

Darjeeling Children's

Trust

Winter Newsletter, 2013



Dear Friends and Supporters.

After many months of anticipation it is with huge delight that I am able to report that the hopes we had a year or more ago that the orphanage project would start have at last been fulfilled. Over the past year we have been fund raising to maintain our core activities such as sponsorship and support for young people in vocational training, child sponsorship, school improvements, the travelling library and the school music service. In addition, and in these difficult economic times we extended our target to include raising monies to add to those raised in India to enable the orphanage redevelopment to start. The momentous decision was taken in early winter by Pema Bhante, the monk in charge of the orphanages, to let the contract for Phase One. This will provide new dormitories for 60 boys, a step which will eventually facilitate the phased demolition of the existing buildings on the site and allow construction of Phase Two. Once complete the new purpose designed buildings will provide accommodation for 60 boys and 40 girls.

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. If you want to follow us through the year look for our Facebook page or news on our web site.

Best wishes for a happy and peaceful year in 2013,
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

Turf Cutting Ceremony at the Boys' Orphanage, Darjeeling November 2012 – attended by DCT Trustees Major Pasang Wangdi and Hugh Heron

A report by Penny Hambly who visited Darjeeling and who spent some of her time visiting the orphanage

“After spending some time enjoying the many sights and cafes of Darjeeling, whilst others sweated over meetings, discussions, mails and phone calls – and before you could say “Kanchenjunga”, here we were, marching down, the Major at the helm, to the boys’ orphanage for the turf cutting ceremony. In addition to our small group (the Major, Hugh, Ricky (volunteer) and me), I was anticipating Pema Bhante and a few of the boys being ‘on parade’ at 8.30 sharp. Not so. Despite the Major’s observation that “We say 8.30, and we mean 8.30” – a steady trickle of SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE - governors, project manager, orphanage management board members - swelled the little crowd teetering down the precipitous path to the new site for the next half hour or so. Along with the boys in immaculate uniforms and flip-flopped feet, and half a dozen orange-robed young monks, we grouped around a little makeshift shrine of bricks, incense, flowers, milk and candles.

The assembly hushed as the monks began to chant and Hugh was invited to choose from an alarming selection of shovels and picks to strike the turf. I thought this would be it; job done, but it was just the start. The chant continued and there was polite applause before the second volunteer stepped up to swing the pick. And so it went on – Pema Bhante, the Major, the project manager,



Ricky, the orphanage accountant, one of the boys – and even I was invited to have a go. Before long, quite a little pit had been dug, and in it, the bricks, candles and incense sticks were buried to bring good fortune to the building work.

There was more: khata scarves were presented to us and many photos taken. Finally we made our way back up. I couldn't have asked for a more exciting end to my holiday; all those who have worked so hard towards this day deserve heartfelt congratulations.... and this is just the beginning!"

The project is being managed by a local architect Ranjeeta Jaiswal ably supported by her second in command Ramesh, and with advice from the architect who designed the buildings. They are seen here on site with Pema Bhante who has raised half the funds for Phase 1 from sources in India. The Trust has been helped in achieving its target for Phase 1 by a grant from the Evan Cornish Foundation to help cover the costs of project management fees and new beds and bedding for the boys.

Our next task over the next two years is to help Pema Bhante raise approximately £140,000 to allow Phase 2 to go ahead.

If you would like more information about how you can help by holding a fundraising event, by making a donation, or by becoming a member of the 100 Darjeeling Children Appeal (a special opportunity for 100 sponsors to "adopt" the redevelopment of this orphanage by making a regular monthly donation over the three-year life of the project) do get in touch. Details are on our web site www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.com



New student intake at the Food & Craft Institute

Four new students started their course this summer and are being supported by the Trust to undertake hospitality training in Darjeeling. All come from poor families and without support would be unable to do the course.



Deepa



Sumita



Palden



Goma

Deepa is the oldest girl in a family of 5 children, three of whom are still at school. Her father is a farmer and her mother a housewife. Goma's parents are also farmers who both work on a farm and try to sell their produce at the local market. The farthest she has been from Darjeeling is about four hours' travel away by jeep. Palden's father works in a shop and his mother knits goods which she sells on the market stalls. None of their families have an income of more than about £45 a month.

It will be a big step for all these young people to leave home and travel to another town to do their practical 6 months' training at the end of their college course. Previous students sponsored by the Trust have worked in places such as Mumbai, Chennai, Ootacamund and Lavasha. All these places are many hundreds of miles from Darjeeling. Parental agreement to this process is vital and all the families are aware of what is involved in the training before the course starts. Phinzo, pictured here, is just completing his 6 months' work training and has been working in a hotel in Bangalore. A letter from his hotel confirming that his work is satisfactory is necessary for him to gain his Certificate.



