

# Darjeeling Children's Trust

## Annual Newsletter, 2010



Dear Friends and Supporters,

The past year has been an exciting one for the Trust. We have a new 5 Year Plan to help guide our work, thanks to your generosity over £16,000 has been raised and in addition we have gained a grant of £7,500 to help us establish a new project providing vocational training for young people. Gift aid from the government is contributing to the Trust's work and has also allowed us to produce a publicity leaflet which we hope will allow us to raise even more.

Over the next 5 years Darjeeling Children's Trust will work with the local community to establish priorities. The Trust aims to build at least one new toilet a year in a school where none previously existed; to carry out school repairs where conditions have an adverse impact on children's health, and to provide essential educational equipment; to fund the travelling library to visit at least 6 municipal primary schools; to fund vocational training for young people; to fund health improvement measures at the girls' orphanage; to support the rebuilding of the boys' orphanage; and to sponsor individual children to attend better schools. So, thank you to everyone for your support and I hope that the articles in this newsheet will illuminate ways in which money which you have helped raise has been spent. Best wishes for 2010, Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

### Child Sponsorship



The impact that sponsorship has upon the children who are sponsored through the Trust was clearly demonstrated at the end of 2009. Schools were visited and children met together with their teachers, whilst later everyone came together for a Trust outing to the zoo. It is clear from those meetings that even in the short space of time since sponsorship began, the children have grown enormously in confidence – as well as in size! It is also greatly encouraging that despite the need for extra lessons for some to make up the deficit in the quality of education they had previously experienced, they have all passed their exams this year and are making good progress. With hard work the difference between them and their peers will continue to reduce over time.

Child sponsorship remains a very high priority for the Trust and there are now 35 children who are helped in this way.



### Zoo Outing

It was a lovely sunny morning on the day chosen for the Trust picnic and zoo outing. Families gathered at a small play area in the centre of town before we set off and after some general chaos, photos were taken of children and families together with Trustees and helpers.

Picnics of snacks fruit and drinks were distributed and we set off along the road to the zoo. It was a long stretch for



small legs made longer because a detour had to be made around the crowded main square. Zoo authorities generously let all the children in free and all adults were let in for half the cost for local people – less than 20p each. A couple of songs and then everyone set off in great excitement around the enclosures. Many of these children had not been to the zoo before – it was a treat beyond the purses of many families.

Leopards were viewed, red pandas marvelled at, and tigers looked at with awe. Finally we all met up and lunch boxes were raided before the children sat with paper and pencil to draw a picture of their favourite object. For many it was a house and mountains, for others a garden and for one, a tiger playing football! It was a great day out.

## The Travelling Library and a new story competition



Enthusiasm for the Travelling Library appears undimmed amongst children and teachers and Sabita, our librarian/story teller (pictured left), now visits seven schools. In one school where there were no partitions between classes the children refused to do the lesson being taught by their teacher because they wanted to hear the story being told to their neighbours. It was heartening to sit in on one session and to see the rapt attention of the children and

their total absorption. Some of the books are written in both Nepali and English, but all are a great success; our need now is for some very simple stories suitable for the very youngest children and we are trying to source these.

It is distressing too to know that reading has now been officially removed from the curriculum but imaginations still need to be fed and literacy encouraged.

Based on Sabita's idea, we will have a story-telling competition for all ages in November 2010 and hopefully this will become an annual event. Details are still to be finalised but it is hoped that telling a story through pictures or orally will encourage those who find difficulty with writing to take part.



## Helping schools

2009 saw the completion of the first toilet to be provided by the Trust at Agam Singh school together with a water harvesting scheme. The toilet is much appreciated but unfortunately the water tank has been vandalised and we are now looking at the possibility of its relocation inside the school building where it will be protected.

Construction of another toilet and water harvesting tank is currently under construction at Serotam school and this time the tank will be located in a position not easily reached by vandals. Construction of a toilet at Bhanubhakta school will take place in March.



The new toilet at Agam Singh school. The water tank has now been removed and will be relocated.



Head teacher (right) and colleague outside Serotam. Door behind and left provides access to new toilet.



Water harvesting tank in place, Serotam located on concrete structure behind teachers.

Toilets are not the only priority. Many children who attend these poorest schools depend on being given a hot meal during the school day and this is likely to be their main nourishment. The Trust has paid for a second calor gas tank at Serotam school, as with only one, the school had to wait for up to 10 days for a replacement when the supply ran out and the children had to exist on crisps and other snacks.

During the year the Trust also responded to an emergency plea for help from Hope School for Disabled Children which was struggling as government grants had failed to materialise and teachers had not been paid for months. A donation was made to the school which helped tide them over the crisis and thankfully the government monies have now been paid. The money donated by the Trust was used instead for making some wooden furniture aids for use by the children. In addition, the Trust has paid for the construction of a new access to an existing toilet. Steep, uneven and narrow steps have been replaced and handrails provided both on the access and in the toilet, all of which will be of immense benefit to the children and their carers. A disabled toilet seat is being made which allows retention of the existing low level toilet.



