



Spring 2020 Updates on the Work

2020 TIG INDIA TRIP

The annual March trip of TIG volunteers to India happened this year, even as concerns about coronavirus were increasing internationally. Along with founder, Paul Ramsey, four intrepid travelers spent two weeks in India visiting families and checking in with the schools and hospitals supporting them. John Valencia and Kerstin Eriksson, who have made the trip in previous years, were joined by newcomers Robyn Reichert and Lori Borman, both mental health professionals whose contributions regarding family and individual issues were invaluable. Half-way through the trip, India closed its borders to foreigners. The group continued their work and on March 15 flew back to the US with minimal travel disruption, a few days before India announced it was ending all international flights.



TIG's
2020 group
of travelers to
India pause for
a photo in the
entrance to a
temple

In Varanasi the group visited the two extended families whose ten children we've enrolled in the Imperial School. There are seven additional children in one of the extended families who will be entering school in the next few years. The group talked with the parents and their children, and met with the tutor and the principal at Imperial School for an update on the educational progress of all the children. The principal reported that the three older girls in our Varanasi families are doing particularly well in school—Gungun, who is featured in this newsletter, and sisters Pummy and Priya who will be featured in a future newsletter.

SUPPORTING THE TIG FAMILIES DURING THE CORONAVIRIS PANDEMIC

The first coronavirus case in India was diagnosed in late January and, as with the rest of the world, the curve of infections and deaths has increased dramatically. New Delhi, a city of 18.98 million people, is the world's second largest city with some of the world's poorest inhabitants, like the families we support, living together in one room in a neighborhood of open sewage drains and shared neighborhood toilets. Given those conditions, we expect to hear that family members have been infected.

The TIG group talked to families about the importance of hand sanitizer and face masks while they were in the country. Since returning, the situation in India has become more dire with thousands of diagnosed cases and hundreds of deaths. Schools and businesses have been closed. Indians have been ordered to shelter in their homes with local police enforcing the rule by using clubs on anyone violating it, and only one family member a day can go to the market for food during specific hours. Nobody in our families can work and the price of food has doubled.

As a result, TIG is now sending families money for food and water and insisting that everyone in the family wears a face mask. We've texted them no-sew instructions in Hindi with illustrations and asked them to send family pictures of everyone wearing a mask. In talking to the hospitals we work with, we've discovered that none of them have been authorized by the Indian government to treat the coronavirus, so we've identified nearby government hospitals that will be used for testing and treatment in preparation for the likely first case among our families. [**Please Donate Now!**](#)

SPOTLIGHT

Learning in Varanasi

Meet Roli Pandey, TIG's tutor in Varanasi. TIG made a decision several years ago to hire a tutor in each community of students we support. Our students enter school behind in skills and can get little academic support at home from their parents because, at their best, they are semi-literate and have had only a few years of or no schooling; so supplemental support from regular tutoring sessions is helpful and needed.

Our tutor in Varanasi is Roli Pandey, a university student. Roli just completed a Master's Degree in Finance at the Banarash Hindu University and hopes to work in a government bank after graduation. While completing her own studies, she tutors our Varanasi students.



Roli Pandey with her mother in their home



Roli tutors the TIG-sponsored students in the home she shares with her parents

Math is the most difficult subject for our students to learn according to Roli. Since English skills are critical, she uses English as much as possible when teaching, spending more time with the students who are struggling and encouraging her faster-learners to peer tutor. She also encourages students to come for tutoring on her days off when they are preparing for exams. Discipline and manners are stressed in her group tutoring sessions. "It will help them be helpful in Indian society," she explained.

Roli is planning on taking a course in career awareness so she can help our students think about career possibilities, apprenticeships, college scholarships, and government assistance for vocational schools and universities.

In addition to being their tutor, Roli hopes she serves as a mentor to the adolescent girls in our program (All but one of our older students in Varanasi are girls). While growing up her father was unable to work for 14 years due to a medical condition, so she knows what it's like to live in poverty in Varanasi. Her mother became her role model. She works in government programs to improve the lot of poor women in India. Roli, encouraged by her mother, realized that education and a university degree were the only way to improve her life and that of her family, so against the traditional social conventions in her caste, she made a decision not to marry

until she completes her studies and begins a career. She lives with her parents, a brother and sister in a house not far from Imperial School attended by all of TIG's Varanasi students and uses the family's roof-top room to conduct group tutoring sessions.



Here's Roli with a group of students that she mentors in another program that TIG is exploring supporting



Meet Gungun

Twelve-year-old Gungun's given name is Ganguotri but everyone calls her Gungun. She lives in Varanasi with her parents and two brothers in a one room home that also serves as a tourist souvenir shop on a ghat, the steps leading down to the Ganges River. Her favorite subject in school where is in the 5th grade is math, a subject she says is "easy" and "most interesting." Her teachers and tutor say that Gungun is one of their best students. In addition to math, she likes playing cricket and badminton, which are offered by Imperial School as extra-curricular classes.

When she's at home, Gungun helps her mother, works at the shop selling souvenirs, and studies. Gungun wants to finish school and become a District Collector, an Indian Civil Service job that's a combination of tax collector and policeman. "A Collector improves our society and makes it more safe," said Gungun.

TIG founder, Paul Ramsey, with Gungun & her brother at Assi Ghat