Raising a fence or two

A grand opening ceremony was held in November at two schools where the Trust has provided financial support for construction of safety fences. The work followed discussions with teachers which were reported in the summer newsletter. At Mahatma Ghandi school the ceremony included speeches by Trustees Major Wangdi and Hugh Heron, and the head teacher, a dancing display, a badminton tournament on the newly enclosed area and, most importantly, cutting the ribbon, a task carried out by Hugh.



Construction of the retaining wall and fence cost £1300 and together with the safety fence at Subash Gram school on the Soom tea estate which cost a further £900, represents the major school improvement work carried out by the Trust in 2012. Smaller amounts were spent on replacing rotten door frames at Banubhakta school, security for the water harvesting system at Prabudhas and the emergency works to repair the roof at Buddhist school which were reported earlier. The Trust has received a number of further requests for help which will be considered for 2013.

Catching the imagination

A total of about 60 children from 8 municipal primary schools took part in the annual story telling competition organized by Sabita, the Trust's librarian/storyteller. The prize giving ceremony was held on 1st November 2012 at Red Cross School.

Ricky Rutherford, a volunteer in Darjeeling, reports:-



One of the prizewinners



A teacher receives prizes for absent children

“Each school had 4 prize winners and

Hugh Heron as representative of DCT was asked to present the prizes to the children. Hugh spoke briefly congratulating all the children on their achievement as well as thanking Sabita for her efforts which were over and above her specified role as an employee of DCT.

Each child was then called up individually to receive their prize. In addition each participating school received a mini encyclopaedia and these were handed out to a teacher from each location as an additional gift for the benefit of all the children, to thank them and the staff for their participation. Next year's competition may include the challenge of writing a story in English rather than Nepali for the first time.”

The music making goes on

With plans starting to be made for a second music festival in autumn 2013, the children have concentrated over the past twelve months on extending their range and repertoire. Rajib, whose teaching uses a variety of nursery style songs, specific school songs and music theory based on the Trinity College books, reports that as well as gaining knowledge the children are most importantly gaining confidence.



Four children, Anamika, Manisha, Chidden and Monali all took and passed their first music exams. Anamika and Monali live at the Girls' Orphanage and all four girls are sponsored through the Trust.

Growing and changing – new ambitions and new talents

Like any group of children, the fifty children who are sponsored through the Trust have changed, developed and grown this year. Some have faced personal difficulties when parents have split up and in some cases this has rebounded on their school work; some, like Jordan who is shown here on the right, have changed their ambitions. Jordan is 14 and the oldest child to be sponsored and until recently his focus was on joining the police force. Now though he has changed his mind and he would like to join the Navy, an interesting choice for someone living so far from the sea.



For some children there are other challenges at home. Living without electricity or using a room shared with an extended family, it may be difficult to find space and quiet to allow homework to be done. Parents who may be illiterate themselves, who need to have more than one job to survive and who have little free time may find it difficult to support and guide their children through their school life. Binay is a small boy with difficulties such as these. He lives in a one parent family and his mother is a porter who can neither read nor write. She is rarely at home, working as many hours as possible to support them and although bright, Binay frequently plays truant and fails to complete his homework. With the help of staff at the school he attends, it is hoped to identify an older boy from a similar background who is making the most of his schooling who will become Binay's mentor and guide him through the next few years.

The personal knowledge that Trustees have of the sponsored children can contribute to helping resolve such difficulties. With the support of the schools they attend and through personal contacts help is given wherever possible.

Nurse training

It seems as though it has been a long haul but at last the three young women who have been supported to undertake nurse training are close to finishing their course. All 3 students are performing steadily and the hospital is confident they will find employment on completion. As well as continuing with both theory & practical classes they are also now involved in a variety of surgeries as observers. For the last 6 months of training they will each receive a small monthly salary from the hospital.



New 5 Year Plan

The Trust has grown far more quickly than was originally anticipated when the first 5 Year Plan was adopted in 2009 and Trustees felt that in the light of this it was time for a review.

In the next five years we will:

- Help improve the physical fabric of schools where this would improve the quality of the educational experience
- Provide the travelling library and hold an annual story competition
- Provide music teaching in primary schools and for all sponsored children and enable those children who are musically gifted to enter music exams if they wish
- Provide healthcare to girls at Kripasaran Girls' and Boys' Orphanages
- Provide sponsorship and support for up to 5 young people annually to undertake hospitality training at the Darjeeling Food and Craft Institute
- Provide sponsorship and support for up to 3 young people annually to undertake nursing training
- Facilitate sponsorship of children into better education
- Provide vocational training in needlework at the Girls' Orphanage
- Facilitate volunteering in Darjeeling as and when candidates with the appropriate skills and aptitudes present themselves
- Ensure a full range of management skills is available to ensure the long term sustainability of Darjeeling Children's Trust.

