



Darjeeling Children's Trust Newsletter January 2018

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The last six months have seen major upheavals in Darjeeling. With the failure of local political pressure on government to declare the Darjeeling area a semi-autonomous region an all-out strike was called in mid-June which lasted for three months. This resulted in the closure of shops, banks, all government offices and all education establishments. In other words, life stopped. UK trustees were also unable to make their usual autumn visit. There were many consequences for the sponsored children and young people supported by the Trust. They were unable to go to school or college and their parents were unable to work and earn money. Many became hungry and as a result DCT spent some of its funds to provide some basic supplies such as rice and lentils. This was a one-off action.

Thankfully the strike ended in late September and life started to resume some normality. Schools and other establishments gradually re-opened and people started to resume their lives. Schools and colleges continued their winter term longer than usual until late December to help students catch up with some of their missed education but they are now closed until the start of March – it is too cold in the mountains for teachers and students to continue as normal in unheated buildings. The older students and especially those who are approaching major exams still have a learning deficit to make up. DCT is recognising these problems and special classes are being held for the older children during the months of the school closures. A big thank you to our trustees in Darjeeling for all their work in supporting the children over the past difficult year.

A big thank too, to you all for your continued support. DCT will continue to monitor this situation and will take any additional measures we identify as necessary to help the children.

Warmest best wishes and a happy and peaceful year to you all in 2018,
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson, Darjeeling Children's Trust

The food relief and some of the children who benefitted from your generosity



Vocational Training starts again

Another six young people have now been accepted to study hotel management at the Food and Craft Institute in Darjeeling, bringing the total to 42 who are either studying or who have already completed the course. The six new students were interviewed in spring and had to take an entry exam at the college to gain access to the course.



All come from poor families all with only one income, a family situation usual in Darjeeling. Neelam's father is an agricultural worker, Sanjana and Sushma's father are labourers earning a daily wage, and Kriti's father is a cook, all with little financial security. They all want to train, get good jobs and be able to help their families. Sanjana made a conscious decision not to go on to college and to undertake further study. She told the Trust that she knows many young people who have Master's degrees but who still can't find a job. Instead, she wants to train at the FCI and she told us:-

"I don't dream to become very rich or a very big person, but I will try my best to do something in my future. I want to do something for my Mum and Dad."

Sanjana is a very bright, personable young woman with very good language skills and she will undoubtedly do well and achieve her dream.

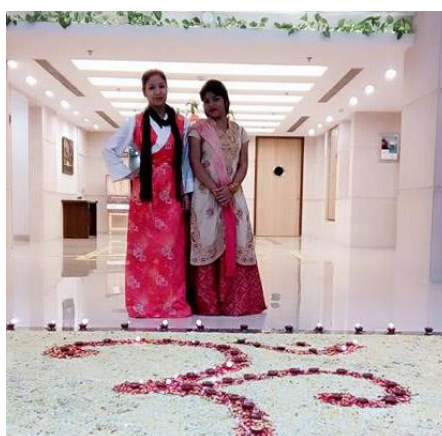
Catching up with former FCI students

Two young people who were sponsored by DCT in the past to undertake vocational training at the FCI are achieving their dream with good jobs and incomes which allow them to help their families.

Ugesh was one of our early students who qualified in 2012. After completing his in-service training and working for a short time in India he got a job in the middle east where he now has a very successful career. He is building a house in Darjeeling for his family, something he could never have dreamed of when we first met him. At that time he lived with his parents, and the family house had recently been swept away, luckily with no loss of life, during a landslide when heavy monsoon rains struck the town

We have met him from time to time on his return trips to Darjeeling and this year was a special one for him as during his visit he married his childhood sweetheart.

We all wish them many years of happiness, health and good times together.



Madhu was also one of our first students who started her training in 2011 – the photo far left was taken at that time. Shown behind her desk and (left) with a colleague, 6 years after she qualified, she is a poised and confident young

woman working in a responsible job in Bangalore and living in Mysore. We wish her luck too in her future life.

Exciting times at the beauty salon

Some young people don't have the qualifications needed to go to college and without help may be destined for a life of poverty. For the last two years DCT has supported three young women each year to undertake training in a local beauty salon so that they have the opportunity to support themselves in the future. The three young women who recently started their training now bring this total to nine and are typical of those who preceded them.

