

Darjeeling Children's

Trust

Winter Newsletter, 2012



Dear Friends and Supporters.

The autumn has proved a difficult time in Darjeeling. The town was rocked in mid-September by an earthquake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale centred in nearby Sikkim. A number of people died in the town and although none of these were known to the Trust, the buildings of the boys' orphanage were damaged with even more cracks opening up. The monsoon was particularly bad and the combination of events caused landslides damaging roads, with the main road to the plains still being blocked.

Despite these events the work of the Trust has continued and has entered a new exciting phase with the prospect of work starting on the orphanage redevelopment (see final page). The success of the children's music festival in 2010 has led to great enthusiasm amongst both children and teachers for music in schools; the travelling library continues to captivate young readers; new recruits to vocational training have started their courses; improvements have been made to schools; continued support has continued for the orphanages and the sponsored children continue to thrive.

Darjeeling Children's Trust's focus is to help children flourish – I hope that you will enjoy reading in more detail below what has been achieved over the past months. Thank you for your support in helping us to achieve this.

Best wishes for a happy and peaceful year in 2012,
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

Cutting the ribbon on new toilets



Toilets under construction and cutting the ribbon

This autumn has seen work taking place at Subash Gram school in Soom, a tea estate on the outskirts of Darjeeling. DCT is providing toilets and a water harvesting system and has provided glass for classroom windows where none previously existed. The local village community raised some funds itself and also carried out some of the manual work. The project will benefit a significant number of children as the school has a large catchment.



New windows from outside – a warmer classroom inside

The Head Teacher wrote to Trustees saying:

"All your campaigns towards the school have greatly supported and encouraged us to proceed further in our vision and mission of importing education."

Sometimes it has been apparent that by giving support in one way to a school, the Trust acts as a catalyst for further action by teachers and the local community.

A new toilet has also been finished at Rupnaryan school and at the request of the teachers DCT also provided a new classroom door to give enhanced security. Darjeeling Children's Trust always works with teachers and responds to their ideas and requests wherever feasible – solutions to problems are never imposed.

Raising the roof in 2011!

After the enthusiasm of the Children's Festival in 2010, the DCT music teacher has been seen over the 9 months walking the steep paths of the town with his keyboard safely strapped to his back. The children of the municipal schools he visits and the sponsored children are discovering music, and he is discovering some lovely voices and children who delight in the possibilities for self-expression that music can bring. He has been using music as a means of teaching other subjects and children and staff are responding enthusiastically.

Rajib leaves Agam Singh Teacher and children sing, wrapped against the cold



New books from Nepal

Over the last four years that the travelling library has been running its books have been well read with the result that they have been showing signs of age. So - time for action, and another 50 new books were ordered. As it is impossible to find attractive children's books locally in Nepali, the first language of most of the children, the books came from a publishing house in Kathmandu, and eventually found their way to Darjeeling. Some are in English, some Nepali and some in both languages.



The new books are inspected Story telling in action

Sabita, the Trust librarian/story teller has held a second story telling competition for the children which was enthusiastically received.

Helping young people have a future

With the first group of five students having successfully completed their training in the hospitality industry and having received their Certificates, the summer saw the next group of five young hopefuls taking their entrance exam to the Food & Craft Institute. All successfully passed and they have now completed the first six months of their course. Over the winter break they will be hoping to get some practical experience in hotels or restaurants. All five come from poor families.



The five students who began their course in 2011

Tashi, who is 21, is one of the five. He has one married sister and four brothers, all of whom work as delivery boys which he himself does part time. He studied until he was 18 and has good English. Successful completion of the course will give him far better prospects for the future.



Thanks to the generosity of the Trust's supporters, three young women are being sponsored through the Trust this year to undertake a two year course in nursing at a local nursing home. Subarna, on the right of this photo, was trying to make a living and supporter family by giving English lessons to young children. Her father has died and so her income is vital to help support her mother and younger sister. Being a trained nurse will allow her to do this far more easily.



Meanwhile the girls at the orphanage continue their cottage industry of knitting and crocheting goods to be sold on the local market stalls and the fund of money which they are earning is increasing slowly. When a girl leaves the orphanage she will take her share of the money with her.



Keeping heads and fingers warm!

The winter in Darjeeling is cold and schools close in mid-December to avoid the need for children and teachers to sit in unheated classrooms often without glass in the windows. Many homes are unheated and it is vital to pile on the extra layers if you have them, and to keep hands, feet and ears warm. This year each sponsored child was presented with a pair of gloves and a hat by the Trust to help see them through the winter. A trip to the market ensured that a good deal was struck for the number needed.



Making a long term difference

Darjeeling Children's Trust knows that whilst a child may have better job prospects as a result of better educational qualifications, not every child identified for sponsorship at a young age will shine academically as he or she becomes older. Trustees consider it vital that the Trust remains involved with the child into the longer term so that each child is helped to achieve his or her potential, whether this is through academic or more practical training.

Here are two more stories of some of the 53 children who are sponsored through the Trust to attend good schools and get a good education.

A 6 year old looking for a future



Sania's family live on the top floor of a three story housing block, occupying one room which is about 3mx8m and which has been sub-divided by a wooden partition. There is a small wooden lean-to at the back. She has a brother and sister and together with her parents the family share this small space with her uncle, aunt and cousin.

Sania's family originally came from Bihar, traditionally the poorest state in India, but they have been in Darjeeling for three generations now with each generation in turn occupying this same small living space. Her mother who was married at 20 has no educational qualifications and works at home, whilst her father is a messenger. They are all keen for Sania to make the most of the education she is receiving and see it as a way out of the life they currently live.

