



Winter NEWSLETTER

February 2023

DCT REACHES £1 MILLION!

Dear friends and supporters,

I am delighted to be able to publish Darjeeling Children's Trust's latest newsletter, full of updates about all the fantastic activity which has taken place in Darjeeling over the last few months. It feels like the constraints of lockdown in India have finally fallen away, and we are able to get back into full swing. We are sponsoring children, funding vocational training, starting new projects on careers support and life skills, and nearing the end of our long-running support for construction work at the KBM Children's Home.

Closer to home, we had an amazing fundraising Ball in London in November, and the generosity of our supporters at that event means that we have reached the incredible milestone of having raised over £1 million since the Trust was first established 15 years ago. Thinking back to our first tentative meeting in 2008, and how far we have come since then in terms of ambition and impact, I want to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to all those who have helped us get to where we are today. Darjeeling might be a long way away for most of us, but together we have changed the lives of hundreds of children and young people in a small corner of India and transformed their future. On behalf of DCT, thank you.

Katie Carr
Chair of Trustees, Darjeeling Children's Trust



KRIPASARAN CHILDREN'S HOME

Over the last six months, life at the Children's Home has been gradually getting back to normal after the difficult last two years, when lives and routines have been disrupted by covid. Whilst the Home usually provides a safe haven for up to 100 children, there have been about 70 children living there since the middle of 2022. This will increase to 100 as the children return from the winter holidays, which have recently ended.

A major achievement - the underground water storage tank, which is vital to the water harvesting project - has been successfully completed and now contributes to the ongoing water supply at the Home. DCT would like to thank the United Nations Women's Guild for the grant that they kindly awarded for the construction of the tank, which will provide much-needed extra water during the winter dry season, and the other donors who have so generously supported this project.

There was some delay to restarting the final phase of construction pending the transfer of monies under the government's new financial

regulations but, with the resolution of this issue the builders are back on site and work is in full flow.

As before, due to the inaccessibility of the site for vehicles, all the work is being done by hand with just the help of that most basic piece of machinery - the concrete mixer. It's being put to good use in the construction of the walls and structural elements of the new two-storey structure, which will provide a larger, more modern kitchen, a central office and accommodation for Pema Bhantey, who is in charge of the Home. DCT would like to thank the Hope Foundation for the generous grant they gave us recently towards this work.

Marilyn Adams, Trustee



HMI - HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINEERING INSTITUTE

The children whom DCT has sponsored for over a decade have now grown into young adults. In December 2022, five children from DCT embarked on an adventurous trail established by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and successfully climbed to the summit of Sandakphu, the highest point in West Bengal, India, at an elevation of 3,636 metres.



For the first time, these children took part in the adventure course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI). **Bijay Thami**, in particular, stood out among his peers by winning four gold medals in the obstacle race, marathon, indoor rock climbing, and for leading his patrol to victory. We are all very proud of him and the other students for their hard work and determination. The staff, trainers and guides at HMI were extremely pleased with the overall performance and behaviour of our children.

We will continue to send five children each year to HMI's adventure course. This will boost their confidence, highlight what the children are good at, and provide them with valuable life lessons and new experiences. When they receive medals and certificates from the challenging adventure course, they will have something tangible to show for their efforts.



NEW SPONSORED CHILDREN

Each year, DCT selects ten new vulnerable children from Darjeeling to sponsor. The selection process involves interviews with the children's parents or guardians, as well as the children themselves. The most deserving candidates are chosen based on this process.

These children have a strong desire to learn and, for their parents, the sponsorship provides financial relief. Some of the children have lost both parents, and some come from low-income families. During these difficult times, DCT's support comes as a blessing to the community of Darjeeling. When DCT decides to sponsor a child, their education, health, and well-being are taken care of, and DCT provides full support for their extracurricular activities, which empowers the children to grow and develop.

For the parents, their children represent aspiration and hope for the future. They naturally want the best for their children, and this includes giving them the chance to pursue professional careers rather than having to follow in their parents' footsteps by taking up hard manual labour. Our present children are exemplary students, and our young adults have started to earn and help their families. One of our students, Samia Ansari, is also the top student at St Teresa's School.

Aashwin Pradhan



HEALTH & WELL-BEING

DCT's Health & Well-being Programme is one of our most well-defined projects to date. In 2022, DCT had great success in its Health & Well-being Programme, led by trustee Clare. Her insightful decisions were central in pushing the Health & Well-being project to new heights.

At the beginning of 2022, DCT hired Dr. Shreya to oversee the well-being of the children at the Children's Home and also our sponsored children who live with their parents/guardians. Dr. Shreya and her team of nurses have been providing care for the children's overall well-being.

