

# Darjeeling Children's Trust Summer Newsletter, 2011

Dear Friends and Supporters.

This spring has seen a flurry of Trust activity in Darjeeling which I hope you will enjoy reading about. The work of the Trust is expanding into new areas and there is continuing success in projects in which we have been active for some time. We never take success for granted however, and April saw one of our regular meetings between trustees, our treasurer and some of the local people upon whom we rely so much, such as Sabita, our librarian, and Basanti, the nurse who works with the girls at the orphanage. The questions we always ask when we have such discussions are "Have there been any problems in achieving what we are setting out to do?" and "What ideas do you have to make the project better?" Although projects are monitored on an on-going basis, it is also important to sit back and take time to jointly take stock of progress. This was how ideas for the story competition arose and how a decision was taken to provide not just soap and toothpaste to the orphanage children but to also provide regular water deliveries during periods of shortage as well.

**News hot off the press - we are launching a special appeal to help raise money for redevelopment of the boys' and girls' orphanages** - more details on page 5. A successful golf charity has been held in Yorkshire to support the work of the Trust and a concert in Bristol, whilst future events include a stepathon climb of Mount Everest in Bristol, a cricket match in London and a champagne picnic.

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

## A proud moment



Summer 2010 saw interviews take place with five young people who were applying for funding for vocational training in the hospitality industry at college in Darjeeling. All came from poor families. One of the young women had been working as a housemaid earning about £10 a month, whilst two of the young men had been trying to eke out a living by selling unwanted surplus low-grade tea they found on the tea gardens. All were shy and unsure of themselves.



After a year's theoretical training at college and practical experience in hotels and restaurants on the plains during the long winter holiday, the difference is palpable. They have become confident young adults with a belief in their own abilities and a knowledge that they have a future which will allow them to have jobs, raise a family if they so wish and help their existing families who were previously struggling so much to support them.

Six months further hotel experience now awaits them in Chennai, Ooty and Lavasa before they finally graduate in December from their courses; it is hoped that all will be offered jobs at their placements once the 6 months is up.

Meeting them in April was a truly heart shaking moment, they have come such a long way in twelve months - thanks to the supporters of the Trust their lives have been altered in a positive and long lasting way. We hope that they will keep in touch and we will be able to report further news of them and their lives in the future.

Five more candidates were interviewed for the course starting this month and they have just heard that they have passed the college entrance test and will soon start their course. We will bring you news of their progress!

## Nursing training – a new venture



*Two of the young women who will train as nurses*

The Trust is now extending its help for young adults in vocational training and plans to support three young women to train as nursing assistants. The course will last two years and during that time the Trust will provide them with their uniforms, shoes, books and any other equipment which they might need as well as providing help with their living expenses where appropriate. All three have just passed their entry test to the hospital where they will train and the course begins later in July.

All three young women, who are in their early twenties, come from families who cannot afford to support them in their training. One has been trying to make a living by giving English lessons to small children in the village where she lives, another is mother to two young girls and has a husband who cannot find work, whilst the third lives at home with her parents and has been unable to find a job.

Money to support two of these young women has been raised by a sponsored abseil which took place at Capel Curig in north Wales on July 2<sup>nd</sup> this year – look out for further reports of this and other fund raising events on our web site.

If you know someone who would be interested in undertaking a two year sponsorship to support a young person please ask them to get in touch.

## Supporting teachers – the English language project

Early 2010 saw the start of the professional development project for teachers which seeks to help them develop their English skills and to introduce them to new ways of teaching at the same time.

Attendances at classes last year gradually grew and this year has seen great enthusiasm amongst local teachers to attend. There have been two volunteers working via the Trust who held classes after school twice a week. They covered a whole range of topics from grammar

to games to play in the classroom with emphasis on how participation can make learning fun .



