



# On The Right Path

## One month with Institute for Indian Mother and Child

By Caroline Olsson and Emelie Looft

WE ARE IN AN EXTREMELY HOT AND green suburb of Kolkata, India. I'm sitting on a bed next to a fifteen-year-old girl. We talk about singing and dancing. And about nice smiles, especially the smile of the Japanese volunteer; she likes his smile. So do I. We talk about pain. I have a small bandage on my arm after a scratch. She shakes her head; "Not good." I should be more careful. I promise I will.

We are sitting in her hospital bed at the IIMC's indoor clinic. This fifteen-year-old girl wears a cervical collar that inhibits the formation of scar tissue on her neck. She stays at the clinic in order to get rehabilitation after a skin-transplantation from her thighs to her neck. The scar from the kerosene burn stretches from her cheeks over the chest, shoulders and arms down to her stomach.

Women at the campus talk about unhappy marriages. Sometimes, the husband or the husband's parents do not approve of the young wife or of the dowry her family paid for her wedding, and the bride will suffer accordingly. The problem with "burning brides" – where a bride is put on fire with intentions to either harm or kill her – is a widespread public health problem in India and resides from the patriarchal structures of the Indian society and the subjugated role of women. Over 8000 women are killed each year and only about 15 % of these cases make it to court.

The girl in the hospital bed is a victim of unjust social norms that she cannot control. She doesn't want to talk about what happened to her. But yes, she knows pain. She agrees that my pain under the bandage is small in comparison.

I have been at the IIMC- centre for three weeks. In total, we are 20 volunteers from different countries. The majority of my time is spent at the indoor or outdoor clinics; tending to wounds, administering injections and taking blood pressure, but there is so much more going on here. We have celebrated birthdays for the children at the orphanage. We have

visited schools and have been giving English lessons. One day we went out to play football on a muddy field with the teenagers in the soccer team of the villages. Another day I had paint all over my body after painting Minions at the walls of the nursing school.

**Covered in colors  
everyone looks the  
same, everybody is  
equal and strangers  
readily become  
friends.**

One morning, I am alone tending to the patients at the indoor clinic and I have twenty women and children to visit before lunchtime. By my side is Masudur, a ten-year-old boy who stays at the clinic while receiving treatment for a candida infection. He is a great help as he translates when the patient's English or my Bengali and body language is not enough. He holds a pen and paper and writes down the temperature and heart rate of a 2-year-old who has a big abscess on his scalp. He keeps track on the time on his mobile while I'm counting the slow breaths of an older woman. I tell Masudur that he is like a mini doctor, but he just shakes his head. He knows that no matter how hard he works in school he might not even have an opportunity to attend those kinds of studies.

The main focus for IIMC, apart from healthcare, is education. The IIMC sponsorship program gives the children the opportunity to go to school, something that can be life changing for not only the child, but for his or her whole family.

The other major focus for IIMC is women empowerment through projects like microcredit banks, Women's peace council and handicraft production. One early morning, during the last days of my stay here in Kolkata, I'm on my way to a

micro credit meeting on a motorbike driven by one of the incredible Indian volunteers Alim. He runs the five IIMC- banks that give over 25 000 women the opportunity to take loans for their own business. The surroundings are lush and rice fields, fishponds and brick houses with straw roofs surround the roads. I see a woman walking down the road with an umbrella protecting her from the sun, and I take out my camera to take a photo. Alim tells me that she is one of the mothers on her way to the meeting. There is something in her way of walking that makes me feel that we are on the right path.

Institute for Indian Mother and Child (IIMC) is a non-governmental organization, founded in 1989 by Indian physician Dr. Sujit Kumar Brahmochary, with the mission to provide health care to the poorest people of the region. The organization operates in West Bengal and in the rural areas of Kolkata, India. IIMC works through many different projects to enhance society in rural areas, including programs within education, sponsorship, economy, female empowerment, agriculture and production. The Swedish branch of IIMC, IIMC-Sweden, has a close collaboration with IFMSA and works primarily with the sponsorship program and by sending volunteers to Kolkata. ●

## IIMC

*Are you interested in sponsoring the education of a child in the rural parts of West Bengal? Or do you want to know more about volunteering in Kolkata? Send a mail to [iimc@ifmsa.se](mailto:iimc@ifmsa.se). Read more about IIMC at [www.iimcmissoncal.org](http://www.iimcmissoncal.org) and join the Facebook page IIMC-Sweden.*



