

# Darjeeling Children's

## Trust

### Summer Newsletter, 2012



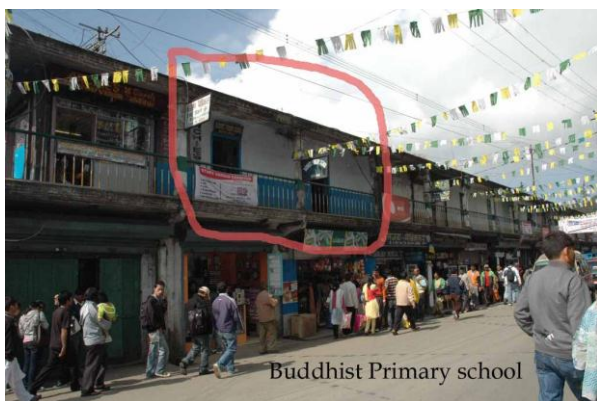
Dear Friends and Supporters.

The new school year began once more in Darjeeling at the beginning of March after a long winter break of over two months. These months are usually dry and can be cold though the skies are often clear with good views of the mountains. It can be a difficult time for the poorer families though, whose homes may be of poor construction and unheated. April saw some freak storms with amazing thunder and lightning and inches of hail – the sponsored children we support were glad of the robust leather shoes which are part of their uniforms as many adults and children were walking through the hail in open sandals. My spring visit to Darjeeling was a time to catch up with our local trustee, Major Wangdi, to visit the orphanages, discuss progress of the sponsored children and projects such as the travelling library and music teaching, to be brought up to date with the progress of the young people who are being supported by the Trust to undertake vocational training and to explore future school improvement programmes. I hope that you will enjoy reading about some of this.

Thank you all for your continuing support,  
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

#### Keeping out the rain ... and more!

One of the first projects the Trust undertook in 2008 was to repair the roof of Bhuddist school where water was dripping down classroom walls and through ceilings during the monsoon. The extreme weather conditions in Darjeeling have taken their toll since then and the roof has been leaking once more. The school lodged an urgent plea for more help before the worst of the weather begins this year.



Buddhist Primary school

The school occupies a small space at 1<sup>st</sup> floor level above one of the noisiest streets in the town.



Discussions with teachers



Water stains in the ceiling

These repairs, which have cost £360, are one of the projects funded by the Trust in 2012. In the light of experience higher grade materials have been used hoping that they will last for some considerable time.

Staff at Mahatma Ghandi school.

Discussions take place



The school playground



Another problem - lack of window glass

The Trust's never imposes a solution on schools and improvements are at the request of teachers and are always discussed with them. A school new to the Trust, Mahatma Ghandi School, asked the Trust for help with a number of projects. With funding tight and a number of schools also making requests, choices had to be made. It was the teachers who decided and monies have been given by the Trust for a new security fence around the school's playground which should stop children falling over its steep edge.

These works cost over £1300 and the Trust will now add other repairs at the school to its longer term programme. Hopefully we will do more in 2013!

I reported in our last newsletter about works taking place at Subash Gram school in Soom, a tea estate on the outskirts of Darjeeling. DCT gave funds to provide toilets, a water harvesting system and glass for classroom windows. These are now complete. The local village community raised some funds itself and also carried out some of the manual work.



New toilets and windows.

This school is also concerned about the safety of children both on the path leading to the school and in the upper play area in front of the school. The Trust is helping provide



Meeting the teachers

security fencing around this area and the path will be diverted to a safer route. Construction will be a difficult job given the soft nature of the bank. Help has also been provided to Bhanubakta school for replacement of rotten wooden window and door frames and for a new water tank with increased security at Prabudas school.

Darjeeling often suffers from water shortages during the winter and this year shortages have been severe.



Local people have to pay for water and where they cannot do this, they try to steal it. This led to the original water harvesting tank at the school (shown here with two teachers) being damaged beyond repair.

The Trust continues to provide stationery for nine schools in Darjeeling.



Some of the children who benefit from stationery supplies

## DCT choir in action!

Rajib, DCT's music teacher, now visits 11 schools to give singing lessons. Most of the children sponsored through the Trust take part in these sessions but a smaller number of children meet him every Saturday morning for a musical get together. In April this small choir was invited to sing at the opening of the AGM of the Darjeeling Ex-Servicemen's Association. During their practice for this event, Rajib was supported by Tara who volunteered through the Trust as a music specialist. The children's appearance was a great success.



