

Darjeeling Children's Trust Summer Newsletter, 2010



Dear Friends and Supporters.

Winter is always a quiet time in Darjeeling. Schools close as it becomes too cold in buildings without heat for both children and staff to carry on; many families who have the money retreat to the warmth of the Plains, and those children at the orphanages who have family return home for a couple of months. March sees the renewal of activity in the town including the work of the Trust. This spring exciting new projects have been started in vocational training, works have been completed and new works commissioned in schools, arrangements have been made for a Children's Festival in early October and plans are being prepared for the redevelopment of the boys' orphanage site which will eventually accommodate both boys and girls. Existing projects have continued with a Fun Day for sponsored children and their siblings, support for the girls' orphanage to improve their health care and an increase in the number of schools visited by the Travelling Library.

As always, thank you for the support which you give to the Darjeeling Children's Trust,
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

Vocational Training Starts

There are many young people leaving college and university in India with good academic qualifications but because they have no other skills, they have great difficulty in getting a job. The Trust is helping a number of young people acquire vocational skills which hopefully will allow them to avoid this situation in the future. The scheme began in spring 2010.



Two local women qualified in needlework skills are being employed to teach crochet, knitting and sewing to ten girls at the Kripasaran Orphanage. The first three months have been spent learning crochet and the techniques the girls have learnt have allowed them to produce a variety of baby wear items. Wool and needles have been bought and in the next few months 4 sewing machines and 2 knitting machines will be provided.

There is a ready market for such goods on the



market stalls in Darjeeling. The profits raised will be divided between buying more materials and a savings account for the girls with the money to be given to them when they leave the orphanage when they might wish to set up their own business.

In addition, four young men (two of whom are shown here studying the college brochure) and one young woman are being supported to train in the hospitality industry over



the next 18 months, skills for which there is a ready market both in Darjeeling and the rest of India. The training, which will be delivered by the Food and Craft Institute in the town, comprises a year's theory followed by six months' practical experience in hotels. If successful the students will achieve a nationally recognised Diploma.

Computer skills too are always in demand and eight young people, four boys and four girls, are being supported in attending computer training courses which are being delivered by a local company at their centre in the town. If the students are successful in passing the courses in basic skills they will progress onto the more advanced modules. Training takes place at weekends which allows students to continue their studies during term time.

English Language Professional Development Course for teachers



Interactive workshops for primary school teachers in methods of English teaching began in April and are part of a programme which should last a minimum of two years. The aim of this work has been to help teachers improve their own English thereby allowing them to better help the children they teach. Feedback about the course has been very positive.

Claire Creegan, our first volunteer in the project, wrote of her experience:

From pretty early on in the project, the sessions took the format of an initial chat about that session's topic eg. storytelling in the classroom. Then the teachers spent the remainder of the class actually trying out the activity. Some of the teachers reported that their confidence had increased and they had begun trying out some of the activities in the classroom with the result that students seemed more encouraged to raise their hand and speak in class.

The Travelling Library

Sabita continues her successful work visiting schools and engaging children with reading. Children at Toong Soong school, shown in the photos below, are just as focused on her storytelling as the children of Agam Singh had been last year.



The teachers at Red Cross school made a request that she take sessions at their school and these have now started. Children from all the eight schools which she visits will take part in the story telling competition which will be held over August and September with the winner's prize being awarded during the Children's Festival on October 3rd.

A Date for the Diary: October 3rd The Children's Music Festival

We often take music for granted; our parents may have sung to us, we hear it on the TV or radio and, for many of today's children, singing is a major part of life at primary school.

Research has shown that learning to sing helps young children's brain function grow and expand, that singing can improve physical co-ordination especially when action songs are part of the repertoire, and music helps children express their emotions, work as a team and creates an appreciation for other arts.

With their rote learning and restricted curriculum, the municipal primary school children in Darjeeling do not have the opportunity to experience these benefits. To offset this, the Trust is organising a Children's Music Festival on October 3rd this year.



Learning to sing

A music teacher, Rajib Lakandra, has been employed and is visiting eleven schools in all plus the boys' orphanage to teach singing, whilst the girls from the orphanage are practising two Nepalese dances. The theme of the festival is East meets west and in addition to choirs singing individually, all the children are learning three songs in common, two in English and one in Nepalese, which they will come together to sing in unison.



Practising dancing

Schools in the UK are also involved and are learning the same songs. They will learn too about the lives of the children in India. We plan to video the event both in the UK and India so experiences can be shared.

It promises to be a stunning day with over 400 attending most of whom will be children, coming together to make music and enjoy a community event.

Child Sponsorship



A sponsored child usually starts his or her new school when the school year begins in March. Late January and February see a flurry of activity as children are taken to be measured for their new uniform and new shoes, and school bags and other equipment is bought. We hope that the big items such as jackets, trousers and pinafores will last two years so the smallest children sometimes look a little lost in their new clothes – but they will grow. One of the benefits of returning to Darjeeling year on year is the pleasure of seeing how the children who were first sponsored through the Trust nearly three years ago are growing in confidence and ability.

