

HUMAN FORCE CAMP 2011: CIPANAS, INDONESIA

From July 3 to 17, 2011, twelve volunteers poured their time and attention into the YUM Village in Cipanas, Indonesia. Hailing from Indonesia, India, Australia, France, Colombia, Brazil, and the US, these volunteers included both Subud and non-Subud members between 15 and 65 years of age. There were two Human Force team members coordinating the camp onsite in conjunction with YUM project staff. The goal was to support the Village's sustainable organic agriculture program, to do some renovations on the site's buildings, and to pilot a program that would bring students and other volunteers to the YUM Village to assist in social work and to learn the value of contributing to the community.



Until recently, the YUM Village has been a home for orphans or children whose parents are of very meager means. Following a special recommendation by UNICEF and the Indonesian national government, the Village has encouraged children to stay with their parents and instead offers community development and educational support services. It remains in a transitional phase as it redefines its main responsibilities and areas of work, but it is already developing a sustainable organic agriculture project, which will eventually be a vocational training program for community members, and it offers stipends to send local children to school. There are social workers that help guide the children and their families to economically and psychologically stable futures.

Volunteers and coordinators ate, worked, and slept at the Village for the full two weeks. Every morning they rose and worked until lunch on the farm and on building renovations. Farm work included tilling soil and planting seeds, making compost, digging irrigation trenches, and harvesting ready crops. Building renovations included cleaning, stripping, and painting the dormitories and kitchen, painting murals of traditional “wayang” characters (Javanese shadow puppets) to bolster the children’s cultural identity, and installing a new gate to prevent further thefts of the compound’s livestock. After lunch and a rest, the volunteers led activities and

workshops with the local children. Up to 60 children between the ages of 7 and 15 came every afternoon. Volunteers were responsible for the concept and execution of all activities, and materials were provided by the Human Force program. Activities ranged from yoga, capoeira, and field games to jewelry making, embroidery lessons, and storytelling. Additionally, all volunteers assisted with ongoing English classes in the adjoining Vocational Training Center. They worked individually with the teacher to develop the lesson plan and run the 90-minute class.

One critical component was the participation and instruction of Erica Sapir from Puppeteers without Borders. She ran daily puppet workshops with the children, as well as capacity building sessions with the YUM staff. As she so aptly demonstrated, puppets can serve as an important tool for communication and conflict resolution, and in the future the staff will hopefully be able to use them to address both personal and group issues in the community.

Equally importantly as having an impact on others' lives, much attention was paid to how the experience affected the volunteers. After dinner, the coordinators led reflection sessions that related the experiences and challenges of the work to each volunteer's responsibility to the common good. They strived to identify the motivation to do social work and understand how it can be harnessed in one's daily life, regardless of professional or personal circumstances. In other words, the aim was to learn how to live Susila Dharma.

There were also outings to enrich the volunteers' understanding of the local context. There were two walks through Cipanas, one which brought volunteers into the homes and personal lives of the impoverished families nearby and offered a stark picture of the contrast between the slums and the extravagant resorts of rich weekend visitors. The other walk exhibited some of the local businesses, including a tempeh factory and fish, dairy, and flower farms. There were also outings to other villages that included watching an arts parade, cooking lessons, and a visit to a historical Javanese religious site. In addition to further developing volunteers' cultural awareness, these experiences helped provoke questions surrounding social responsibility.

Evaluations showed that by the end of the two weeks, both the project and volunteers felt that they had benefited from what they said was a "priceless" experience and, if the opportunity arose, would participate again in the future. The diversity of the program and the outings to the community were especial highlights for the volunteers, and YUM felt that all targets were met. Moving forward, the Human Force team will be focusing on refining the preparation phase to ensure the proper organization of the next camp, which they hope will take place in 2012. This includes regular communication and teamwork with designated contacts from the selected Susila Dharma project. The HF team would like to express its heartfelt thanks to everyone who has donated to the program or helped spread the word over the past few years, and especially to the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace for its generous support.

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