

# Darjeeling Children's Trust

## Summer Newsletter 2014



[www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.com](http://www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.com)

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is now over six years since the inception of the Trust. It is a fact which really only strikes home when we start to look back over how many children we have met in that time, how many pencils and rubbers have been bought for schools or how many school improvements have been carried out. Many of the sponsored children, a fair number of whom we have known since those early days, seem to have grown up significantly; we continue to forge new relationships with schools; more young people are being supported through vocational training courses and at last Phase 1 of the Orphanage redevelopment is nearly at completion and is being fitted out.

None of this would be possible without the wonderful support which you provide, so a big thank you on behalf of the children and young people who you have helped and I hope you enjoy catching up with all the news.

Warmest best wishes,  
Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

### Our sponsored children

The school year began again in March where it had left off in the cold of the previous December. Little Abishek who was reported missing with his mother the previous year still didn't appear and so must now be considered to have left the area permanently; a number of new young children were added to the list and some of the older ones will be leaving school in a couple of years. The two photos here show the difference in the children between 2009 and spring this year. In the bottom picture, our youngest DCT recruit, Dyia, is standing in the middle of the front row and Pasang who is our oldest, is in the back row on the left. He will leave school in about 18 months' time.



DCT is committed to giving support to these children throughout their education. They will need to make choices regarding subjects they wish to study which may affect the jobs that they pursue and their ability to make a living in the longer term future. One of the older boys has always had a clear vision for himself as a future police officer, but this is unusual. Most will need help in the decisions which they take especially as they come from families with little experience of education. For some such as Binay this advice will be critical. He wants to become a mechanical engineer but his mother who is a porter is illiterate. She can have little idea of how to help Binay decide what subjects are most appropriate to study and how to pursue his ambition. DCT is currently investigating how best to deliver careers' advice to all the sponsored children as they progress through school.



The children's progress is monitored on a regular basis with DCT trustee Major Wangdi keeping in touch with teachers and visiting schools to monitor progress and resolve any problems.



Above are four of DCT's older sponsored children

## Vocational Training

Vocational training is one of the most direct ways in which we can see the effect of DCT's investment in young people. Since starting the initiative a total of 29 young people have either completed or are currently undergoing training and we are awaiting news of whether one more young woman has been accepted for nurse training. The majority of those we have supported have obtained a government sponsored qualification in the hospitality industry whilst of the remaining five, four have undergone nurse training and one is currently training as a medical laboratory technician. The world has been opened up to them in ways which previously they couldn't have imagined.

Some students keep in touch and we hear their success stories. Samir (*pictured top right*) who qualified at the end of 2011 first took a job at a hotel on the east coast of India but now has returned home and has a job at one of the top heritage hotels in Darjeeling.

Another of our students, Yogesh, (*pictured 1<sup>st</sup> right*) was placed in the boys' orphanage by his parents so that he could go to school. His father is a farmer and his mother a housewife and together they couldn't afford to pay the very small amount for the education they wanted him to have. They knew however that he would be sent to school if he lived at the orphanage. He finished his year's college training at the end of May and is now doing his work placement in Bangalore which he says he is enjoying very much. Another of his contemporaries Upesh, (*above*) also a former orphanage boy, is doing his work experience at a five star hotel in Cochin. He has written to say that it took him three days of travel to reach his destination, a mere 2895kms from home! He is earning his first real salary. Whilst only 2000 rupees a month he has all his meals and accommodation provided and once he has fully qualified he will be able to earn a much better salary. For comparison, 2000 rupees a month represents the total income of some of the poorer families whose children are sponsored through the Trust.

Meanwhile Aishwarya (*right*) gained a place at the Navjeevan Institute of Rural Medical Education & Training in Gyaganga with DCT support. She began her medical lab technician studies a year ago and has now completed her formal training. She is currently undertaking a month's practical experience in local hospitals. She is very keen to undergo further studies to become better qualified and once her hospital training is completed she hopes to be able to undertake a further one year course at a hospital in Delhi.

Helping these students costs so little – putting one young person through 18 months of training (including costs attached to their work placement) to become qualified in the hospitality industry costs the Trust £600 - from the results we have seen, it's money well spent.

## The hills will ring with music once more!

It is four years' this autumn that DCT held the first Children's Festival of song and dance in Darjeeling – and we have decided that it is time to repeat the experience! The date has been fixed for 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the hall has been booked and plans are now being laid. The event will take place in the Hall of Southfield College which has a small stage and will be an ideal venue. Rajib, our music teacher is working hard to coach the children who are all very excited already at the prospect. As before we will be relying on the help and support of teachers from Camellia and Good Start Montessori Schools where we send a number of our sponsored children, and we are very grateful to them for their time and organisational skills.

DCT and the children are also very lucky that members of the Bollywood Dance Company who provided such great entertainment at last year's Bricks and Mortar Ball will be travelling to Darjeeling to help train the children to take part in the festival.

More next time after the event!