A family struggling against the odds

The lives of many low income families in Darjeeling are physically hard. Without the benefit of much formal education and without the skills to allow them to even think of applying for an office job, both men and women are thrown back on occupations which even in the short term can be harmful to health. Even manual jobs are hard to find and so if there is an opportunity to work as a porter and to carry huge loads or to labour for a day then those who want to support their family take what is on offer. The result is that many in this situation suffer health problems and death rates are surprisingly high. A number of children sponsored through the Trust are in families where

one parent has died at an early age. In other families one parent might have been injured at work which prevents them working.

Sahil's father died about two years ago leaving his mother the task of providing for herself and her son. Without sponsorship there would be the temptation for Sahil to leave school and try to earn some extra money but his mother is working hard on a local market stall to support them both whilst he carries on going to school.

Sahil has one more year at his current school and then will have to transfer to a secondary school in the town until he is 18.



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 we have 6 children currently waiting for a sponsor.

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

More teachers gain their Certificates

With the help of volunteer, Ele, more teachers have taken part in the English development course. The group of about 10 teachers delighted in learning how to teach parts of the body through songs such as the Hokey Cokey and how even activities such as drawing and art can be a fun way to learn the names for facial features. The course demonstrates techniques which need few resources but which are aimed at attracting even a child's attention. Everyone who participated regularly was presented with a Certificate.



Drawing can be fun



Doing the Hokey Cokey

Supporting the orphanage children

The 100 children who are looked after in the girls' and boys' orphanages are some of the most socially disadvantaged boys and girls in the area, with some coming from many miles away. The children range in age from 4 to 18, with many have only one living parent and a high percentage are orphans. Often there is more than one child from a single family being looked after. Where parents are alive and if they can cope, the children return to stay with them during school holidays, but otherwise they must stay on in the orphanage buildings with little to do.

Thanks to the generosity of the Trust's supporters the lives of these children have improved immeasurably over the last few years. The girls continue to benefit from visits by a qualified nurse who monitors their health and helps them maintain their own health regimes. Donations have made it possible for extra water deliveries to be made to ensure that all can have a proper wash at least once a week, and all the children are regularly given medicated soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes.



Basanti, the nurse who visits the girls



A gift of new towels

In addition, donations from the Trust's supporters also make it possible for both boys and girls to receive gifts which help improve their lives. Previously the girls have been given books and slippers whilst this year they all had some new underwear and a new set of clothes.



Enjoying some of the new books



Sorting out new clothes is always a source of great fun but the girls also show a great deal of care for each other, ensuring that



everyone has their share.

As well as singing, the boys love art and in the past have benefitted from the gift of art supplies which has allowed them to pursue their hobby.



One of the boys with some of his artwork

As well as soap and new towels which they regularly receive, in November all the boys were delighted to receive new school bags. The gift required haggling in the market to get a good deal and a special delivery took place after which everyone was assembled for distribution to take place.



The bags, which were all the same, were piled high on a table in the yard at the orphanage and then everyone lined up to receive his gift.

Right: Two satisfied customers!



Below: Some of the many boys who benefitted



The Orphanage Project – Progress Report

In the Trust's last newsletter I reported the hope that a start would be made on the orphanage redevelopment in the autumn. Sadly that was not possible. Work has been slower than anticipated for a number of reasons, some of them down to the need to carry out emergency repairs after the earth tremors of October. The main reason though is because it has taken the Trust longer than hoped to find a structural engineer who has experience of building in the mountains and in whom everyone has confidence. It is vitally important to get this right.

Happily Mr. Brahmin, whose company is based down in the plains in Bagdogra has the right experience and following negotiations with him his company undertook soil evaluation tests in December, the results of which are now with the architect. The site on which the new buildings will be constructed is within a landslip zone so it is critical that the right depth and quality of foundations are built to ensure the long term safety of the children and staff who will live there.



More cracks appear as the land moves.

Whilst this has been going on, Pema Bhante who is in charge of the orphanages and who will be the client for the project, has been resolving legal issues of land ownership, making sure that the land deed is in order and properly registered. He has also called together a fund raising team and management team in Darjeeling who are busy gathering monies together from local sources.



Concrete fill in the floor of the dining room which split open

The Current situation

Fund raising has been going on both here and in Darjeeling.



In August a team of 6 in Bristol climbed the height of Everest on step machines and raised about £800. But more is needed!

Our target for the whole project is £165,000. Of this total, £60,000 is needed to build Phase 1, which provides new dormitories for all 60 boys. We have about half the money needed for Phase 1 and are currently in discussion with the architect to identify what could be built with existing resources. Building in Darjeeling is not as cheap as in the rest of India – materials have to be brought by lorry from the plains and then carried by porter to the orphanage site, whilst the buildings themselves have to be built to withstand earthquakes and tremors.

Launch of the 100 Club

100 children need our help and Darjeeling Children's Trust has launched 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, or if you have any ideas for useful sources of corporate or grant funding, please get in touch at info@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com

The Trust also greatly appreciates supporters holding fundraising events on our behalf, and one-off donations of any amount are of course very welcome. Donations can be made online at www.justgiving.com/dctappeal or via Paypal at www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.com Please remember to add Gift Aid to your donation if you are a UK tax payer. You can also donate by text – text 70070 and enter the code DARJ50 which will link to the orphanage appeal.

Thank you for your continuing support.

