

## In their own words...

### India: Child quarry workers get help to go back to school

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IPEC partner organization MVF (Mamidipudi-Venkatarangaiya Fdn.) in Andhra Pradesh works to remove children from child labour and get them into school. The following are descriptions of the working lives of child quarry workers who participated in a MVF “bridge” camp to prepare them to return to school.

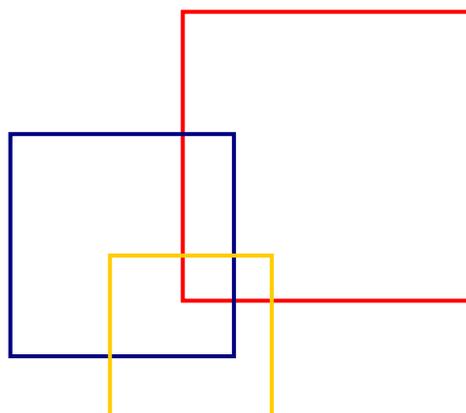
**1 Gopal**, 12 year-old boy, class 5 school dropout.

I come from an agricultural farming family. We own about 5 acres of land. Since my parents quarrelled with my grandparents, they abandoned agricultural work and took up quarrying. My brothers have all gone to school-the older one has joined police service. My mother could not take the buffaloes out for grazing and I had to take on her work. Since then I dropped out of school and started to work. I was soon recruited to work along with my parents in the quarries. I had to do polishing and ‘sponging’ of granites. All under the hot sun starting at 6 in the morning until 6 in the evening. I was paid Rs.50/- per day for this work. In addition, in the evening I washed slurry. This was a painful process and each day I had blisters on my feet. They were so sore that I could hardly walk. I got Rs. 30/ per day as wages for this work. The MVF volunteer met me and asked if I would join school. I told my father and after talking to him I came to the camp.

**2 Subhan Basha**, 12 year-old boy, Class 1 school drop-out.

I have two brothers. They never went to school. All three of us went to work on the quarries and earned Rs. 20/- a day. Our parents did no work and lived off begging for alms. We went to work at 7 in the morning and came at 6 in the evening.

My work was to carry the rubble from the quarry site. These were very sharp stones and I could hardly stand on it. My feet bled all the time and all I could do was silently weep in pain but go on. My step mother would not let me stay back at home, not even for one day. She was always scolding me for everything. I could not even seek refuge in the school as I had a mortal fear of school and felt that the teacher would beat me up. Therefore, I never went to school even after my father told me several times that I should join schools. I took the easy route out of school and joined work. A friend of mine from my village who was at one time a fellow quarry worker came one day and told me about the camp where he was studying. He said that he was no longer at work and that he liked to be with friends, in study and at play. I decided to join the camp too. That’s how I am here.



### **3 V. Balanjaneyulu, 14-year old boy.**

I am the oldest in the house and have a younger brother and a sister. I studied up to class one and so did my brother. My father worked carrying head loads to fill the truck and my mother worked on the quarry site. My father was an alcoholic and never gave any money home. My mother had to send all of us to work instead. I got Rs.30/- and worked all day from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening. I loaded the stones in the lorry and cut the stones to shape. To do this I even got Rs. 50/ a day. I hurt my hand and fingers all the time while chiselling the stone. Quite painful! To top it we were working in the hot sun where the temperatures went up to 50 degrees Celsius. My younger sister too joined me in this work. One day an MVF volunteer contacted me and my parents. Our parents would not listen. The volunteers came so many times home. Even then our parents did not listen. One day some 'English' visitors from Netherlands came to the quarry site. We were 30 of us working on the quarry. They took a film on our work. We were asked once again by the MVF team to abandon work and join schools. I went to my parents and told them how I want to study. To convince my parents, MVF volunteers took all of us-my mother, father and sister to the camp at Dhone. We spent a whole day there to see all that was happening in the camp. After we returned the entire family discussed the camp. It took my parents one whole week of discussions before they relented and finally packed me and my sister off to the camp.