## Mahatma Ghandi School gets a new roof

Trustees Major Wangdi and Marilyn Adams first met the teachers and pupils of Mahatma Ghandi School in 2012 and the Trust has been offering them support from that time. It is a school which takes children that other schools often reject or have excluded, perhaps because of behavioural problems or because the children can't guarantee attendance for the whole school year because their parents are itinerant workers on the nearby tea estates.

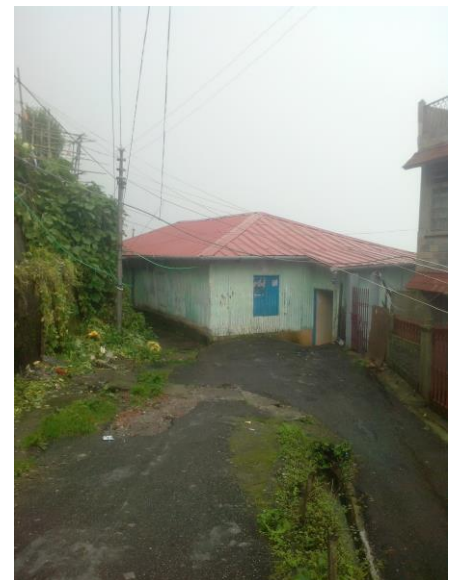
During our early talks together staff highlighted a number of problems – a new fence was needed to enclose the school playground to keep the children safe when playing; there was no glass in many classroom windows and water was coming through the roof of the school hall which doubled as a classroom. The school's first priority though was the security fence and after this was built with DCT help, trustee Hugh Heron cut the ribbon to officially "open" it in 2012. Other improvements have taken place thanks to the generosity of a volunteer who went to Darjeeling through the Trust and who taught at the school. Windows now have glass to keep out the weather, classrooms have white boards and there are books for reading.

The biggest problem though remained the roof and although DCT wanted to help, in 2013 the cost of £5500 was prohibitive. Good news however - as there have been no other major calls on the school improvement budget over the last year and because the favourable exchange rate has meant that the Trust's funds are now going considerably further than a couple of years ago, DCT was able to give the go-ahead in April for the work to proceed. It was then a race against the weather to try and get everything done before the onset of the monsoon. All the old corrugated sheets had to be removed and rafters replaced and as the photos below show, some of this work was done as the mists rolled in. Thankfully work was completed before any major downpours and staff and children are now enjoying the benefits of a dry hall where teaching can go on without being interrupted by water dripping into buckets!

As part of their thanks to DCT the school has agreed that the hall can be used for DCT events such as special music lessons when it is not needed by the school.



Above & below – the roof's poor condition



## A volunteer's view

Clare Blakeway-Phillips went to Darjeeling as a volunteer facilitated by the Trust and here are some impressions of her time there.

*As soon as I walked into Mahatma Ghandi School I felt comfortable with it. I taught English to the junior classes from 11.00 - 12.30, Monday to Thursday and health education to the senior class on Fridays. The children and staff were lovely. I went to school at 10.45 every day so that I could have tea with the staff and get to know them. I also tried to let them know what I was doing, to show that there are interactive methods of teaching which they can use apart from the common approach of rote learning often used in India.*

## Monsoon impressions

As the UK basks in this year's above average summer temperatures, Darjeeling is currently "enjoying" the monsoon. Always welcome there to top up local water supplies, it can be challenging for those not accustomed to watery days and nights. It is challenging too for all our sponsored children. Here are a few impressions of that season –

*Dampness! The late monsoon is saturating the air and everything else. The beds are damp, books and paper feel damp, clothes rapidly feel damp and the air is thick to breathe. It rains - a lot - and the water rushes down the roads gouging out large channels and potholes. There is an incessant noise of rain on corrugated roofs.*

*Drizzle can be interspersed with deluges and then drizzle can turn to mist. By 5.30 in the evening the streets take on a Dickensian air, little street lighting, grimy underfoot and the mist creeping around everyone and everything*

*But by late September the end may be in sight – it is what the locals call a "blue day". The sun is clear and the air is fresher. Windows are opened and clothes and bedding hang from outside wires or are spread eagled on roofs in an attempt to banish the mustiness which pervades. The landscape too opens up and the Himalayan ranges, the deep valleys below Darjeeling, and most importantly, Kanchenjunga, are all emerging from the cloud. This mountain has a magical persona, third highest in the world, remote in Sikkim, snow covered. As the air clears, dawn will surely provide a glimpse of its grey snows turning first rose and then a brilliant white.*



## Orphanage Boys and Girls

The on-going health and wellbeing of the orphanage boys and girls continues to be a major concern for DCT. Soap, toothpaste towels and water supplies continue to be provided to both girls and boys as they are needed and Basanti continues to visit the girls every weekend.

Here are some impressions from Clare of her visits to the girls' orphanage:

*The orphanage was enjoyable and often tiring! The children loved singing songs with actions or dancing!! I ended up doing alternate sessions with younger and older girls which worked better. Some I helped with letters they wished to write, or home work but mainly it was games and reading them stories. I bought some fairy tale books for them and then always chose one girl to be in charge of lending the book out. I also, at their request, did a session on teenage issues. This went down well. I gave them a questionnaire to facilitate discussion. I also gave the girls a pink hard back book on being a girl, puberty and teenage issues. It was a bit American but they loved it!*



Clare with some of the older girls

An experienced nurse, Clare found that despite Basanti's visits some of the younger girls were suffering from scabies and head lice. Both will be an ongoing problem due to the overcrowded living conditions and limited water supply and will need a continuing active preventative approach. Occasional hot water is necessary really to wash clothes when scabies is present and help keep the children clean but this is not supplied at present.