A second Children's Music Festival, albeit a smaller event than last time, is being planned for this autumn.



## 2011 story competition

It has become an annual tradition for Sabita, the Trust's librarian/story teller to organise a story telling competition. In 2011 a total of 62 children took part and in her report which she presented in April this year, Sabita writes

*"My acknowledgements are to the honourable teachers of the schools concerned. I discovered a huge reservoir of talent of the children of these eight schools. The sixty two participants enthusiastically wrote the story ..."*



Photos by Sabita Thapa of children taking part in the competition and some of the prize winners

## Lunch at the Food & Craft Institute

With the second group of five students 9 months into their training at the FCI we paid them a visit at college and were delighted to be asked to lunch. Our visit gave us the chance to see their training in action as first we visited the kitchen where food was being cooked and pans washed, and then the two students training in restaurant and bar skills served our food. It was very impressive to see how far the skills of these young people have developed since last summer.



*Pawan and Pemba practise their skills in the kitchen*



*Ugesh serves water; the 5 students together; Madhu serves*

All five students are about to complete their year's college course and shortly will embark on their 6 month work placements. A senior lecturer at the college tells us that students who do the course in Darjeeling are much in demand by hotels all over India.

In leaving the college we unexpectedly met Samir, one of the first students the Trust had supported. He

looked far more mature and in charge of his life. He gives us the news that he has been appointed to a post in a hotel on the eastern coast of India at 7000 rupees a month plus board and lodging. This is a large sum for a young man to earn, especially coming

as he does from a family with little income. Prior to starting the FCI course he had no career path in mind and no job prospects.



*Samir in 2012*

## Making patterns and sewing shorts!

During the annual assessment of progress on Trust initiatives we concluded we needed to introduce some new teaching skills to enable the girls to make better progress with needlework and use of the sewing machines. With new teacher Sita in place the class has been busy learning how to make patterns and how to cut out material. In April they had all completed the first steps towards making shorts for small boys as the photo below shows.



Many of the girls are in the orphanage because their families are too poor to support them at home and ensure that they have an education. One way of trying to ensure that when these girls marry they are able to keep their families together is by trying to give them some means of earning money. Some of the girls have aspirations to become teachers or nurses and the Trust will help wherever it can for these hopes to be realised, but if they have to return to their villages they will have some skills to take with them.

The same principle applies to the orphanage boys as well and to the young people engaged in other vocational training.

## Nursing – a time for re-assessment

The three young women supported by the Trust to undertake nursing training have been re-assessing how they wish to take their training forward. Two, Sita and Chewan have decided for family reasons to complete their course in Darjeeling but Subharna (on right) is keen to undertake a more advanced course and has applied to a much larger hospital in Siliguri. She is currently waiting to hear the result of her application. The Trust will continue to support Sita and Chewan over the next year until their course ends and will also provide course and hostel fees, uniform and books for Subharna over the next three years if she is accepted onto the course.



## Two boys, two stories.

Children who are sponsored through the Trust have a variety of home backgrounds. Although all are low income families, some have better accommodation than others.



Sohan lives in three rooms in a rented apartment which costs about 500 rupees a month for rent (about £7) on the top floor of a three storey building with three generations of his family. His grandmother, his parents and sister occupy the small sitting room and kitchen areas whilst Sohan sleeps with his older brother in a boarded area of roof space with low headroom. Nevertheless the family are relatively lucky, the roof doesn't let in water and they have electricity.

Sohan is in Class 2 at Camellia School and is doing well. His father has been a waiter for the last 15 years and his mother is a housewife; both hope for better for their son.



Another little boy, Samit, who is nearly seven, has two sisters both of whom have rickets. Samit himself is small and looks as though he borders on being under-nourished even though the school he attends gives him extra food at lunch time His father was a carpenter who fell from a great height severely injuring himself and he now cannot work whilst his mother earns what money she can doing tailoring work.



## New sponsors needed!

The need for sponsors continues and children are identified at every visit who could benefit from an education where they become fluent in writing and speaking English – still a pre-requisite for a good job. If you know anyone who might be able to help please put them in touch.