In addition, dental surgeons from West Sikkim also conducted their first dental camp for DCT children. They volunteered to do so from the neighbouring state of Sikkim, and were generous enough to bring their own equipment and conduct a highly organised dental camp for over 100 children. The dental surgeons conducted basic dental screenings, extractions, and tooth restoration. Around 20 younger students had milk teeth taken out. A technical officer also conducted an Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programme for all students. The dental surgeons have promised to continue volunteering and to make the dental health camp even larger in the future.



Dr. Ansari from Darjeeling also volunteered to conduct an eye camp at the Children's Home. 130 children, along with staff from KBM, were seen by the doctor. The DCT's Health and Hygiene team, composed of Dr. Shreya and two nurses, supported the successful eye camp. Thankfully, not many children had bad eyesight, but some will require a follow-up check at the doctor's office. DCT will cover the cost of spectacles for those who require them.

Each weekend morning, the boys and girls at the Home partake in a yoga class taught by Donna, which helps to keep the children fit and healthy, especially after the emotionally testing time experienced by all during the lockdowns. Various other activities were also conducted, such as a live fire drill in which all children participated, an orientation on Human Trafficking by MARG NGO, and lessons on girls' hygiene given by Rotary Club Darjeeling and Darjeeling Prerna.

NEW SUPERVISOR COMMITTEE AT KBM

The final phase of construction for the Children's Home is underway, and the children are now enjoying living in a spacious environment with ample light and a health-promoting atmosphere.

At the beginning of 2023, DCT supported the appointment of both male and female supervisors for the Children's Home. This initiative will ensure that the children continue to be well looked-after. DCT has taken part in several ground-breaking projects in 2022, and the supervisors will ensure that these Children's Home projects continue to run smoothly. Pema Bhandari, the head of the Children's Home, will have additional support in this goal.

After conducting interviews with the candidates who had applied for the supervisor positions, Sangam and Jigten were appointed as the male and female supervisors, respectively. These deserving candidates are already working diligently, having quickly become familiar with the home, and are adding value to the children's day-to-day lives.

The supervisors also oversee the children's daily routine by organising committees of male and female head students. Each committee comprises four senior boys and girls. Daily duties are assigned to the children, giving them a sense of shared responsibility towards the Home. In time, the Children's Home will be an example of collective care and co-operation in Darjeeling.



PROJECTS IN DARJEELING

Career Counselling and Winter Tuition

This year, we are providing one-to-one career counselling for those students who are on the cusp of joining a course or college. Eleven of our sponsored students are currently about to complete their schooling. Mr. E. Pradhan, a certified career counsellor, is helping these children to clarify their goals as well as supporting them to decide which career path they would like to pursue.



For the junior classes, winter tuition has resumed after the pandemic. Mr. Thakur teaches students in classes 6-9, covering any material they have not understood in school, especially during the difficult time of the pandemic. This will help to build students' confidence in these subjects.



Nursing 2023

There are four nursing students currently undergoing GNM (General Nursing and Midwifery) training in Darjeeling and Siliguri. Each of them is supported by DCT.



Knitting & Sewing

Binita has been helping our girls at the Children's Home to learn knitting and sewing. This activity provides the girls with a valuable pass-time at the weekends, and teaches them important life skills for the future.



PROJECTS IN DARJEELING

Beauty Course

Each year, six young women embark on the local beauty training course. These students did not wish to pursue an academic route and therefore doing this type of practical course is perfectly suited to them. Many of our former beauty trainees have found employment in their villages and cities.



Maths Tuition

The children at the home experienced a difficult time during the pandemic, and this particularly affected their progress in maths. Many have found the subject hard, and were receiving low scores. A maths teacher, appointed with DCT's support, now helps these children with any issues and ensures that they are progressing well in all areas of the subject.



Food and Craft Institute (FCI) / Vocational Training at Don-Bosco, Kalimpong

Each year, DCT sponsors ten new students at the FCI in Darjeeling. The course is an 18-month programme that includes one year of classes at the institute and six months of practical training at hotels in cosmopolitan cities. The results of this vocational training have been outstanding, with many students securing jobs in the tourism industry, including in cities and on cruise ships.

In 2022, DCT sponsored Pujan and Nikhil to attend Don Bosco Technical School in Kalimpong. Both of them come from impoverished backgrounds; Pujan delivered milk from his village and had to walk for nearly three hours to reach town, and Nikhil has lost both of his parents and was working in a restaurant to support himself. Despite their difficult circumstances, they worked hard and were each able to secure a place on the hotel management programme at Don Bosco. After graduation, they each managed to secure jobs in Bangalore, and are excited for their new opportunities.