Most years DCT only provides extra water to the girls but this year due to shortages some deliveries have also been made to the boys. The next phase of building the new orphanage will include a huge water harvesting tank which, together with improved ventilation and space standards will start to help address these health problems.



## Excitement is mounting at the orphanage

In the last 18 months those in charge of building Phase 1 of the orphanage redevelopment have had to meet and overcome various delays and difficulties. Early in the year though, excavation and works on foundations finally came to a close and in the last six months the buildings have taken shape and grown. The cold weather in February was perfect for the roof to be put on and by April, when Trustees Major Wangdi and Hugh Heron met Pema Bhante, the head monk, with the project team and architect, external and internal walls were being built. By June, the walls were built and had been plastered.

*The photo (right) shows two of the 60 boys who will live in the new dormitories provided in Phase 1.*



The last donation which the Trust made a matter of days ago was to help settle the bills which are now being incurred for fitting out – tiling of bathrooms, electrical works, bathroom fitments, paint for the walls and wood for ceilings. We are now on course for the boys to move in within weeks!

## The next challenge

With completion of Phase 1 within sight DCT is now working hard to raise funds for Phase 2 which will provide dormitories for 40 girls as well as prayer room, kitchen, dining room and administration block. The architect has prepared detailed drawings and preliminary estimates but even if the exchange rate holds steady the total cost is likely to be in excess of £200,000. Although work can be broken down into two parts, the longer the contract takes then the more costs are likely to rise due to inflation. Pema Bhante continues to fund raise amongst his supporters but major contributions will be needed from DCT if the project is to be finished. We are not daunted! Together we are helping the boys shown below but there are 40 girls who now also need our support.

**Can you help? Come to the Bricks and Mortar Ball, let us know if you have any ideas for fundraising large or small, or of grants which we can apply for. We need your help to make the difference!**





## Fund raising news

### A great Yorkshire weekend

July 4<sup>th</sup> saw a great gathering of golfers in Yorkshire at the Pontefract & District Golf Club to take part in the now annual Darjeeling Cup Event. There were fifteen teams including the first all ladies team. 58 players took part, there was great weather, and lots of fun and laughter. The "best style" prize, which was hotly contested, was won by a brave golfer wearing a matching orange top and trouser combo.

The winner of the Darjeeling Cup '14 was Chris Moreland from London. Chris gave an outstanding display of golf as Chris plays off a low handicap and had to play with foreign clubs and shoes as his own had been stolen the night before!

The Team event was won by the Santander team from Sheffield - great stuff - they have come close in the past. The Laughing Buddha (the wooden spoon) was won by Mike Scott and as well as the laughing Buddha, Mike took away a free golf lesson from the assistant pro.



*Men's and ladies' team captains*

Lots of thanks to trustee Hugh and all his team of helpers who worked so hard to make the day a success and raising over £6000 – and many, many thanks to everyone who went along and donated so generously of their time and money.

### Success in the Bristol 10k

Congratulations too to trustee, Katherine Carr, who with husband Andy ran the Bristol 10K in June this year to raise funds for the Trust.

They joined hundreds of other runners on the course who left Bristol's historic harbourside and streamed along the bank of the River Avon on a route which took them out and back under Brunel's iconic Clifton Suspension Bridge. A great run and great times – and over £150 raised!



### An invitation to the Ball!

Ticket sales are going very well for the Bricks & Mortar Ball which will be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, so if you haven't already reserved your place please email [events@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com](mailto:events@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com) as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

This year's venue is the V&A Museum of Childhood, very close to Bethnal Green underground station. It is a truly spectacular setting, and it seems very fitting for an event which is seeking to raise money to give 100 underprivileged children a wonderful new home. The ticket price includes a champagne and canapé reception, open bar, substantial (non-seated) dinner, two fantastic dance performances by The Bollywood Dance Company and a DJ. There will also be a live and silent auction – more information about the fantastic prizes we have on offer will be sent round in due course.

We hope to see you there!

**THE BRICKS & MORTAR BALL**

Please join us for the second Bricks & Mortar Ball to raise money for the phase 2 building costs of an orphanage for 100 children in Darjeeling, India.

Saturday 22nd November 2014  
V&A Museum of Childhood, E2 9PA  
7.30pm - 1.30am

Lounge suits & cocktail dresses

Ticket price: £75

RSVP to [events@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com](mailto:events@darjeelingchildrenstrust.com)

Ticket price includes entrance, champagne and canapé reception, non-seated dinner & an open bar serving wine, beer and soft drinks all night. There will also be performances by the Bollywood Dance Company and a DJ.

There will be a live and silent auction, a tombola as well as other fundraising activities which you may want to bring some cash for! Further details about the auction lots will be circulated closer to the time.