



*Darjeeling Children's
Trust
Newsletter Summer 2024*

Dear Friends and Supporters,

"There must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory."

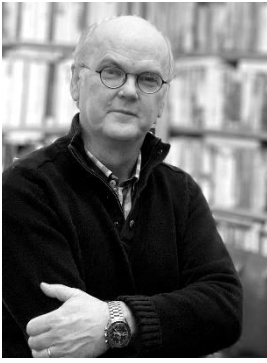
Sir Francis Drake was right, as I discovered in Darjeeling last month. Others have provided a full account of the opening ceremony and accompanying festivities at the newly-completed Kripasaran Children's Home and I won't steal their thunder. But I will share three thoughts which struck me forcefully, both at the time and afterwards, as I reflected on an unforgettable event.

The first concerns the limitless possibilities contained in the vision which begins any great matter, especially when that vision is turbocharged with unstoppable determination. It's certainly a perceptive vision which, when looking at the crumbling concrete, leaking roofs and dark, dingy accommodation of the old children's home, sees only possibilities for a wonderful transformation. Not only do the new facilities offer a comfortable, bright and efficient place in which children can live, learn and grow, they also say to them something which perhaps they've never before had the audacity to believe: "You are worth it". To borrow from Muhammad Ali: if our minds can conceive it, and our hearts can believe it, then we can achieve it.

The second is that the capacity for continuing unto the end is dependent, not just on the dreamer of the original dream, nor yet on those who give practical effect to that dream, but on a large, dispersed, indivisible team. Remove any link in the chain and the chain breaks. So to every supporter whose generosity has provided a link in that chain, thank you very much indeed.

The third is that the true glory of the completed great matter was evident, not so much in the new building, nor in the marching, singing and dancing displays — inspiring though these were — but in the manifest confidence of 100 children, from youngest to oldest. Learning one's ABCs and 'one, two, threes' is, of course, vital. But if children are so intimidated by the pressures of life when they go out into the world that the lessons of the classroom have no prospect of helping them realise their potential, then everything will have been in vain. (There is a cliché which represents children's minds as a 'tabula rasa', a blank slate on which teachers can write. But Rabelais was surely closer to the mark when he described a child as "a fire to be lit, not a vase to be filled.") This personal assurance on their part is clear evidence that the month-by-month support provided by our child sponsors does more than feed children into an examination mill: it equips them for their entire working lives, the benefits of supporters' generosity being sure to outlast us all. We really should have a notice proudly displayed above the gate: "Respect us. We are Darjeeling's future".

You'll recall that DCT's former Chair, Katie Carr, said farewell in the last newsletter and we miss her contributions to the Trust generally and to the deliberations of the Board particularly. We were also sorry to lose Kirstie Davidson and Akasa Pradhan from the DCT family: both their commitment and their contributions were highly valued.



I do hope to see as many of you as possible at the Grand Ball on 23rd November where, between the feasting and the dancing, you'll have an opportunity to meet Aashwin, our Project Director in Darjeeling.

Graham Cory

Chairperson

Darjeeling Children's Trust

It's monsoon time again!

The six months of summer are a major challenge for everyone who lives in Darjeeling. Over those months the town receives about 90 inches of rain which buckets down, soaking everyone who isn't well protected. This year, as every year, DCT has taken steps to help the children avoid all those heavy downpours. Waterproofs and umbrellas have been given to the young people. For some, it looks like they have plenty of growing space!



DCT trustees, Hugh Heron, Sharan Patel and Tshering Huber help in giving out the brollies.



Returning to Darjeeling

I visited Darjeeling regularly from 2008 up until 2019...and then the pandemic years struck and brought the routine to a halt. So, this year was my first return trip in 5 years, and I really didn't quite know what to expect.

What I did know (despite the advent of zoom) was that a five-year gap meant I had lost that essential personal connection...I had lost the feeling for the purpose and so I knew this visit was critical if I was to re-find my belief... "why are we doing this?".



On arrival from Delhi, some things hadn't changed. The familiar chaotic scenes at Bagdogra Airport, our vehicle skirting around cows and goats on the village roads and the vistas of vast tea plantations rising towards the foothills of the Himalayas as we wound our way up and up towards Darjeeling.

On the first day, I made my way to the site of the children's home. It was a walk I knew well, some 25 minutes from the main town on busy, noisy roads passing by the historic railway station, and down the narrow stairwell (where all material for the new building had been carried by hand during the 12 years of construction). We opened the gate to the new home.



There was an immediate impact on the senses. The new home is vast, spacious colourful and warm. It has a great vibe. Children started to arrive on the scene – they looked healthy and happy and genuinely delighted to make our acquaintance. The head monk Pema Bhante appeared, and we shared a familiar handshake. He looked well. A five-year gap melted away.

I was introduced to our new, young DCT colleagues recruited in recent times to support the health and well-being of the children...and for the first-time face to face, I met Aashwin, our conscientious project lead. They are all totally committed and a joy to be around.

