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WA OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION APRIL 2013

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

THE CHALLENGES IN INDIA

Professional Development Representatives, Amy Rushton and Janine Hewlett, recently returned from the experience of a life time in India. Janine and Amy spent two weeks volunteering with Equal Health, a Perth based organisation which has been providing allied health and medical care to those in developing countries since 1999. They joined a team of 8 other allied health professionals, including OTs, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, a dietician, a teacher and a psychologist. Their time was spent between Shishur Sevay Childlife Preserve in Kolkata, an orphanage founded by Dr Michelle Harrison, and Anandinikitan Society for Mental Health Care (AN), a large institution for people with a range of disabilities located in rural Katwa, approximately 130km west of Kolkata.

Amy and Janine described the experience as “overwhelming” and, at times, incredibly “confronting”. “The values, attitudes and beliefs surrounding disability in India are so very different to our own. Particularly at AN, we came to realise quickly that

making a sustainable difference to these people’s lives was going to be very difficult”, Janine reported.

Amy added, “as a female Occupational therapist working within the disability sector, I found it hard to comprehend the difference in treatment between men and women, and people with and without disabilities. I have come to realise that we are so lucky to live in a country like Australia; where everyone has equal access to health care and resources”.

The allied health team worked on a number of projects during the two weeks, including issuing and fitting donated wheelchairs to children with cerebral palsy, and educating carers about the importance of positioning for play and feeding. “We made use of what we had available in our environment. At one point, we were chopping up old mattress foam with blunt, rusty saws to make wheelchair inserts and using sari scarfs to make pelvic straps!” Amy and Janine stated. A number of the residents at AN were provided with soft helmets to prevent recurrent head injuries from seizures, and money from a fundraiser organised by Amy and Janine was used to purchase

woollen jumpers for many of the female residents who previously did not have access to such luxuries.

To find out more about how to get involved in volunteering overseas, visit <http://www.equalhealth.org.au/>. Dr Michelle Harrison of Shishur Sevay Childlife Preserve has an online blog and Facebook page where her day to day experiences can be followed. Please visit <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Shishur-Sevay-Childlife-Preserve-Shishur-Sevay/140303275990089?fref=ts>



Amy Rushton and Janine Hewlett in India

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