*The group included teachers of all ages.*

Dolly, one of the teachers wrote:-

*"It was a very knowledgeable programme by which we all were benefitting from learning various new techniques taught to us by our volunteers. As the new generation is coming up we should change our teaching methods and switch to new techniques for educating them. So I feel that we should come forward and welcome these sorts of educational programmes for the sake of our country's bright new future."*



*Volunteers in the classroom*



*A fun learning session*

## Life stories - Making a difference to Sasang and Pasang.



It is easy to sit at home and forget how much difference sponsorship can make to a child and his or her family. Sasang and Pasang are two brothers both of whom are sponsored through the Trust. They live in a single room with their parents who were kind enough in May to invite us to visit them and hear their story.

Their father is 37 years old and works as a rubbish collector. He went to school until he was 15 but their mother left school when she was 10 and currently doesn't work. To our great astonishment and her amusement she told us that she had been born on a bus whilst her mother was heavily pregnant and travelling to Darjeeling from Nepal.



The family live in a single room which is approached along a passage where it is so dark even during the afternoon that you need a torch to find your way through. There is one window at the back of the room but this also looks out onto a dark passage so it fails to provide any light and even worse, there is no through draught of air. Even without the monsoon the room felt damp. The family have a tough time making ends meet and without the Trust's support, both boys would need to leave school. Pasang would like to become an engineer whilst Sasang is too young at the moment to have made up his mind. Both parents have hopes that their children will get a good education which will allow them to have a better life than their own.

### A Family with a dream

Mr. and Mrs. Chettri also have a dream for their two daughters, that one day they will have good jobs and will earn enough money to allow them to escape the round of manual labour

which is their lot. They live in an area of Darjeeling where housing blocks now occupy land that originally formed the gardens of the Rajah's palace. They have electricity but no running water - Mrs. Chettri has to spend 3 hours on alternate days collecting 60 litres of water from a standpipe which is 10 minutes' walk away from their home. Her daughters, Sanjana and Smriti, both of whom are sponsored through the Trust, help when they aren't at school as well as helping with other household jobs before school. As they don't have a toilet, they share one with 15 or 16 other people who live in the same block.

The girls' father, does manual work when he can find it, at times travelling to Sikkim and living



and working there for up to a month. Their mother works as a housemaid as well as producing knitted and crocheted goods which she sells by the kilo for sale on local market stalls - all this as well as keeping the family supplied with water and running the home. The two girls are always cheerful and delight if they can practice their English with you. They walk an hour in each direction to school every day, no matter what the weather is and are hugely grateful for the plastic macs and wellies which the Trust provides to help them keep dry during the torrential monsoon downpours.

### Looking for more sponsors

The Trust is currently looking for more sponsors - if you know anyone who would like to help please ask them to get in touch - email us at [sponsorship@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com](mailto:sponsorship@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com) Here is just one of the children whom the Trust has undertaken to support into better education but who needs a sponsor for the next school year.

Samit is five years old and is painfully thin and whilst he is well, both his sisters, who are older, have rickets.



His father is a carpenter but he fell from a height off a ladder and is now unable to work, whilst his mother tries to earn money by taking in tailoring work.

Do you know someone who could help?

## A new direction

The Trust was approached in April by teachers from Subash Gram M.S.K. school on the Soom Tea estate, about 7 miles outside Darjeeling. It is approached down a steep winding road whose poor surface makes travel difficult to and from the town. The teachers had heard of the work that the Trust had done in Darjeeling and asked if help could be given to their school. They had been given money by the local authority to build a new school but the amount was inadequate to provide a building big enough for all the children who wanted to attend the school as well as a toilet and water harvesting for hand washing.



*Discussions taking place at the school with staff. The glassless windows are clearly visible.*

After a visit by Trustees it was agreed that financial support would be given to the school for construction of two new toilets - one male and one female - and a cess pit, plus glazing to the windows and a water harvesting scheme.

Despite the low level of income of teachers and parents, the community gathered enough money to allow them to make a contribution to the project. Teachers have undertaken to send regular updates about the school and the progress of the children. This project will be of benefit to a significant number of students as a total of 90 attend the school and there are three part time and three full time teachers.

In Darjeeling the new toilet and water harvesting system are currently being built at Rupnaryan school, which is located in the lower market area. It occupies a narrow site approached up steep steps so there were few options for siting the new toilet.



