

THE INDIAN VILLAGE PROJECT

By Kirk Roth and
Debra McClintock

The five of us met for the first time in Chennai, India, on March 16, only knowing each other through e-mail. We were an international “blended team” originating from Japan.

Our members included a Canadian, a Japanese national, an architect from the United Kingdom and an engineering student from the United States.

Habitat Madras is an ambitious and growing affiliate in India.

Five of our seven days in Chennai were spent on the work site. We began by forming fireman lines to pass bricks and cement up to the houses, while the boys bricked the final few layers of a house already in progress. Everyone joined in: the sweet, young homeowner-to-be, the 12-year old boys and girls who wanted an excuse to communicate with us, and the grandmothers who could chuck bricks faster than all of us.

Little boys would distract us with their dances and the women would call us down the lane to put flowers in our hair. Lunch would be a fabulous combination of curries, fried chicken or fish and juicy watermelons and grapes brought fresh from the village.

Breaks could come at any time, with Chai tea or lassi being served—even if we hadn’t begun any work yet!

The last of our work there involved pouring concrete roofs for the two houses standing side by side. It was a big day for the village as a cement mixer was brought in—a luxury typically too expensive. They held a ceremony to bless the mixer,

which must have worked because it ran like a charm all day without stopping. The Indian workers would every so often shout for more *masala!*

That final day in the heat of the rooftops gave us a real sense of accomplishment. The roofs were left to dry in the big Indian sun.

On the Saturday of our departure, a festival was held to entertain and recognize our team. The women on the team were dressed in hand-tailored saris, with sandalwood powder brushed on our faces and carefully selected bindi placed on our foreheads.

The team was brought to a makeshift stage in the middle of the village where speeches were made and gifts exchanged. We handed out pens and pencils donat-

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ed by Japanese students as well as cricket jerseys.

The finale was a riot of children dancing to the latest chart-toppers and an impressive fire dance. Their enthusiasm and openness towards us was inexhaustible as we reluctantly tore ourselves away from the good-bye hugs and handshakes to board our bus to the airport.

As with most Global Village reports I’ve read about, our experience was an unforgettable one full of sharing, laughter and learning.

The villagers’ generosity and willingness to invite us into their lives was astounding, appreciated and almost painful to leave behind.

Kirk Roth and Debra McClintock were team leaders to Madras, India.