

Photo by Joan Huntley



Third group hauling dirt.



Photo by Steve Craig

Work crew with family at work site.

A Different Work Experience

The PWG lends a helping hand to Habitat for Humanity India. By Nancy Zrymiak.

The Professional Women's Group teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to help build houses with local Indian families in February. About 28 women and family members from the PWG came together at a small village in north Bangalore to volunteer their time, strength and camaraderie.

We were greeted by Nirmala Rani, and the rest of the Habitat team. Nirmala explained the goals and ideas behind Habitat for Humanity, the work they do worldwide, and in India.

Habitat for Humanity International is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to eliminate poverty housing. Habitat India commenced in 1983 and has built and repaired more than 29,000 homes. Habitat is not a hand-out, but a hand-up program. Low income families must repay a no-profit loan to Habitat and "contribute own sweat equity (shramadhana) towards unskilled labour."

Volunteers are an important part of the Habitat campaign. Volunteers from all walks of life are encouraged to contribute to these BUILD projects and advocate for "an India where every citizen has a right to decent and simple housing."

Nirmala asked us to form four groups and each group set off to work on a different home. The homes were at different stages and everyone worked hard digging, hauling dirt or cement, or laying bricks. The home owners worked alongside of us and it was rewarding to work with each other and see the progress over the day.

During our lunch break Nirmala had some words of wisdom. She acknowledged that each of us could easily have paid a local Rs. 200 to do the work that we did. But she assured us that our time was as valuable to the community as our labour was. It showed the community that we valued them as people and cared enough to come and help. Not only that but each of us will share our experience with others and create awareness.

The teams bonded with each other, interacted with the homeowners and the curious local children. Everyone was eager to help out and it was hard to say goodbye. At the end of the day, we were all enriched by the experience organized by Habitat for Humanity and the Professional Women's Group.

Laying bricks and making progress – this is the size of the house.

Photo by Nancy Zrymiak