Yashika's father is a monk with a monthly income of about 2,500 rupees (about £40 in £GB) to maintain his family. She went to school until Class 9 but failed to take any major exams to help her become qualified and get a job. Sharmila left school at an even earlier stage in her education after Class 7 when she was probably about 14 or 15. Her father is a casual labourer and earns about 2,200 rupees a month. Bishaka managed to complete her Class 10 at the local school but did not have a job before she started her training. Her father works on a local tea garden and earns about 2,500 rupees a month. All have siblings who need parental support.

At the start of their training DCT provides their uniforms and basic equipment. Once qualified as beauticians they will be able to set up their own small business at home or work in one of the numerous salons in Darjeeling. With just a pair of scissors and a comb income can be earned and money gathered to buy more sophisticated equipment.

This is one more way in which by your support you are helping to change lives and create opportunities for young people to flourish.



School improvements at Mahatma Gandhi School



Some of the staff at Mahatma Gandhi School who have worked with DCT to make their school safer and more secure are shown in the above photo. Some of the improvements they have requested are shown here including the construction of a fence around part of the play area to stop the students falling over the edge onto the footpath four or five feet below, a new roof and floor and repairs to the school hall, provision of white boards, glass to windows and a security gate and fence. DCT is continuing to help and support the school by funding the construction of a new security fence around the rest of the play area and a new gate to keep out intruders who have damaged equipment and classrooms over the last year or so. The school has an inclusive policy and gives an education to children who ask to attend school, including those who may have been excluded from other schools and children from the families of itinerant workers on the local tea estates.

You can't learn on an empty stomach

For the past two years DCT has been funding school lunches for a small number of children or young people at Mahatma Gandhi School. They may walk for more than an hour to get to school but their families can't provide them with enough money to buy lunch to get them through the school day. This year four young people, three of whom are shown here, have a simple meal every lunch time which is paid for by DCT and cooked in the kitchen of a house next to the school. It is enough to keep them going through their lessons and on the long walk home.



Desperate to learn – education matters and is a treasured gift

Trustees have just been told of one of the young people who is sponsored through the Trust and who without doubt is desperate to learn. He is a young man of about 17 years of age who has had a difficult life. His mother is illiterate and has had few opportunities in life. Her son often truanted from school and failed some of his exams in his earlier years, but DCT held faith with him and continued to maintain its support. When he started to attend his current school, he seemed to turn a corner; he stopped truanting and worked hard and a year ago he told us that he had the ambition of training to become a chef and undertaking the vocational training course at the FCI.

A couple of weeks ago he passed out at school and was taken to hospital by the male teachers at his school where it was found that he had had nothing to eat for days. He had passed out from hunger. He is now being given a daily meal at lunchtime in the school canteen paid for by DCT. It is overwhelming to think that he was so desperate to attend lessons in order to pass important exams which he will take in spring that he forced himself to go to school, despite the state he was in.

Annual meeting with the sponsored children and their families

The school year has finished in Darjeeling and schools are now closed until the beginning of March. Preparations start early though for the next school year and in a couple of weeks' time, trustee Nima Wangdi will call everyone together for a visit to the tailor to be measured up for new school uniforms. The children grow rapidly and the uniforms get hard wear so inevitably need to be replaced annually. In late December DCT trustees in Darjeeling met up with the sponsored children and their families to review the past year, to go over reports and identify any problems that need to be addressed, to exchange contact information and to make sure that everyone understands the need to keep in touch, for children to do their homework and to attend school regularly.



The good news is that only two children failed their annual exams and will need to resit, even after the disruption caused by the lengthy strike when schools were closed.

Extra tuition is underway

Every year DCT provides extra tuition for the sponsored children who are about to take their Class 10 and Class 12 exams in March and April. These are important milestones along the way which will determine how far the young people can go in their education and ultimately what careers they might pursue.

This year though has been special for everyone as so much time in the classroom has been lost due to the strike. Although this may not make a huge difference for the very young, it can make a significant difference to the older pupils. DCT has arranged for extra classes in English and Maths for all children in classes 6-9. So, every weekday children are giving up two hours of their holidays and making their way to the school hall at Mahatma Gandhi school to catch up on their learning. The location was chosen specially because being a wooden building with good windows it will be warmer than many others even without any heating. The children still sit in their coats though to keep warm.



Orphanage news

Construction work on the orphanage came to a temporary halt this year partly due to the strike but is now due to restart in the next few days. Many of the children and young people stayed on during the strike as at least Pema Bhante was able to provide them with food donated by local well wishers. The winter sun is currently shining in Darjeeling, so once engineer Ramesh has gathered the labour force together, building progress should be rapid on the girls' accommodation.