Events remind us too frequently of the benefits that sponsorship can bring in providing these children with options for their lives when they are older. One little boy's mother is a porter who recently fell and broke her leg whilst carrying a huge load of bricks on her back. Another boy's father has recently died. Without sponsorship both these children would probably have been destined to lives of hard manual labour following in the family tradition.

A Fun Day Out



All the sponsored children came together with their brothers and sisters for a Fun Day on a wet Saturday morning in May. The monsoon seemed to be starting early so luckily a large hall had been booked, providing lots of space for games such as Mr. Wolf which produced much hilarity. Action songs too were popular. Everyone had a picnic lunch and then sat down with pencils and crayons to draw a picture.

Working with Schools

The Trust continues to work in partnership with schools and over the winter the planned new toilet and water harvesting project at Suratam school was completed. The new water tank feeds down directly into the toilet and provides water for flushing and hand washing. All that remained in April 2010 was for the rubble to be cleared from the entrance and this has now been done. In addition the school had a major problem during the monsoon period as water came down into the entrance area in front of the classrooms, leading to flooding. The Trust has paid for a new canopy to be erected to throw the water away from the side of the building, leaving the access area dry underfoot, a significant improvement for a relatively small amount of expenditure.



Water harvesting tank



New toilet



Area prone to flooding Work on the new canopy

Teachers

Other works were also commissioned in April. A new toilet is now nearly complete at Prabudas school and a major scheme of repair works has been started at Bhanubhakta school, one of the poorest that the Trust supports. Works include a new toilet, removal of broken wooden floors and their replacement with concrete, repair to windows including new surrounds and glazing to keep out the cold and monsoon rains, and a new coat of paint.

This is one of the poorest schools in the market area with few resources.



Corridor & classroom!



Toilet site

On-going support for the Orphanages

In addition to familiar faces there were some new ones at the girls' orphanage this year as the numbers have crept up. There are now 45 girls who are being given a home. Conditions are even more cramped as a result so the work of Basanti, the health visitor employed by the Trust, is even more important. Visiting twice at weekends, she acts as advisor and confidante and is working with the girls to help them maintain their health and routines of good personal care.

At the start of the school year each girl received a large and small towel plus medicated soap and toothpaste. Thanks to your donations the Trust has now been able to extend the scheme to the boys' orphanage and each boy has also received towels, soap and toothpaste.



Receiving towels



Three boys from the orphanage

These items will continue to be provided to both orphanages as and when they are needed.

Plans for the Future

The quality of accommodation in both the orphanages has been a major concern for some time. For the girls there are issues of overcrowding inside the building and an almost complete lack of outside open space, whilst for the boys, the main issue relates to the age of the buildings they live in and their condition. The number and extent of cracks in the walls and ceilings is alarming and fears about safety are compounded when you see the places where lumps of concrete have fallen away.

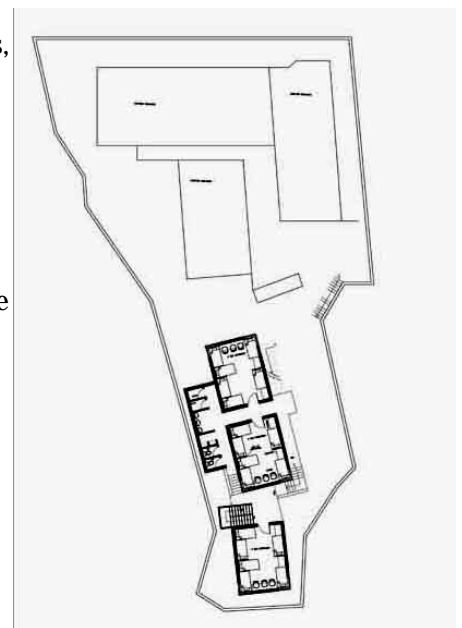


Boys' orphanage site

For some time there have been sketch proposals to redevelop the boys' orphanage site with the long term aim of accommodating both girls and boys in the same location. In view of the seriousness of the health and safety issues and in order to try to achieve the start of the redevelopment sooner rather than later, the Trust has funded the preparation of a concept plan for the site. Developed to a brief provided by Pema Bhante who runs both orphanages, these plans have now been agreed and work has started on drawing up working drawings and costings for Phase 1.

This will allow fund raising to go ahead in India and it is hoped that construction will start this autumn after the monsoon has ended.

As the Plan shows, Phase 1 will be on the lower part of the site which is currently undeveloped. It will provide dormitories for the boys and junior monks and one room for visitors. This will allow all the boys to move from the potentially unsafe buildings. The dormitory accommodation for the girls will be in either Phase 2 or 3; as yet no decision has been taken on the order of subsequent phases of construction.



The support given by the Trust to date has been a major commitment to the 105 children who currently live in the orphanages. Over the next few months Trustees will consider the extent of commitment to the actual building process in the light of available funds, other priorities, anticipated costs and the extent of monies which are forthcoming from other sources.

DCT Facebook Page

Just a final word – the Trust now has its own Facebook page which includes photos of recent fund raising events. News items also appear on our web site

www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.com