

AIA Newsletter – 2018.12.17

In 2008, during my Master of Architecture at The University of Melbourne, I participated in one of the first studios with The Bower Studio. It occurred here in Darwin's Palmerston's Indigenous Village (a.k.a. PIV or Gudorrka). It changed my entire career and life's trajectory. Since then my passion has been to give my time and skills to work in remote and disadvantaged communities throughout the Asia Pacific. It has always been with the goal of consulting with each community via respectful and consistent community engagement methodologies. After a couple of years being far removed from this type of work I have decided to take a mini-sabbatical to return and work on behalf of The Anganwadi Project (<https://anganwadiproject.com/>). With Sarah Sandberg, from Sydney, I will be working in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India in a first ever joint-venture project with The Rural Development Trust organization (<https://rdtfvf.org/>) to deliver TAP's first rural anganwadi (or pre-school). As explanation, Anganwadis are an Indian government initiative for childhood nutrition and early childhood education programs.

I have been recruited by TAP and will volunteer my time to live and work in India for the next 4- 6 months to oversee the design and construction of one of these school buildings. The community we are working in is called Bondalawada. In this area there are high proportions of people from both scheduled tribes (minorities) and scheduled castes (previously 'untouchables') in these communities. Literacy levels are low, especially amongst women (average 19%). The climate is hot and dry and the Anantapur area is regularly in drought which can make it difficult for farming communities to sustain themselves.

In close partnership with the local community, we will aim to create a beautiful, simple and safe space in which children can learn, at minimum cost. The anganwadis are constructed by local labourers and we aim to use largely re-cycled materials. The typical size of the building is approximately 64sqm and will cost approximately \$12,000.00 AUD; this equates to approximately \$180 per square meter construction rate.

I have been in Anantapur for almost one month now and the experience has already been extremely rewarding, eye opening, and enlightening. We have selected a site and have conducted three community engagement sessions, lasting around 3 hours each. We usually start with some fun exercise sketching or drawing and making collages with the kids, then we take time to discuss with the teacher her ideas on the project and where we are at with the design. We have a translator with us, who happens to be a female engineer that works for RDT. We use physical models and diagrams to assist with language barriers, as the community and teacher speak Telegu as their first language and may not be able to read drawings. And we always meet in the teacher's space, which is currently a village home, so we can discuss elements while they are in front of us. The aim of meeting in the teacher's space is to also break down any sense of the hierarchy. The next community meeting will be a design presentation as we are currently finalizing the conceptual design and will move into documentation stages very soon. We hope you will follow our progress on The Anganwadi project's social media platform (<https://www.facebook.com/The-Anganwadi-Project-136887003047341/>).

While the above is a brief synopsis of the project, you may also wish to follow my personal observations and thoughts via my blog, The AWOL Architect (<https://awolarchitect.blogspot.com/>).

Please note this blog is of no reflection of TAP or RDT's beliefs and they are not associated with the blog in any way.