Meanwhile a group of DCT supporters paid a visit during their trip to the hills and met up with Pema Bhante and DCT trustee Major Wangdi in Darjeeling and were shown the orphanage project. They kindly made donations to support the children.

Fund Raising News – and a big thank you from the children of Darjeeling

A huge thank you to everyone who has donated money or time to help the children in Darjeeling and to support our projects. You are making a difference to young lives

The Estate Tea Company - our new partner

Thomas Webb, who founded and runs the Estate Tea Co. which specialises in sourcing single estate teas from some of the world's greatest tea gardens, tells us why he has chosen to support the work DCT does.

"Notably in the last year, we have been directly trading with some of Darjeeling's finest tea producers which enables us to tell our customers the complete story of who, what, where and why these teas were produced. Working closely with producers, you can't be oblivious to the issues in the tea industry, and the impact that it has on local communities. The current political climate in Darjeeling has had a severe effect on the availability of Darjeeling teas within our industry and it does not take much digging to see the wider impact. During the strike tea gardens ceased production, shops, schools and banks all closed - furthering the problem for children in the region. This is why we choose to support the Darjeeling Children's Trust in their efforts to raise money and support for the schools of Darjeeling.



We will gladly be donating £2.00 from the sale of our Darjeeling tea retail packs to the Trust. It might not be much, but it's a start - and something that I hope will increase our customers awareness in these issues."

A huge thank you to Tom, this is a wonderful gesture that will make a difference to the lives of children. More information about Tom's company and the teas it sells can be found at www.estateteaco.co.uk

Amazing effort at Euromonitor Int. London

On every third Thursday of the month staff at Euromonitor Int. London host a fund-raising evening. A different team of volunteers runs the event and selects the theme and the charity each month and comes up with ways to raise as much money on the night as they can. The drinks and snacks are provided for by the company so everything the employees donate for drinks, raffle, games on the night goes to the chosen charity.

The event – a celebration of Oktoberfest - went really well and the great sum of £1,423.94 was raised! As part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programme, Euromonitor Int. very generously doubled what the team raised to the brilliant total of £2,847.88. A huge thank you to Lisa, Lena and the London HR team for choosing to support DCT and for all their hard work, and also to the company's generosity in doubling the money they raised.



Their initiative is supporting Darjeeling Children's Trust active programme to improve the lives of children and young people in Darjeeling through education, training and changes to their living conditions

Another great evening hosted by Sharmila Bousa

Thanks to everyone who came along to the Stella and Dot jewellery evening in Bristol in December in aid of Darjeeling Children's Trust, and to the lovely Sharmila Bousa for donating her commission to a great cause. I'm not sure there were many Christmas presents bought, but we certainly treated ourselves!

EduKidz – our new partner

Grant Robertson who founded and runs EduKidz which sources and sells educational toys and resources to give children a lifelong love of learning, tells us why he chooses to support the children of Darjeeling.

"The Darjeeling Children's Trust has a clear vision, and it is one which resonates profoundly with the ethos of EduKidz. The charity aims to improve the lives of children in Darjeeling through education, providing better living conditions and providing career training. EduKidz is proud to be a supporter of the Darjeeling Children's Trust which is an incredible charity offering real chances and opportunities for disadvantaged children in Darjeeling, India

We're proud to announce that we'll be supporting them through collaborations and donating 10p of every sale made on EduKidz to support this amazing scheme. Every time you buy a learning resource or educational toy from EduKidz you'll be supporting and donating to children who can't take their education for granted. And what a difference you'll be making!"



A huge thank you to Grant who will be visiting Darjeeling in March and who will see for himself what a difference his - and your - support is making. More information about EduKidz can be found at www.edukidz.co.uk

A great fund raising evening is taking place on Friday 20th April 2018 7.00pm until late

Please come and join us for a night of entertainment and fundraising to **celebrate the Darjeeling Children's Trust 10th Anniversary**. The event will feature: Champagne and canape reception, three course meal, live Indian dancing, live auction, silent auction, tombola, goody bags.

Where: Grange Tower Bridge Hotel, 45 Prescott Street London E1 8GP

Early bird tickets are available until the end of January via our web site www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.org.uk or via our Facebook page.

The Trust has transformed the lives of many children in Darjeeling through the generosity of YOU, our supporters.