presentation and worked on it further. In the words of Krish Majumder (Grade 2 student), *"We will each write a presentation and will choose the best one from the group. This way everyone will learn"*.



During class time, the following issues were discussed:

Why do we take medicines?

Why do we become sick?

Why should we collect medicines?

How are we going to be serving our community by collecting medicines?

In order to tie-in spiritual concepts with the study of health, the following questions were investigated along with the ones stated above:

*What kinds of medicines are needed for our soul?
What makes our soul unhappy?*

While trying to identify sources from where the students could collect medicines, the following suggestions were made by them during a large group consultation:

- i) Chemists*
- ii) Higher income families*
- iii) Hospitals*
- iv) Dispensaries*

Before the students started their medicine collection drive, volunteer parents were invited to the school to see the final presentations of different groups in order to make suggestions that could be used to further enhance the presentations.



Based on the reflection and evaluation that took place on the previous project, students felt that they needed to take definitive steps in order to ensure disciplined behavior during the action phase of the current project. Hence, a large group consultation took place on this issue where the students came up with the following rules:

- 1) We should stand in line while approaching an individual's home or office.*
- 2) When a group member is making a presentation the rest of the group should listen attentively.*
- 3) We should talk politely with the individuals being visited.*
- 4) We should obey the volunteer parents who escort us on visits.*
- 5) We should not touch anything in the homes we visit.*

Finally, students were educated on the importance of checking the expiry dates on medicines before use, and how to do so.

Action

Sixteen groups comprising of 87 students in total visited 55 families in the Chanban and Gada Chowmoni areas in Udaipur town. The students were accompanied by 11 teachers and 17 volunteer parents. There was a great deal of enthusiasm amongst the students, and the families being visited were happy to receive the young children as they made efforts to serve their society.



Generous local families donated a large amount of unused medicines to the visiting students who were careful to check the expiry dates on the donated medicines before accepting them.

Additionally, a visit was made by the program coordinator to the district medical storehouse from where he received Rs. 20000 (US\$ 400) worth of medicines for free.

Reflection/Evaluation

After collecting medicines from the local community the groups reflected on their action. The following were some observations made by students:

Our successes:

1. *We walked in a line while visiting families*
2. *Our presentations were better than on previous projects*
3. *We showed more respect to the families and also to the volunteer parents*
4. *When we were in the bus we did not talk or make noise*
5. *We spoke politely with the families during our visits*

Points for improvement:

1. *While someone is making a presentation, others should not laugh and talk*
2. *We should further improve our discipline*
3. *We shouldn't talk or smile while walking in a line*

In the words of one grade 3 student, the project taught him:

- *That it is more effective to talk to others with a smiling face*
- *One must cooperate and stick with their group during a project*
- *How to make effective presentations.*

The students also made artistic representations of their project as an exercise in reflection.



The volunteer parents that escorted students on their home visits had the following to say: *“All of children have developed great communication skills, and they are also very intelligent”*.

“I found that the students were able to inspire the visited families with their brilliant presentations”

“Such projects allow students to connect with the outside world and gain learning from beyond their classrooms. I too gathered good experience in the process. Each group of students performed their best and their sincerity was very convincing to the visited families.”

Finally, the teachers observed that students turned to group consultation more often through the project and spoke more often in English during discussions.

Project at a Glance

Number of student participants:	86
Number of groups made:	16
Number of teachers involved:	11
Number of families visited:	55
Number of parent volunteers:	17

Cross-curricular benefits of the project

Science: Students learned about different types of medicines and the diseases they cure. They also learned how to check the expiry date on medicines.

Social Studies: Students learned about the various agencies that provide health care and the different sources that one might acquire medicines from.

Mathematics: Students engaged in sorting exercises where they classified and sorted medicines according to their use

Literacy: Students enhanced their written and oral communication skills through the process of writing and delivering presentations. Their vocabulary increased while learning the names of diseases, medicines, etc.

Spiritual development: Students practiced being polite, courteous, cooperative, patient, and humble throughout the project. Further, they better understood their responsibility to serve the community and experienced the joy that comes with it.

Social/emotional skills: Students learned how to work effectively in groups, and they developed an attitude of cooperation. They also increased their self-confidence and skills of communication by interacting with adults and children.

Conclusion

In addition to all that is stated above, the project helped to bring parents, teachers, students, and the local community together in acknowledging and working towards an issue that affects them all. The students not only reinforced their classroom study of various subjects but also learned about the benefits of working cooperatively and systematically in general. More importantly, the community and students were both equally benefitted by the project.