Old and new toilet accesses at Hope School



Some of the new equipment at Hope School



## Schools – the list grows!

In 2009 two new schools were added to the list of those which the Trust helps. Rupnaryan is a small school in the lower market area where four classes were being taught in two rooms with disruption ensuing for all. There is also no toilet for the children, who have to go out into the market to the municipal toilet. Sabita and the Travelling Library already visit the children but beyond this, the school's first priority was for construction of partitions so that teaching of individual classes could take place in peace. These have now been built, paid for by the Trust. The school will be a priority for a toilet in 2010.

Prabudas is the oldest municipal primary school in Darjeeling and is proud of its history. It has now been added to the list of schools provided with vital stationery for the children – others include Bhuddist and Bhanubhakta. Prabudas will also be on our priority list for a new toilet in 2010.



Rupnaryan school



Classroom partition



Children at Prabudas



Stationery arrives

## Helping the girls and boys at the Kripasaran Orphanages

Two developments which have been initiated by the Trust are proving very popular at the girls' orphanage. The newly equipped bedroom is a huge success and has allowed the older girls to have some more privacy, sadly lacking before. The beds look cheerful with their brightly printed sheets and blankets and one huge benefit is that the new bathroom, which has a large opening window, is being used by the girls to hang wet clothes after they have been washed. Previously they were hung in the crowded sleeping area which had little through ventilation. The older girls are also allowed to use the large prayer room on the first floor for study purposes and it is noticeable that they now spend far less time downstairs in the communal room, which in turn leads to less conflict with the younger girls who need to study less and who create quite a lot of noise from time to time.



The newly equipped bedroom



Basanti



Enjoying new socks



New toothbrushes - With volunteers  
Alissa and Priyanka

In autumn 2009 the girls benefited from donations of new socks, pants and toothbrushes and toothpaste from volunteers visiting the orphanage and from other benefactors. The Trust continues to ensure that there are regular supplies of toothpaste and medicated soap available through the year. There has been a change in the identity of the health worker who is paid for by the Trust as the girls complained that the one previously employed liked to spend too much time just chatting with the carers. Basanti, who has recently been appointed, seems a very caring young woman. She has just started to visit the girls regularly at the weekends to help give them support and care. When they return from the winter break each girl will be given one large and two small towels with their own soap box, hopefully to help them put into practice the advice which Basanti will give them about not sharing these items.

The structural problems at the boys orphanage cannot be remedied and in an area prone to landslip the only solution is to rebuild using modern methods and better materials. The Trust previously pledged a sum of £1000 to help the boys and in autumn 2009 these monies were used to commission a properly researched master plan for the phased redevelopment of the site. The plan will aim to be as cost effective and sustainable as possible; materials such as timber will be re-used wherever appropriate, water harvesting will be incorporated and building methods will be a response to the land instability inherent in the area. The plan will also provide for the eventual relocation of the girls into new buildings on the site.

The master plan will allow fund raising to take place on a phase by phase basis amongst the local community.



Site of boys' orphanage

## Exciting new project in 2010 – Vocational Training for Young People

Whilst the youngest children may benefit from being sponsored into English medium schools which will give them an opportunity to get better jobs than would otherwise have been the case, older children without this opportunity face a daunting task in finding employment. There are literally millions of children leaving school every year in India with their Year 10 or 10+2 certificates at 16 or 18 years of age. Without the benefit of further training, they face fierce competition for employment.

With the benefit of a grant the Trust plans to help at least a few of these young people and is setting up vocational training schemes starting in March 2010. Ten girls will be given the opportunity to learn needlework skills – knitting, sewing and crochet spending three months training on each. All the girls who will undertake the first course currently live at the orphanage and have been identified with the help of Pema Bhante who runs the Kripasaran Orphanages. There are numerous outlets, not least the market stalls, for good hand made goods but one of the benefits will be that they will be able to make clothes for the other girls with whom they live. The training will be given by two young women who are sisters, Meera and Gita, who qualified down on the Plains and the Trust will provide equipment and materials.

In addition, computer training will be provided for four young women and four young men. Discussions are currently underway on further training for some of the boys and whether this will be in carpentry or hospitality skills.



Meera and Gita with their work



Two of the young people who will be helped

Last but not least the Trust also wants to help municipal primary school teachers help their pupils by contributing continuing professional development in English language skills which can then be passed on to their pupils. Discussions have been held with the Primary Teachers Association and agreement has been reached that English sessions will start from early March. Part of the process will be to also demonstrate teaching methods used in the UK. This is vastly different from the methods used in the majority of municipal schools in India, where learning is almost universally by rote.

## Raising money, making friends and creating partnerships 2009

There have been many fund raising events this year for the Trust; raffles have been held; marathons and half marathons have been run; a charity cricket match has been held; a Halloween gig took place with the band giving its time free; coffee mornings have taken place; and volunteers have given their time to work with the children.

These are just a few examples of the generosity of the Trust's supporters.

Friendships too are being forged. In November Trustees were welcomed to the Vrindavan School in Kalimpong, adding to the many friendships which exist with schools and individuals in Darjeeling.



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