Windows are also being glazed and a new door is being provided to the classroom on the first floor. These have all been identified as priorities by the teachers.

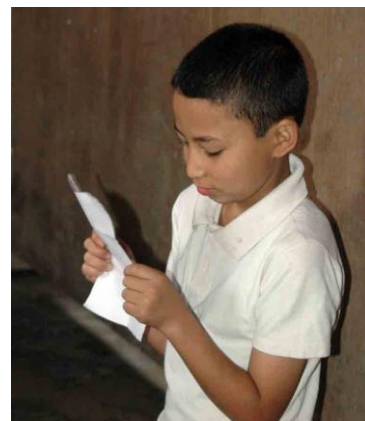
## Keeping up supplies

Meanwhile the Trust continues to support eight municipal primary schools in Darjeeling with supplies of pencils, chalk for blackboards and exercise books. The start of March sees the beginning of the school year so it is vital that these are delivered early soon after term begins.

## More stories for more children

Sabita, the Trust's librarian/story teller visits eight schools around the town each week. Her visits are widely anticipated by the children who love the stories she tells and their associated activities.

With Sabita's time fully committed, there is no spare capacity to extend the travelling library to new locations. The Trust is currently looking at demand from other schools for the scheme to be extended to them and at the possible employment of an assistant for Sabita.



*Sabita with one of her pupils*

## Using music as a teaching aid

After the success of the music festival in October 2010, Rajib is now visiting schools once more and is developing a project which will use songs and music to help children learn other subjects, such as spelling, counting as well as helping with health education.

## Helping the orphanages - a major appeal is launched

In the three years since the Trust was formed, support has been given to the children of the Kripasaran boys' and girls' orphanages in Darjeeling. Supplies of water, medicated soap, towels and equipment such as combs are given whenever needed, a health visitor works with the girls, 12 of whom were also provided with a newly equipped bedroom with bunks and a bathroom. It has become increasingly clear though that there are significant problems which can only be helped by the children being accommodated in new buildings.

The boys' existing buildings are about 90 years old and this, together with the poor quality materials used at the time mean that some have become unusable and they are starting to fall apart and slip downhill, - a dangerous situation in an area of unstable hillsides and landslip.



*Cracks are evident and cement render is falling off at the boys' orphanage*

The health problems which the girls experience are much exacerbated by their overcrowding, and the lack of outside space of any sort makes life difficult. Clothes washing and drying, food preparation, and recreation all take place in a small yard at the front of the building next to a noisy and dusty road.



*The girls' small dilapidated kitchen*

*The outside yard*

The Trust has been supporting the development of plans for the redevelopment of the site currently occupied by the boys' buildings. We have been working together with

the head of the Kripasaran Buddhist mission in Darjeeling and a local architect to prepare plans for the new buildings.

Building on the site is a challenge - significant retaining walls will be required to ensure future stability. Land though is a scarce commodity and a new site would be prohibitively expensive - redevelopment here is the best option.



Phase 1 will be built on land not previously developed on the lower part of the site and will allow all the boys to be safely rehoused. Phase 2 will involve demolition of the existing buildings and will provide dining room and prayer room as well as accommodation for the girls.

Some funds have already been collected in Darjeeling - a walkathon was held in late May to raise the profile of the project and to start the local fund raising campaign.



A Management Board and Project Team have been set up in Darjeeling and they include our locally based Trustee. The money collected there so far will allow a start to be made this autumn at the end of the monsoon when the retaining walls will be built. If funds allow the cement ground floor slabs will also be put in. It is hoped the second and major phase of building will take place in autumn and winter 2012-2013 provided that funds are available.

Our target is £165,000 and of this total, £60,000 is needed for all of Phase 1 to go ahead.

If you would like to contribute you can do so online - go to [www.justgiving.com/dctappeal](http://www.justgiving.com/dctappeal). Please don't forget that if you are a UK tax payer you can also tick the box and gift aid will be added to the amount received. You can also donate by text - text 70070 and enter the code DARJ50 which will link to the orphanage appeal.

We would love to hear from you if you would like to hold a special fund-raising event to help us reach the target. Can you help make this dream come true?