



The Yak Pack Theatre Project

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This summer, two Bournemouth families – The Malans and the Lindsey-Clarks travelled to the Himalayas with The Yak Pack Theatre Project. As a cast of 4 adults and their 5 children, they performed the original fairy tale 'Jambhala' throughout the remote and impoverished Spiti Valley in India, where people live in some of the worlds highest villages.

The Yak Pack Theatre Project had the dual aims of providing the joy and entertainment of live theatre to these isolated rural communities, and sharing the concept of Theatre-in-Education in a practical way.



The Project has been a real success. We held 13 performances in schools, monasteries, old peoples' homes, village temples and party halls. We performed for 1850 people, reaching 1 in 10 of the people who live in the Spiti Valley. We estimate that more than a third of all Spitian school children saw the show.

We simply couldn't have reached so many children without the generous support of our local community, who donated their time, money, expertise and resources to help us make it happen. Thank you!

The Play, "Jambhala", is the story of one boys quest to find wealth. Disillusioned by his simple life in a rural village, he leaves to seek his fortune in the big city. The story explores themes common to rural societies all over the world, whether that's a village in Dorset or one high in the Himalayas.

“After performances there were always conversations about the meaning of wealth. It was so interesting – and often inspiring - to hear their views, whether from a retired nun, a teacher, a Himalayan pea farmer, or a 6 year old at boarding school.”

Peter Malan



Juliette sharing drawings from children at Christchurch Infants School

The performance was very interactive, with live music, opportunities for audience members to have small parts in the play if they wish, and sound effects provided by the audience.



Children in Langza village, performing in the show as watch-sellers in the market place scene

“ I was surprised to see how much they loved joining in with you, it makes it very memorable for the children. ”

Naren Rana, an official in the local government school department

“ It’s rare that you see children, especially children with autism, so involved in something... I felt so happy seeing Autkesh being so happy, because he has autism and he is always lost in his own world most of the time... but today, with all the acting and the masks and all that, he was enjoying so much, he was laughing out loud, I really felt very well. ”

Ipsha,
special educational needs centre at Day Star School



Villagers watching the show

For the first half of the Project, we concentrated on performances at primary schools. Teachers and educators in Spiti were able to chat to Yak Pack members after the performance and share ideas about using the show to inspire lessons. We took bags of school resources with us, simple practical items like pencils and crayons, reams of paper, modelling clay, card and scissors, backed up with a booklet of ideas, to facilitate lessons with a creative streak!



Kaku, our Spitian cast member, who translated the dialogue into either Hindi (in schools) or Spitian (in villages), so that everyone could understand the story.



“This is our first time to see foreigners who came from far off places. A different kind of experience in front of the children, and in different languages. I hope they can learn many things. We didn't see such things in our lives before so we've got many new ideas from you guys. Not to go with the books only, we can play, we can teach them acting, and act something ourselves.”

Nailatha and Ramesh
teachers at Serkong School in Tabo



“With one group we have started short stories, we did two stories in the previous semester, this semester we'll try to do this one. So we'll simplify the sentences, shorten it up, and with the pictures and colouring and all that we can use it. Both the English story as well as in Hindi”

Ipsha
special needs teacher at Day Star School

We finished the first half of the project with a performance at Spiti Old Age Home, where about 25 retired nuns live. The Old Age Home was in the same village as a large Buddhist Monastery where about 100 student monks live and are educated. Many Spitian children take this route through education rather than school. We met with the Monastery Head teacher to drop off some resources for their school, and talk about creative learning. He sent about 40 young monks to enjoy the performance with us at the Home, which the elderly nuns absolutely loved.



Retired nuns and student monks watching the show at Ki Old Age Home

During the second part of the Project, yaks and donkeys took our trekking theatre company from village to village in some of the highest inhabited places on earth, more than 15,000ft above sea level – quite a shock to the system when you come from Bournemouth! Although the altitude made life challenging at times, we did get to send postcards home from the world's highest post office in Hikkim village!

The yaks and donkeys were an essential part of our theatre company. The donkeys carried the props, costumes and instruments. The 2 yaks carried a succession of children (and a few adults!) as we struggled with altitude sickness and the physically demanding nature of high altitude trekking interspersed with performances! Luckily the children had under-studied each other, and flexible scripting meant that the show could go on!



Walking from village to village, nothing between villages except the mountains all around

Here, the tiny village schools were closed for the summer, and everyone was working hard in their family fields to bring in the pea harvest.

We performed at the end of the working day, in dusty temples and dimly lit party halls.

What the venues lacked in appeal, the audiences more than made up for. Few villagers had seen anything quite like our show before, and they watched and joined in with energy, enthusiasm and laughter.



In a world without many modern conveniences (like mobile phone reception or an internet connection!) their appreciation for good entertainment was clear.

Each tiny village was home to just a few hundred people; surrounded on all sides by the desolate beauty of the high Himalayas, with not even another village in sight.

We felt so grateful to be able to share our performance in such an isolated corner of the world.



Shows in tiny dusty village temples



We returned to Kaza, the main town in the Spiti Valley, for a final performance.

Originally planned as a show just for families of children with special needs, we soon found the hall filled with other groups who had heard about the show too!

About 50 nuns came from 2 different nunneries, and a group of student monks came from the teaching monastery in Kaza. We also had an after school club attending, with children whose parents worked.



The final day of the Yak Pack Theatre Project was spent at Spiti Childrens Room, where we donated the props and costumes we didn't need to bring home.

We chose the Children's Room because its mission is very similar to our own - to provide creative and imaginative learning opportunities to children that don't have any.

Since arriving back in Bournemouth (with something of a bump!), we've been invited onto local radio and television to talk about the Project – you might have seen Juliette, Benny, Izzy and Ben on South Today.

Recently, local company LiMETOOLS has taken on the challenge of producing a documentary about The Yak Pack. Peter Malan filmed every aspect of the project whilst we were in India, from learning to ride yaks to performing in impossibly small dark temples.

“Our products are being used in areas where the sustainability of the environment is becoming a real challenge. We have great respect for any organisation that is brave enough to try and support these communities in different ways. The Yak Pak Project has used its considerable skills and passion to deliver that support and we are privileged to be able to help them tell that story in the hope that it may encourage others.”

John Dale Co-Founder of LiMETOOLS

We're so excited about the LiMETOOLS documentary! Their generous sponsorship will help us to spread the word about the power of theatre in schools and beyond, especially in parts of the world where creative and playful learning is rarely a part of the curriculum. Every school we went to in Spiti has asked us to come back, every village, the local state education department, and even the King. The sheer need for this kind of work was so clear.

To everyone who made this project a reality....Thank you.

Love from the Yak Pack

