



## *Darjeeling Children's Trust*

### *Newsletter January 2017*

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The journey to Darjeeling is always an adventure. Flying from Delhi to Bagdogra, the heat, dust and noise of the plains greet you before you start your drive up through the foothills – a trip of 2-3 hours with over 6000 feet of steep climbing on twisty roads, towards journey's end. Travelling in late October this year we passed in to mist about half way up, but were amazed about seven miles from Darjeeling when the skies cleared and we had a wonderful view of the town backed and dominated by the Kanchenjunga range. Our next three weeks were busy, catching up with all the sponsored children, the vocational students, visiting schools, meeting DCT employees and visiting the orphanage redevelopment. I hope that you will enjoy reading more of these events and of what has been happening over the last six months. I hope too that you will see how the money that you donate is changing young lives for the better.

Best wishes,  
Marilyn Adams,  
Chairperson, Darjeeling Children's Trust

#### **Our team in Darjeeling**

For the last seven years DCT has been represented in Darjeeling by our "man on the ground" and DCT Trustee, Major Pasang Wangdi. His team of one has now been added to with two new trustees. The appointment of Nima Wangdi is a recognition of the increasing amount of work which she has undertaken over the last few years looking after the day-to-day needs of the 67 sponsored children whilst the appointment of Sonam Dorjee will bring a younger perspective to Trust activities. Sonam has a business background and is especially interested in helping develop mentoring for any of the sponsored children who need help and advice as well as careers advice for the older children.



#### **Thank you for giving me the chance to make something of my life .....**

These were the words spoken by one of our former FCI students (shown right) who was home on holiday and who called in to see Major Wangdi after completing two years on contract in Saudi Arabia. He has already risen to the post of section manager in the restaurant where he works and is planning to take his restaurant manager's exams in autumn 2017. He told us how the money he is earning is allowing him to help his father and to build a house for them both in Sonada, about an hour's travel from Darjeeling and nearer the plains.

His words, delivered with a huge smile, were echoed by Sushmil's mother who also called in to see us and who said "Thank you for giving my son a life.." Sushmil is one of our FCI students who finished his training in 2014. After working for a while in India to gain experience, he has now moved to the middle east and has joined the increasing number of FCI graduates who are making a success of their lives abroad and earning money to help their families.

Meanwhile the six students currently studying at college visited one weekend in their uniforms. All look purposeful and are enjoying their course and are already starting to get ideas of where they would like to travel for their 6 months' work placements which will start next July.



### Three beauticians and their gift to the orphanage girls

Three young women have been sponsored by the Trust to undertake training as beauticians for six months in one of the local beauty salons, and have just come to the end of their course. Passang, Prabha and Sarika have learnt the fine arts of hair cutting and straightening, eyebrow plucking, manicuring and much more and are now looking for jobs. There is an increasing number of beauty salons in the town so it shouldn't be long until they find success. Until they do, they are able to stay on and work at their training salon.



As a thank you to the Trust, they volunteered to give a haircut to any of the orphanage girls who would like one. This was a big treat as a haircut usually costs about 250 rupees (over £3) which is a large amount to be found by Pema Bhante out of tight budgets for each girl and some girls hadn't had their hair cut for years. Hair cuts are low priority when compared to the need to pay for rice! For one girl it was the first hair cut she had ever had!



The three young women came along to the orphanage one bright sunny Saturday morning together with the salon owner, Sonam (all four pictured left). After much debate about the best location for the event it was eventually decided that despite the brightness and the hot sun making conditions a bit difficult, outside on the first floor balcony would give the best light and there would be enough room there for everyone to work at the same time.

The girls were both excited and a bit nervous and it was only after the first few brave ones went off to wash their hair and work started, that a much longer queue formed. One of the youngest girls who was only 6 years old and had trouble combing her hair at all, had perhaps the most remarkable transformation. It took a full five minutes of pulling and straining to pass the comb through the tangle of her long hair but she decided, with the help of Susmita our nurse assistant, that it would be better for now to have a shorter style which she could comb. She looked incredibly proud after the work was finished and her hair was held neatly in place with a large clip.



Some of the other girls wanted the latest Darjeeling style – a chin length bob tapering down at the front – whilst others just wanted their very long hair to be cut and all the ends tidied. By the end of the session 32 girls sported new hair cuts!



### Demonitisation causes problems in Darjeeling

Overnight on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the Indian government announced that from that moment all 500 and 1000 rupee notes were no longer considered legal tender. These notes comprised 86% of all the notes in circulation. The stated goal was to fight "black money": the illicit proceeds – often held as cash – of tax evasion, crime, and corruption. There were immediate problems for everyone in India as banks and ATM's closed and when they eventually re-opened we had to stand in line with everyone else to try and get some cash. Even now, there are long queues and it remains difficult to obtain money. Schools are closed for winter but DCT will soon need to access adequate funds for the annual purchase of shoes, uniforms and bags for the sponsored children and for other locally incurred costs.



## Sponsored children are looking to the future

The good news is that all the sponsored children except one girl, who has been having problems at home, have passed their end of year exams and will be moving on automatically to the next school year. The student who failed is currently retaking her exams and we hope that she will be successful.



There are now nearly 66 children benefitting from sponsorship through DCT in to better education. Some, whom we have known for 7 or 8 years, are starting to reach a critical time in their school careers. For a few, Year 10 exams are about to be taken next month and results will help determine what schools the students move on to for their final two years of education as well as what subjects they will study during those years. Others are about to take their final school exams and must decide whether to apply for a college course or go straight to vocational training. Some of the young people reaching this stage in their school careers are shown left.

DCT is helping with those decisions in a number of ways. Long chats were held with each of these students in November to find out their thoughts so that we could find out where gaps existed in the advice they have been given. A few students were remarkably well informed and they already know what career path they wish to pursue. For example one young woman wants to study sociology and has already been told by her teachers that graduates in this subject are much in demand and will get favourable terms of access to the Indian Civil Service. For others though there has been little advice at school and apart from thinking they might like to do a course because a “friend is going to do it” they have no long term view of their future. In many ways the first student is exceptional as although the families of the sponsored children believe that education is important, few if any have first hand experience of the process of training and seeking a job.

## Careers advice and a mentoring programme

*(Below: Two of our sponsored children)*

Following on from those chats some advice was given immediately about visiting the local careers’ office where more information could be gleaned, for example about ways of entry in to the civil service. In addition DCT trustees in Darjeeling are working with members of the Darjeeling Hills Children’s Welfare Society, teachers at Camellia plus the principal of the local graduate college to hold a careers’ conference for the older children and their families. This will include discussions about the possibilities of vocational training and non-graduate access to institutions such as banks and the post office.



It also became clear from discussions with all the sponsored children, but especially with those in their teenage years, that some children are having problems at school, in their personal lives and also simply as part of the growing up process. DCT trustees in Darjeeling are working with teachers and others in Darjeeling to help them through this stage in their lives and are setting up a mentoring arrangement for those students with most need of guidance.

## On the set of “Endeavour” – A great day out

Our Bricks and Mortar Ball had wonderful and unusual auction lots. One of these was a day on the set of the TV programme Endeavour. One of our supporters won this and had a fascinating time along with his brother. The production team looked after them extremely well and made sure they had a day to remember. As well as seeing how the programme was filmed, they met some of the cast, including Shaun Evans and Anton Lesser. They had not imagined they would have a chance to chat to the cast!

## Lunch time at Mahatma Gandhi School



DCT is once again providing lunch for four children at Mahatma Gandhi School. The children *(shown far left with the lady who cooks their food)* regularly walk for up to an hour and a half at each end of the school day between home and school. They were recommended by the school’s staff as being in need of help as their families were unable to afford to give them money for lunch. The cook and her husband live next door to the school.

## Volunteering in Darjeeling

Although DCT does not have a volunteer programme, it can facilitate visits by volunteers. Ellie is one such young woman who was helped to volunteer by the Trust and here is her account of her stay and the work she did:-



“In September 2016, I had the pleasure of travelling to Darjeeling to volunteer with the Darjeeling Children’s Trust. As a student nurse I was eager to use my knowledge and skills to benefit the wonderful children there. I spent my mornings at the Mahatma Ghandi School, teaching the students about a range of health topics including healthy eating, exercise and smoking. From the day I arrived, I was warmly welcomed by all of

the students and teachers. It was lovely to see how much the students enjoyed school; they were always enthusiastic, incredibly polite and it became clear that this small but fantastic school is giving each of them the opportunity to thrive as an individual.

In the afternoons I spent time at the girls orphanage (shown above). On my first day, behind the big steel doors I was greeted by so many beaming genuine smiles, and for four weeks the girls continued to bring me such happiness. We shared stories of family, school and growing up and I gradually got to know each of their unique personalities. I also educated the girls on their own health and hygiene. I created a tooth brush chart for each of them, to remind and encourage them to brush their teeth twice a day! One of the girls is shown here proudly holding her chart.



I have such happy memories of Darjeeling and was so humbled by the kindness of everyone that I met. I knew early on that this wouldn’t be my last trip to Darjeeling, and I look forward to returning in the future. Not only to visit all the children, staff and volunteers, but also to see the development of the amazing work of the Darjeeling Children’s Trust.”

Many thanks to Ellie for all the work she did and bringing happiness to the children.

## Health matters at the orphanage

The work of our nurse and nursing assistant has been extended over the last year and they are now helping to look after both boys and girls at the orphanage. Led by Basanti, our nurse who is shown right, they now also visit the boys’ orphanage to monitor their health and to talk about health education. In the autumn they discovered a bad case of scabies on one of the younger boys and he was quickly given treatment. When the children all return at the end of February for the start of the new school year DCT Trustee Sonam will join their visits to encourage the older boys to attend the sessions on health education. They currently have a habit of disappearing when Basanti and Susmita appear, no doubt performing to perfection the role of embarrassed teenage boys when confronted with these issues!



Basanti runs the health education sessions with the girls and has organised them into small groups with each group headed by one of the older girls who helps the younger ones look after themselves properly. Meanwhile Susmita (shown right) visits every weekend and helps the younger girls have a good wash. She also checks their health, looking for signs of problems such as fevers and skin infections. Here, as the girls line up, she is inspecting hands and nails.



DCT continues to provide medicated soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes and towels as and when needed and no doubt there will be new provisions in place when the children return to the orphanage at the end of February.



## Music and story telling continues to be in demand



Both Rajib and Tshering continue their work with the children in the poorest schools and are much in demand. Rajib is shown here at Mahatma Gandhi School where we all enjoyed singing and discovered that “Row, row your boat” has words that are well known both in English and Nepali!

Tshering our librarian/storyteller is making plans for the coming school year and hopes to have an exhibition of the

children’s work in autumn. She uses stories and craft work to enthuse the children and also to pass on messages about health and other issues.

## Working with Wakefield Girls’ High School

Our relationship with Wakefield Girls’ High School continues to evolve with enthusiastic support from the Head, Nina Gunson. Proposals are being developed for a potential school visit to Darjeeling in 2018 organised by the assistant Head, David Eggleston. It is expected that a group of up to twelve girls will take part in a range of activities that will include visits to our key projects and provide a wealth of experience to share on return to Wakefield. Meanwhile, Momo the bear, who was sent by the girls and made his first appearance in Darjeeling in April 2016, continues to thrive. Here he is with two of the Trust’s sponsored children and also taking the air with Kanchenjunga in the background.



## Thank you to the Rotary Club of Pontefract

The Rotary Club of Pontefract have provided tremendous support in recent years in particular raising funds for our nurse training programme and child sponsorship scheme. Over 80 people attended a dinner event in November hosted at a local Indian restaurant raising well over a £1000 for future DCT projects.

Perna and Samishka, the two young women supported to undertake their nurse training by the Rotary Club, are both doing well and have passed all their yearly exams. Perna, shown here, has just started the final year of her three and a half year course. She is currently on a 6 month programme visiting villages to help and give advice on community health matters. Once she has passed her final exams she will work a probationary six month placement within West Bengal and after receiving her Certificate she can be posted to a hospital anywhere within India. Despite working hard at her studies Perna still finds time to enjoy dancing and taking part in dancing competitions. She is also team captain at her nurses’ hostel.



The Rotary Club also sponsor Tshumila Lama (shown right), an articulate young woman who is currently studying for a degree and whose aim is to join the Indian Civil Service. Tshumila is an exemplary student who has an hour’s travel in each direction to attend her college course.



## The sponsorship scheme

The DCT sponsorship scheme has been running since 2008 and in that time the programme has grown from a handful of children sponsored by trustees to nearly 70 young people supported by sponsors living all over the world. Over the 8 years our fees have remained static at £240 a year (£20 a month) but over that time the cost of sending a child to a good school in Darjeeling has risen significantly. This is for a number of reasons: school fees have risen, often much faster than inflation as have costs of uniforms, and more recently the value of the £GB has fallen by 20% against the rupee, hitting our spending power. Over the last few years we have covered the shortfall between fees and costs from Trust funds, but unfortunately the gap has grown to the extent that we can no longer afford to do so without significantly affecting our ability to support our other projects.

We have recently written to sponsors about the costs of sponsorship and the decision to raise the monthly cost from £20 to £25 a month for all new sponsors. We very much regret having to do this and understand if current sponsors are unable to increase to the new monthly amount. If as an existing sponsor you are not able to increase the fees you pay at this time, please be assured that your sponsorship will continue at its present rate and there will be no adverse impact on your child. Thank you for all your support and understanding on this matter.

## Progress at the orphanage

As the summer monsoon rains recede, October and November always sees a lot of building activity in Darjeeling under the clear sunny skies. The orphanage building site provided an interesting setting for a meeting of the project team during our November visit.



Our “office” was approached across a series of loosely placed planks and we looked out over the surrounding hills. Work was concentrating on construction of slabs with gradual demolition of the old boys’ orphanage buildings as and when necessary.



Due to the need to sort out an issue with the Orphanage’s government approved account, work stopped for a while on site but now, with the help of a generous donation from the Mumbai based Chanrai Foundation, construction is again taking place on site.

## Fund raising and donations – some thank yous we would like to make!

A big thank you to everyone who donates individually to help the children and young people in Darjeeling and to corporate donors Market Securities, based in London.

Since the last newsletter there have also been various fund raising events held around the country. A big thank you -

### To Riya and her friends and the students and staff of Nower Hill High School



Riya organised a great fundraising event at her school and this is her report:-

“Having found out about the incredible work that the Darjeeling Children’s Trust does, my friends and I were inspired to help out. We decided to organise a charity “Christmas Market” at Nower Hill High School in order to raise money for the Trust, and were delighted

by the support that we received from the students and staff. From selling books, small toys, candles, gifts, cakes and running competitions, we managed to raise £282.71! Big thanks to Mr Nagle, Akeed, Alice, Caitlin, Elaha, Elica, Elisha, Francesca, Grace, Hannah, Jash, Krusha, Maxine, Oliver, Rhiane, Shaimaa, Shreeya, Vennilla and Yashvini for making the event a success.”

### To Robert who walked the Yorkshire Three Peaks and the people who sponsored him

The 3<sup>rd</sup> September was the first really wet day after weeks of dry weather – the wind blew and the rain came down horizontally! It was also the day that Robert, DCT Treasurer, had identified to walk the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge, a distance of 25 miles. Starting off in Chapel-Le-Dale the route included ascents of Wherside, Pen-y-Ghent and Ingleborough, a total climb of about 5000 feet. Despite the conditions, the steepness of the route and the slippery rocks underfoot, Robert completed the walk in ten and a half hours and raised £450. Thank you to friend Bernie who walked part of the route with him and to everyone who sponsored him.





### To Kathmandu Nepalese Restaurant in Bristol

Early October saw a fund raising dinner take place at Kathmandu nepalese restaurant in Bristol. Sixty people came along and enjoyed the conviviality and great food. A big thank you to all who attended, to the restaurant for hosting the evening and for the crate of beer for the raffle; to Clifton Lido donating tokens for a swim and breakfast for two; to everyone who donated prizes for the raffle – and to everyone who bought tickets! The evening was a great success and raised £1200 for the orphanage redevelopment scheme.



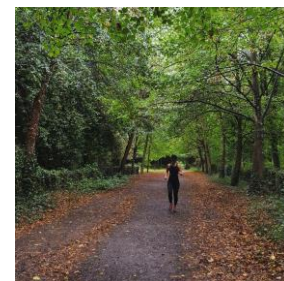
### To Sharmila Bousa

Thanks to everyone who came along to the Stella and Dot jewellery evening in Bristol in December in aid of Darjeeling Children's Trust, and to the lovely Sharmila Bousa for donating her commission to a great cause. I'm not sure there were many Christmas presents bought, but we certainly treated ourselves!



### To Klodi who ran a half marathon who reports ..

"I ran my first organised half marathon in November in the Old Deer Park in Richmond. I have to admit that though I was really excited and thrilled that I had won a place to run, I was slightly freaking out and a bit worried. I was aware of the amount of effort required, and the motivation and discipline necessary to train. I was also aware that at times my body wouldn't want to put in the effort. What motivated me most was that I wanted to help the children and young people of Darjeeling and especially to raise money for Phase 2 of the orphanage redevelopment, and because Darjeeling Children's Trust is making such a positive change to these children's lives. So every day I put on my running shoes and trained to raise as much as I could as I felt it was my turn to help.



So I ran on a very cold day in November and completed the half marathon. Though elated at accomplishing this feat and gaining a medal, I also had two blisters on my toes! But it was worth it! My wonderful friends and family donated and helped me to reach my target. Please support this charity and I am now looking at ways of helping them, including a visit to Darjeeling to help the trust hands on."



### To Rani's Restaurant in London

On an evening in early December, 47 enthusiastic participants gathered for dinner and a quiz at Rani's Restaurant in London. After introductions and catching up with family and friends, five teams were formed. The ground rules were set, including no looking up answers on phones and the teams became very enthusiastic once they were told that there was a prize for the winning team! Our wonderful quiz master Christine Inglis, supported by a very efficient Dan Sisson who ensured that all the sheets were correctly scored, did a fabulous job running the quiz with very interesting subjects. Christine and Dan will be back again for another quiz very soon.



Massive thanks to Rani Restaurant for hosting our event with fabulous food and their generosity. A big thank you for all the raffle prizes, namely Alexander Frater, (our former patron) for the signed copies of his books as well as various family and friends. You know who you are! The evening was a great success and made £1250 for the orphanage redevelopment fund.

**Thank you to everyone who has supported Darjeeling Children's Trust over the past year. You have helped make huge improvements and changes to the lives of children and young people in Darjeeling. Pawang speaks for them all when he says "Thank you for giving me the chance to make something of my life..."**