### **4 Ramadevi, d/o V. Ramanjanulu, 12 years Palukuru, Mandal Banaganapalli, Kurnool District.**

I have an older brother and a younger brother. Both have studied up to class one. My father is an alcoholic and a drunkard. We could not continue in school and soon joined the quarry work. I had to

work all day without any rest. It was only for lunch, that we were allowed some rest and that too a short one. I had to load the stones on to the truck at the quarry site. I also chiselled stones and this took a heavy toll on my body . I got hurt several hundred times yet went on and on. One day there was a film team that came from The Netherlands and they shot me and my brother while at work. We were beginning to feel the truth in the words of the MVF volunteers that children should not work and should go to school. Both of us felt that we should not be seen as child labourers but as students and were determined to go to school. We told our family and the MVF volunteers to rescue us. We are now in the camp and studying very hard to go to school.

### **5 Balanjaneyulu, 14-year old boy.**

I have one elder sister, three elder brothers and two younger brothers. Only the youngest of the lot went to school. I was working on the quarry and earned Rs 30/- a day. I worked all day from morning to evening. I was involved in chiselling of stones, making them into rubble, carrying head loads and all other very painful tasks. I had blisters on my hands and feet all the time. There was no day when I did not get hurt and cry in pain. My father would tell me to stop working but I would not listen to him. One day the blisters on my hands were unbearably sore and bleeding that my father said that I should take some rest. I said OK and stopped for one whole week. I felt that staying back from work would cause a lot of trouble to the family and was anxious about the incomes. How will we survive if I took rest I asked myself? I went to night classes with my friend in the village every day. He had dropped out of class 6 but joined these tuition classes. I was a very good student and did better than my friend in studies. My teacher was so impressed that he sent me to the camp at Dhone. At last deliverance from a miserable working life where there was

nothing but endless toiling and countless injuries was in sight.

**6 M. Subbamma d/o M. Guruviah**, 12 year-old, Village -Kotharamapuram, Mandal Atmakur, Kurnool District.

We are three of us. I am the eldest with my younger sister in class 3 and my younger brother too being out of school. I worked in the quarry carrying head loads of sand. My parents quarrelled all the time and my mother could not take my father's insults and violence any longer. She drank pesticides and committed suicide. My father remarried and my stepmother ill treated me. I just could not bear the drudgery of work and everyday battle in the family. I ran away from home and gave a police complaint. They gave a strict warning to my parents and relocated me with my family. Fortunately, just at that time the MVF volunteers came home and all the three of us joined the bridge course camp. I can read and write now and am waiting to go to school. My younger sister too is studying in the camp with me.

**7 M. Radhika, d/o M. Venkateswarlu**, 12 year-old, Class 6 school drop out, Village Kotharamapuram, Mandal-Atmakur, District Kurnool.

I have two elder siblings (a brother and sister) and two younger siblings (a brother and sister). My parents weave mats and baskets. I would go along with my elder sister to the quarries. We both carried head loads of rubble. After we returned home we helped the family in weaving baskets. My mother was very ill and my father a drunkard. The entire family responsibility was on me and my sister. We worked at home, on the quarries, in the kitchen and everywhere else. It was work, work and work all the time. One day when we were in the quarries an MVF volunteer met us and our father. They must have talked to him a thousand times. Fed up of such persuasion, our father sent both of us to the camp. We were the first ones in our family to study.

As you know, girls seldom go to school in our community. I want to study hard and join school, college and march on and on.

**8 Chintakuntla Yellamma d/o C. Yelliah**, 12 year-old, Village-Kotharamapuram, Mandal -Atmakur, Kurnool District.

My parents work on a quarry site. My brother is in class 8 and joins us in vacation time and during weekends to earn money. In fact one day while at work my brother broke his little finger. My father would not let him stop work. He said that we cannot afford to have excuses for not working. We must be tough. I was in school up to class 5 and dropped out to join the family in quarry work. I carried head loads of rubble in the searing heat and sun. My eyes watered all the time. Yet I had to work. When I got back home I was forced to do all the domestic work, fetch water, fuel wood and even go to my grand mother's house to help her! My uncle could not see me work so hard. He heard about the bridge camp at Atmakur and took me there. I was simply elated to see the children in the camp. I could not believe it to be true. I wept looking at them and the newness of the camp. I wept out of joy. It seemed so unreal. Soon I brought my younger sister too to the camp. My parents visit us often and I like my camp.

