



UN Youth Volunteer Margaret Hmangte provides speech therapy to Paumuanlian, a 10-year-old child with speech impairment. (UNV, 2014)

UN Youth Volunteers give new breath to community initiative

In the district of Churachandpur, one of the remotest tribal areas of Manipur, India, there are little services for persons with disabilities and a lack of trained rehabilitation professionals. Four UN Youth Volunteers are bridging this gap by collaborating with the local community and helping them to run a school where physio-, speech- and language-therapy is provided to children with special needs.

Dipak, Kylie, Margaret and Shakeeb are four national UN Youth Volunteers working at the Centre for Community Initiative in the district of Churachandpur, one of the remotest tribal areas of Manipur, India, where there are little services for persons with disabilities and a lack of trained rehabilitation professionals.

The four UN Youth Volunteers are bridging this gap by collaborating with the local community and helping them to run a school where physio-, speech- and language-therapy is provided to children with special needs. They train teachers and parents so that, in future, they will be able to offer those services on their own.

"As I volunteer to train children in language and communication, I can see that these efforts are helping children to slowly learn the use of language for communication. This is creating a positive impact on their social skills, as well as preparing them for mainstream schools," says UN Youth Volunteer Margaret Hmangte. Thanks to the hard work of parents, teachers and volunteers, the number of children enrolled in school has increased from 13 to 25.

Going the extra mile, the UN Youth Volunteers also sensitize local organizations, mainstream school teachers, volunteers, and public and government officials, to make sure that they are aware of the needs of those children. So far around 40 parents of persons with disabilities, nine teachers of "The Malsawm Initiative" (TMI) and ten teachers from regular private school have been given training on physiotherapy, speech therapy, special education and awareness on inclusive education.

The UN Youth Volunteers' commitment benefits them as well as society as a whole. By working with families coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they help to overcome prejudice and long-lasting conflict. This is how they foster peace and development where it really counts - in one of India's most remote areas and among the most vulnerable of its people.

"At a personal level, volunteerism has brought significant differences as I have realised the importance of team work in development issues, and made me realize disability is a human rights issue. Similarly my coming to the north-eastern part of the country, which is culturally diverse, also brings a feeling of goodwill from people of mainland India and strengthens the belief that, in spite of our differences, we have solidarity for our fellow citizens in faraway place," says UN Youth Volunteer Shakeeb Ahmed Khan.

"This may act as a building block for promoting peace and development, and I believe the spirit of volunteerism will help to unite society, with their differences intact. Above all, volunteerism has made me a more humble and better human being!"

- India • Persons with disabilities

Sustainable Development Goal: