



Darjeeling Children's Trust

Newsletter

February 2020

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The last six months have been full of activity and events for DCT. As our short winter newsflash described, the most momentous of these events was the opening of two new dormitories for the girls at the Kripasaran Children's Home which allowed the 31 girls then living in the old hostel to move to bright new accommodation. But there have been other achievements too, with more young people either completing or being sponsored for vocational training courses; younger sponsored children and students achieving personal goals at school and college; maintaining existing partnerships with schools and the forging of new partnerships in Darjeeling. I hope that you will enjoy reading about these and seeing some of the photos.



On a personal level, I have decided that after twelve years as Chair of DCT it is time to step back although for now I will remain as a trustee. I am sure that the Trust will benefit from new energies and ideas and will continue to flourish. For my part, my life has been hugely enriched by the experiences that I have had over these years and especially by the people that I have been privileged to know and work with. It has been wonderful to have worked with and become friends of so many people both in India and the UK and especially to have got to know so many children and young people with all their varied talents. I would like to thank all DCT trustees past and present both in the UK and in India, for their ideas, energy, support and friendship; all that has been achieved has been the result of that friendship and teamwork and the variety of skills that people have brought to the table.

Until a longer-term permanent Chair is found, the Trust will for now be led by Katherine Carr. Katherine was a founder member of DCT. She is already proving to be an energetic leader with a clear vision of where the Trust needs to go and I wish her much luck and good fortune in undertaking this task.

Marilyn Adams,
Trustee and former Chair, Darjeeling Children's Trust

It is such an honour to be chairing Darjeeling Children's Trust after 12 amazing years as a trustee. The Trust has made a huge difference to children's lives over that time, and I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of it. The next few years will hopefully see completion of the major project to rebuild the Kripasaran Children's Home, which has been the focus of our fundraising in recent years. That will represent an enormous success, but will also present us with opportunities to support new projects and with new people. I am only keeping the seat warm, and we'll be advertising for a new Chairperson shortly to lead us through the final stages of the Kripasaran project and these decisions about our future. If you'd like to be involved keep an eye out for our advert in the next few weeks. We're an enthusiastic and friendly bunch and would love to hear from you!



Katherine Carr, Chair,
Darjeeling Children's Trust.

Alexander Frater 1937 - 2020

It was with sadness that we learned early in January of the death of former DCT Patron Alexander (Russell) Frater. Russell, as we knew him, was a well known and respected travel journalist. Former chief travel writer at the Observer for twelve years, he was a three times winner of the Press Awards Travel Writer of the Year, having been commended twice before that. He was also an author of renown, with perhaps his most famous book being "Chasing the Monsoon" which was published in 1990.

He became DCT's Patron in 2009, only giving up when his wife's and then his own ill health made it impossible to continue. We knew him as someone generous with his time, interest and support. Not for him a passive role of Patron in name only; he came to trustee meetings, attended DCT events and sponsored two children. He was absolutely delighted when one of them read "Chasing the Monsoon" and thoroughly enjoyed it.

It was our pleasure and honour to have known him and to have had him as our Patron. He is seen here drawing out winning numbers at a DCT cricket match in 2009.



Getting together with the sponsored children and their parents

At least once every year Major Wangdi and Nima call together all the sponsored children and young people for a general pep talk, to discuss the importance of parents helping and supporting their children and to encourage the children and young people to work hard and make the most of their



education. December's event was a great event which turned in to a celebration of the last ten years' work with the children and young people. It was attended not only by the children and their parents and some former students who have now gone on to jobs and new futures, but by the Trust's associates in Darjeeling. These included our librarian-storyteller Tshering, and Basanti and Susmita who look after the health and provide health education for the boys and girls at the Kripasaran Children's Home. They all work so hard to help the children. A presentation of a beautiful Ganesh figure was presented to Marilyn Adams in recognition of the time she has spent as Chairperson.

Moving on

Some of the young people sponsored by DCT as young children are completing their education and leaving school and college. Jordan, seen here on the left when he was first sponsored in 2009 and far right in November 2019, has been supported through his school and college education by DCT. Since we first met him, he has had a



single-minded ambition to become a police officer. Now, after leaving college, he is about to enter a study course that will coach him for his Civil Service exams and allow him to enter his chosen profession. His family have managed to obtain a grant for this expensive process from a local Buddhist organisation so we bid him farewell and our very best wishes for the future – through sponsorship DCT has given him this life opportunity.

Success for one of our sponsored children



Looking anxious as they line up before the tournament, sponsored boy Yograj later celebrates with his team mates after they win the local inter-schools football competition. They pose here with an impressive number of trophies. Sponsored children take part in an impressive variety of sports including kung fu, football and badminton and often compete in both local and regional competitions. It is all part of building confidence

Meeting the sponsored children

DCT trustees in Darjeeling are in contact with sponsored students on a day to day basis, but part of any visit by trustees from the UK is the chance it provides for us to meet the sponsored students individually and to visit some schools. In November we met up with all the students and took the chance to visit Camellia, Good Start Montessori Academy (GSMA) and Chaitainya Schools. Together with invaluable input from head teachers we talk to students individually and discuss with them their progress including moving on to the next stage of their education, whether it's their next school or college or vocational training opportunities. We always ask if there are issues they would like to talk about and there often are. We were also treated to the annual concert at GSMA where a number of the sponsored children were performing.



From top left, clockwise: students at Camellia; a sponsored child dances at GSMA; Major Wangdi talking to students at Chaitainya; group photo at Chaitainya; in the playground at GSMA.

Helping students choose the right career

We have long recognised that careers' advice in Darjeeling has been minimal and it has been difficult for our students to plan their path ahead. Huge congratulations therefore to three young people, Aashwin Pradhan, Aishwarya Pradhan and Namkha Norsang. They have set up a small local company called Going Homestays to promote homestays to travellers to Darjeeling and they also decided to organise a free special careers Open Doors event on the 8th December in association with the Darjeeling Rotary Club and DCT. Their speakers included Namkha, who is a robotics engineer, and others with a diverse range of professions including a fashion blogger, film maker, interior designer, fitness coach and nutritionist. They were helped during the event by the DCT students at the FCI.



Over a hundred students from different schools around Darjeeling attended, including all the DCT sponsored students and students from the Children's Home together with Pema Bhante. Whilst many students will follow other paths, the event helped to open the eyes of the young people that there are many opportunities out there – in talking to students at school before the event the Open Doors team found that 90% had no idea of what they wanted to do with their lives. Plans are in place to repeat the event annually.

To fund the event and so that even the poorest could attend without a charge the team raised about 3,500\$ to cover costs from a local fund raising campaign. After the final bills had been paid they discovered they had surplus which they donated to the Children's Home. What a wonderful gesture! DCT is very proud to have this wonderful team as partners in improving the lives of young people in Darjeeling.

Beautician training is going well

Anamika, last year's trainee beautician, has completed her course and is planning to travel to Bangalore to live with her brother and his family so that she can work in a salon where more advanced beauty techniques are taught. We first met her as a young girl of eight years' old living in the Children's Home and she has become a bright intelligent young woman. She is seen here on the left with Poonam the salon owner. Part of her training last year was in bridal beauty techniques – and here is one young woman ready for her ceremony.



Three more young women have now begun their six months' training. All three come from poor families and in two cases their mothers are alone and struggling to look after their children after their husbands passed away. Manisha, one of the students, is seen here applying herself to henna design. Another of the young women wishes to be able to support her mother and siblings.



We wish them all luck in their chosen career.

A Special Event at the Kripasaran Children's Home

17th November saw a very special event at the Children's Home – it was the official opening of two new dormitories for the girls. It was a wonderful day of celebration as ribbons were cut, speeches were made, songs were sung and dances performed. At last the dream, that all the children at the home would have accommodation that would allow them to live and study in well-lit and airy surroundings has become a reality.



The day before, moving day, was full of activity as bags were packed and by late afternoon, everything was done and the girls waited for the transport to carry them and their few possessions on the short journey to their new home. There was some trepidation amongst the older girls as some had lived in the old hostel for up to ten years.

There was excitement and anticipation too though, especially as the younger girls had already visited their new home a few days earlier and spread the news of what they had seen. By coincidence, we too had been visiting at the same time and watched as they rushed around the new rooms, opening and hanging out of windows, loving the views and light as the sunshine poured in. They had all crowded in to the new bathroom and showers and on to the balconies, whilst chattering excitedly, deciding which set of bunk beds they would occupy with their friend and which cupboard the two of them would share.



Only a few days earlier the final touches were being put in place as mattresses were delivered and the carpenter met with Nima to discuss where the curtain poles should go and the length of the new orange curtains. They were being matched by new colourful bedding for the girls so that once everything was in place, the dormitories seemed full of light and colour – what an amazing contrast to their previous dark, poorly lit hostel.



We have a special request – could you sponsor a table for £135?

There is a lovely new dining room but no tables. The old tables used by the children are literally falling apart and unfit for use.



At the moment the young people are sitting on the floor to eat until new tables are made!

Could you sponsor a table – perhaps with your family or work colleagues? One has been promised so far but we need 13 more!

The Opening Ceremony



The great day arrived and Marilyn Adams was given the honour and privilege of cutting the ribbons – one for the new dining hall and one for each of the two new dormitories. This has been an enormous achievement for the whole team, all of whom were able to be present apart from Raghavan, our architect. It was also a momentous occasion for Pema Bhante, seen here with trust Chairperson, as it is his original vision of giving the children a new healthy home that we have all been working towards over the last ten years.

With ribbons cut, it was time for speeches and for the children to show off their singing and dancing talents with Rajib providing the music and watched by Tshering who had coached the girls.

Then everyone, including a few of the girls' mothers, set out to explore new dormitories which the children are rapidly making their own. Beds are being decorated and cupboards personalised with stickers, whilst the outdoor balconies are being put to good use as shoe storage and clothes drying areas.