The Don Bosco Technical School also offers various vocational training including courses for car mechanics, electricians, teachers, and office administrators. If any deserving candidates come forward for vocational training in the future, we will also be happy to provide them with sponsorship.

Aashwin Pradhan

NOTABLE SUCCESSES & ACHIEVEMENTS

Name - School - Class	Achievements
<p>Bijay Thami Camellia School (<i>Class 12</i>)</p>	<p>Four gold medals in HMI adventure course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obstacle race • marathon • indoor rock climbing • no.1 patrol
<p>Anish Darnal Camellia School (<i>Class 12</i>)</p>	<p>School Character & Service Award</p>
<p>Tenzing Bhutia Chaitanya School (<i>Class 10</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gold medal in 8th Bengal Taekwondo Championship • Selected/appointed to serve for Tibetan Army
<p>Samia Ansari St Teresa's (<i>Class 10</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third place in Darjeeling District Cooperative Union district-level quiz competition • Third place in Youth Parliamentary Extempore Speech Competition
<p>Sania Ansari St Teresa's (<i>Class 12</i>)</p>	<p>Second place in Youth Parliamentary Quiz Competition</p>
<p>Ashwini Tamang Chaitanya School (<i>Class 11</i>)</p>	<p>School Public Speaking Participation Award</p>

DONATIONS FROM SWITZERLAND

STERNSAENGER (Choral singers)

The choral singers from Arlesheim, a small town in Switzerland, donated their collection towards kitchen furnishings, computers and the fresh water pipe for the Children's Home in Darjeeling. Most of the singers are acolytes from the Dom (Cathedral) in Arlesheim. On January 6, the Visit of the Magi, till January 9 the choral singers go from house to house singing and blessing the households of the town. Every year, the money collected is donated to a children's project and this year DCT was lucky to be the recipient.

There were 44 children who participated over the four days, ranging in age from 12 to 19. They collected a sum of SFr 14,000, which is approximately £12,000.

It was an experience to see children from one world helping needy children in another world.



Evangelish Kirche, Binningen

The Evangelical Church in Binningen, a small town in the Canton of Baselland, holds Sunday lunches for the members of the church. The collection for the meal is given to a charity which the church elders choose.

In June 2022, Darjeeling Children's Trust was presented with a cheque of £1,000 by the Evangelical Church. The children of Darjeeling thank the members of the church for their generosity. Every Rappen goes a long way in Darjeeling.



I joined the three kings; Balthazar, Melchior and Casper, for two days and believe me it was hard work knocking on doors, sometimes welcomed, sometimes not. It was amazing to see the children trudging on in the cold weather with such enthusiasm and energy.

Tshering Huber, Trustee

GREEN SHOOTS & STRONG ROOTS BALL

Guests and trustees gathered at the May Fair Hotel in central London on the evening of Saturday 19th November for a magical night of fun and fundraising. The excitement and atmosphere reflected the joy of celebration amongst a community of friends and supporters coming together for the first time in three years.

DCT had previously held four large events in London over the years but, after the hiatus of pandemic and lockdowns, this one did feel very special. The event was sold out weeks in advance, with supporters keen to have a Ball as well as to hear all about our new projects and the strong roots that have taken hold as a result of many years of work in Darjeeling.

The Trust's Chair, Katie Carr, took centre stage to update the audience on the Trust's exciting recent activities, and the packed Crystal Room then quietened when she introduced a short film produced by Aashwin, our new project manager in Darjeeling.

The film was a work of art, beautifully produced, and it had a huge impact. The team in Darjeeling spoke directly to the UK audience, acknowledging the benefits of their support. This was followed by a video tour around the new Children's Home showing the children playing, studying and doing chores.





Kishan Amin and the other members of JIYA produced a wonderful, intoxicating set of song and dance music, performing a fusion of Eastern and Western numbers throughout the evening, brilliantly supported by female vocalist, Amrita.

A highlight of the night was the energetic Bollywood Dance routine performed by Gita. This mesmeric performance drew large numbers of guests onto the dance floor, eager to display their Bollywood dance moves and set the scene for dancing the night away.



A huge effort was put in by trustees and volunteers to support the fundraising potential and to ensure that the Ball had optimum impact for the benefit of the children. The combination of a fantastic tombola, a silent and a live auction, along with numerous donation pledges, resulted in funds raised exceeding £50,000; incredible generosity way beyond our expectations. This meant that **our small Trust has now raised in excess of £1 million since its inception in 2008.**



I would like to thank everyone involved in helping to make the Green Shoots and Strong Roots Ball such a great success. The management and staff at the May Fair Hotel were exceptionally supportive, the DCT events team could not have given more, the input from volunteers was outstanding ... and the children in Darjeeling will benefit for many years to come from the generosity shown by our supporters.

Hugh Heron, Trustee