Would you like to be directly associated with any of these initiatives, perhaps by making a donation or by organising a fundraising event? It costs £65 a month to run the travelling library which visits 9 schools; £84 a month to provide a music teacher for children in 11 schools; £100 a month to provide a trained health carer and supplies of water, towels, toothpaste and medicated soap to girls and boys at the orphanages; £55 a month to provide vocational training in needlework for girls at the orphanage; £63 a month to support a nursing student and £34 a month to support a young person studying hotel management.

Perhaps you would prefer to be linked to a specific school?



Mahatma Ghandi school hall



Roof detail



Decaying timber and corrugated roofing

We have received requests from Mahatma Ghandi School for help to repair the roof and floor of the school hall which has decaying woodwork and holes in the corrugated roofing. It is used as a classroom for older children but this becomes difficult with rain falling in. It will cost approximately £5800, a sum currently beyond the annual resources available to Darjeeling Children's Trust for roof replacement.

Requests for help have also been received from other schools including a bid for £310 for labour costs associated with erecting a further classroom at Rupnaryan school (costs of materials have been met through donations in India); £75 for repairs to the water harvesting tank at Surrotam; £20 for provision of waterproof covers for exercise books at Prabudas school and £50 for 5 new blackboards at Banubhakta where children are unable to read what is being written on the current boards due to their condition.

Children and teacher at Banubhakta



In the classroom in Prabudas



Teachers and children in Surrotam



Fund Raising News

Jane McDonald the singer, actress, media personality and broadcaster, who first became famous following her appearance on the BBC show "The Cruise" appeared in the BBC Quiz show "Celebrity Pointless" on December 8th and raised money for Darjeeling Children's Trust. Jane and her partner came up against a combination of Edwina Currie and Diane Abbott in the play off for the final and were narrowly beaten on points.

A big thank you to Jane for her support.



Children enjoy a trip on the Toy Train

Thanks to fundraising by a former volunteer in Darjeeling, Kat Sirrell, the children at Rupnaryan school where she taught were able to enjoy a special outing on the Toy Train from Darjeeling to Ghoom and back. Although it's only a distance of about 7 miles as the crowd flies the slow speed of the train make it an exciting half day trip. All the children come from poor homes and for many this is likely to have been the first time they had been on the train.

A big thank you to Kat from the children of Rupnaryan!



Himalayan 100 Mile Stage Race

Alan Young wanted to do one of the world's great races, the Himalaya 100 mile Stage Race which began on 29th October this year, and he chose to raise funds for DCT. Here is an edited account of his race:

"Day 1: 24 miles, and the hardest day. We start to, of all things, the tune of bagpipes, a traditional instrument on the borders of Nepal. We are given Tibetan Prayer Scarves in white and a blessing for our run and we are off, all 60 of us. Total climb 9,100ft with the last 3 miles above 10,000 ft. It's difficult to breath and after 5 paces your leg muscles knot up in pain. We camp at Sandakphu at 11,815ft. In the end 9 don't make it and come up by jeep."

Days 2 to 5 followed with more of the same: long distances, stunning scenery with views of the white peaks of Everest, Kanchenjunga and Lhotse in the distance; and a variety of surfaces including tarmac, rain gullies, steps and dry stream beds to test the legs and feet.

Alan finished successfully on Day 5 and reported: "Disbelief, you could see it on other people's faces too. We'd done it and it wasn't quite real. We had finished! One hundred miles."



A big thank you to Alan for choosing to raise funds for Darjeeling Children's Trust.

Royal Parks Half Marathon

Sheila Saye, DCT trustee, took time out to run the Royal Parks half marathon in October to raise money for the orphanage redevelopment. The route takes in St. James, Green and Hyde Parks as well as Kensington Gardens and luckily the sun shone and the rain stopped for a few hours. Sheila did a fantastic job following injuries and illness over the previous two years and finished in 2h13m17sec.



Students support DCT

Students at UWE from the group "Engineers without Borders" have been fundraising for the Trust. Seen here with some of the wonderful cupcakes they made and sold, the group is now carrying out research into solar energy and how the design of buildings can reduce condensation in monsoon conditions. Other students from the University of Essex are planning to raise the profile of the Trust on their Colchester campus and through social media networks.



A big thank you to everyone for their efforts.