What happens next?

The project isn't finished yet. With many of the girls away in their home villages over the winter break, work began in mid January to build the second bathroom, as for a few weeks in November and early December over 30 girls and women staff had to share 3 toilets and 2 showers. This is clearly not an acceptable standard. DCT has provided funds for the second bathroom and this should be finished by the end of the winter break. Work has also been commissioned to complete a new dormitory for female staff who help look after the children. At present they are sharing the children's sleeping quarters which is putting pressure on space standards. This work will cost £6500; we need to raise a similar amount to complete the dormitory for the male staff.

The final stage will be to build the new kitchen and food storage area and the living and office accommodation for Pema Bhante, to landscape the site to provide playspace and to complete the third dormitory and bathroom for the girls. The dormitories are now near capacity but Pema Bhante is often requested to accommodate up to 20 more girls whose family circumstances might be such that they need a home.

DCT needs to raise £85,000 to achieve all this – we would be very grateful for any help you can give.

Some aerial shots of the site taken by a drone mounted camera – with thanks to Lungta Creative Productions



The boys' hostel which was completed in 2014 is on the right whilst the new building containing the girls' dormitories is the red-roofed grey building on the left. This will also eventually be painted yellow – a symbol of peace. The two new dormitories occupy the top floor whilst floors below will eventually form the third dormitory, a general recreation room, bathroom and staff accommodation. Seen in the background, the old red-walled prayer room with storage below, will be demolished in the final phase of construction. The steep terrain, the lack of vehicular access and the consequent construction difficulties are illustrated here.

Haircut day at the Children's Home



Anamika and new trainee, Manisha, under the watchful eye of salon-owner, Poonam, all gave a morning of their time to give haircuts to any of the girls at the Children's Home who decided they would like a trim. At first the take up was slow as everyone was a bit nervous of the occasion, but volunteers were soon lining up and, in the end, the three hairdressers worked solidly for nearly three hours.



One of the older girls, shown above on the left, who had plaits nearly down to her waist decided that she wanted a complete change and asked for a short, fashionable bob. Her friend is to her right – holding some of the hair that had been cut off! She seemed very happy with the result and altogether there were some very satisfied customers.

All the vocational training students are happy to be able to give something back when the opportunity arises.

Vocational training in hotel management continues to help more young people achieve some of their life goals

Five more students are working hard at the Food and Craft Institute to complete their year's college training before they learn the location of their work placements. These are likely to be in parts of India many miles from home. Seen here on the right and looking smart in their college uniforms, they told us of their family backgrounds when we met up with them in November. Some described how their fathers, who are the only wage earners in the family, are on low daily wages and unable to afford college fees. The father of one of the young people had passed away and his mother goes from house to house cleaning and washing clothes to try and support herself and her five children. This student's ambition is to earn enough to help support her and his brothers and sisters.



One of our previous FCI students has sent us the photo on the left as she sits at her desk in the hotel reception where she now works. She may eventually return to Darjeeling but for now she is seeing something of the world.

Another student, Eyingo, who lived for nine years at a Christian Mission home and whose parents have both died, is studying at a different college and is already hard at work at his work placement in a large hotel in Nagpur, hundreds of miles from Darjeeling.

Because of his family situation the college has waived their charges so DCT is supporting him by paying his hostel fees to allow him to undertake the course.



We also met up with Samir, one of the first students DCT sponsored to study hotel management in 2010. He has worked at a variety of hotels in India since then gaining a wide range of experience. He had just been successful in being offered a job with an Italian cruise company. He was about to go to Kolkata for his on board training whilst his visa applications for Europe and the USA were being processed after which he was planning to return home for a couple of weeks before his big adventure began.

He offered to visit the students at the Children's Home to talk to them about his career and advise them about the opportunities it offered. We wish him luck as he becomes a citizen of the world!

Oxford Runners raise funds for DCT

Four men from Great Milton, Oxfordshire offered to enter the Oxford Half Marathon to raise funds for the DCT. Unfortunately, the organiser had to pull out due to illness, leaving Marc Powell, James Bamford and Ian Brown to take up the challenge. The three valiantly put their best feet forward despite appalling weather conditions. As well as raising £560, Ian Brown (Brownie) achieved his personal best run. Well done Marc, James and Brownie. DCT is thrilled you ran to support the children of Darjeeling!



Yorkshire walkers get crafty and raise money for Darjeeling's children

In early December the Tuesday morning walking group, a group of friends who are based around Halifax, met at the home of one of their members, Andrea Conning, for a charity craft and lunch event to raise money for DCT. This year's project was to make patchwork baubles to hang on their Christmas trees and although none of the group owns up to being very "crafty", everyone managed to produce something to be proud of. After the success of the previous year when rag wreaths were produced, this has now become an annual event. A huge thank you from DCT for your support and making a difference to the children of Darjeeling.



Thank you to everyone who has supported DCT

A huge thank you to all our supporters and to everyone who has donated their time, money and energies into supporting the children in Darjeeling. You are changing lives and helping young people have a future full of hope.