Sponsorship fees cover school fees, uniform, shoes and other equipment and books, and all our sponsored children are kept safe from the weather during the monsoon with wellies, plastic macs or umbrellas.

The address to contact is  
sponsorship@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com

## Supporting the orphanage children

There are currently 46 residents in the girls' orphanage whose ages range between 8 and 17. With both boys and girls one of the difficulties when they reach the upper age is that Pema Bhante no longer receives any grant for their upkeep yet they have still not completed their education. He allows them to stay because he knows how important it is for them to finish their Year 12 exams but at the same time this puts an increasing strain upon the orphanage finances. If they stay then the young people must make a contribution by looking after the other young people.



*Basanti*



*Sharing a joke*

In any event in the girls' orphanage those over the age of about 10 must help the younger ones by washing their clothes and helping with the cooking. As with young people everywhere, the teenage years are marked by lots of mental and physical development and Basanti, the nurse who visits the girls at weekends, reports that they often feel hungry.

All the children come originally from families where there is likely to be little tradition of boys and girls having a choice about their future jobs and careers. The Trust can contribute to discussions about the options available as without help these young people may have little choice but to return to their families in their villages.

Thanks to your donations to the Trust it has been possible to continue to supply water in times of shortage (about £300 pa), and materials such as towels, toothpaste, combs and medicated soap (about £500 pa). Visits by Basanti cost about £400 pa. Orphanage funds do not extend to providing electricity for either personal or clothes washing, even in the winter, but the young people are just pleased to have enough water for a proper wash once a week.

## The Orphanage Project – Progress Report

It takes a long time for the first spade to be put into the ground on building projects in Darjeeling. The orphanage redevelopment is edging slowly forward and this April saw a major decision being taken by the Management Board which is in charge of the process. With the work of the structural engineer at last complete, an initial quote was received for construction of Phase 1 to provide dormitory accommodation for 60 boys but was considered too high. Members of the Board considered managing the project themselves but in the end decided to ask for a second quote from a local architect and her project manager. This has been received and is considered acceptable. Ranjeeta, the architect, was involved with some of the early survey work on the site and together with Ramesh, the project manager, have a good reputation for good quality work. Management of the project will include sourcing all the materials needed from Bagdogra some 7000 feet (2000m) below on the plains, organising lorry transport and portorage to bring the materials to the site (there is no vehicular access) as well as the actual construction process.



*Pema Bhante, Ranjeeta and Ramesh on site*



*The vertical nature of the site*

Fund raising is going on both in India and abroad including in the UK. Everyone is now looking forward to work starting and traditionally when that happens more donations are made locally,

often in kind. In Darjeeling though building work is especially weather dependent and after some significant amounts of pre-monsoon rain, the monsoon itself has now begun in earnest which makes excavation of the hillsides and use of cement impossible. Work is now programmed to start in the autumn.

### Our funding targets

Our target for the whole project remains at £165,000. Of this total, £60,000 is needed to build Phase 1, which provides new dormitories for all 60 boys although this figure will rise once the costs of new bunk beds and other fitting out costs are included. Here are a few sample costs:

Construction of the retaining wall	£2,200
Digging the foundation trenches	£200
Buying the cement	£11,700
Ground floor brickwork	£5000
Plastering	£11,000
Basic plumbing & electrical work	£3600
New bunk beds and bedding for 2 boys	£230

If you know anyone who would like to sponsor any of these items in part or in total please let us know. Alternatively there is also a special opportunity for 100 sponsors to 'adopt' the orphanage redevelopment by making a regular monthly donation over the anticipated three-year life of the project. The 100 sponsors will receive special access to information and updates about the redevelopment, and will have their names added to a plaque of donors in the completed orphanage building. If you would like to become one of the 100 sponsors, please get in touch at [info@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com](mailto:info@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com)

### Fund raising events

Here are a few of the events planned for the next few months:

2012 sees the continuing tradition of a Golf Day which will be held in Yorkshire at the start of July. The week before the Olympics provides the background for the Two Rivers' Cycle Ride though speeds are unlikely to be up to Olympic standards!

A half marathon will be run in the autumn and funds raised will support the Trust.

A cake sale will be held at work in London.

A charity lunch and sale will be held in Yorkshire.

**Our continuing thanks to everyone for all the support which you give to the children of Darjeeling.**