We embarked on a tour of new dormitories, water harvesting, dining area, food storage, staff accommodation, kitchen...and at the end of the day, we removed our shoes to join the children in the light-filled prayer hall that sits on the roof of the Home. I sat in silence listening to the chants and the quiet meditation, surrounded by warmth, love and gratitude.

I was in Darjeeling for two weeks. On day one, I realised I still believed.

Hugh Heron DCT Trustee

Young people and their families give something back

A big thank you to Mr. Ganesh, a barber and parent of one of our sponsored children.

He regularly visits the boys at KBM, to give them a haircut. The boys are seen here standing in line, and his work leaves them looking neat and tidy.



Happily, the girls aren't missed out. The trainee beauticians help them in the same way. In June when the beauticians visited, the girls had fringes trimmed and new styles under watchful eye of salon owner, Poonam.



Six young women a year benefit from DCT's sponsorship. The course lasts for three months and each placement costs £220. If you would like to change the life of a young woman who, without this training would have few employment prospects, do email us at info@darjeelingchildrenstrust.org.uk.

Thank you to another parent who stepped in to help solve a problem. Mr. Prakash visited KBM to repair the sewing machines which needed attention. They are in demand as now some of the boys, who expressed an interest tailoring, have joined the girls for the weekly sessions.



The classes are in great demand and keep teacher, Binita, very busy. If you would like to sponsor the classes for a year, or part of the year, the annual cost is £xxx and any contribution is welcome. Donations can be made via our website, www.darjeelingchildrenstrust.org.uk



We are also grateful to DCT alumni who are helping DCT. Passang, who was sponsored as a young boy passed all his exams and went on to become one of our first FCI students. After his six-month placement in Hyderabad, he returned to work in Darjeeling and he is now the Office Manager at the Hermitage Resort, a well-known Darjeeling hotel. He gladly gives up his time every year to advise current FCI students completing their college course who are about to leave for their work placements. It's always reassuring for

them to hear from someone who has experienced the same thing before, and to hear about the ups and downs they are likely to encounter.



Until very recently, Wangchen was a resident at KBM. With a passion for all things motorised, he was sponsored by DCT to undertake a training course at Don Boscoe College in Kalimpong and has now secured a great job as a motor mechanic in Siliguri.

A big thank you to both young men who spoke to assembled students at the Career Awareness event organised by DCT and recently held at KBM.

Spotlight on the DCT Team in Darjeeling

DCT is lucky to fund a great team in Darjeeling who work hard to get the best result for the young people DCT helps. The team of two is led by Aashwin, who was born in Darjeeling and whose family still live there.



Aashwin has a BEng degree in Electronics & Communication. An entrepreneur at heart, Aashwin decided not to follow the typical route into an IT career, but instead founded his company 'Lungta Creative Production', where he combines his technical know-how with a passion for creativity to work on video projects. Later, he also started a tourism website named 'GoingHomestays' focused on building a network of homestays in Darjeeling and connecting the guests directly to the host. In his free time, Aashwin loves to read (books on philosophy / spirituality are a favourite), ride his motorbike, take photos and inspire others. He has a strong motivation to help those in need and, since starting work, he has made a huge impact on the reach of our charity in Darjeeling. His favourite quotes are: 'With great power comes great responsibility' and 'The best is yet to come'.



Aashwin is ably supported by Alok, a dedicated professional who joined DCT in July 2023 to collaborate closely with Aashwin on vital projects. With a talent for maintaining computer records and a knack for connecting with sponsored children, Alok ensures efficient data organization while making a meaningful impact on young lives. Outside work, he's an active member of the Darjeeling Enfielders Club, where he gathers donations and aids those in need, showcasing his commitment to social causes. Alok's dedication to both his work and altruistic pursuits embodies his admirable character and commitment to bettering the community.

Sad news of Jordan Bhutia 1998 - 2024

It is with great sadness that we report the death of one of our former sponsored students, Jordan Bhutia, in an accident on 14th April this year. Jordan was sponsored from the age of twelve and did well at school. When he died, he was studying for the entrance exam to the Civil Service.



He had gone with friends to a local picnic spot to cool off in the waters of the River Jamuna to escape the heat. When one of his friends fell in and got into difficulty, Jordan and another friend jumped in to help but sadly Jordan fell and was swept away. One of the other young men also died. Jordan was nearly 26 years old.

More news of our sponsored students

Currently there are more than 60 young people sponsored into a better education through DCT.

It is always a huge delight to everyone when they do well in their lives. So huge congratulations to Samia who gained 98.25% in her Class 12 exams and who hopes to go on to enter the prestigious Indian Civil Service. Congratulations go also to our sports stars, Dewakar and Sohan who had great success playing badminton at the National Badminton Championships held in West Bengal.



We are very proud of these young people and of all the young students who are working so hard to give themselves and their families a better life! If you would like to sponsor a child, please contact us at info@darjeelingchildrenstrust.org.uk.

Fund raising in Switzerland

DCT Trustee Tshering Huber, who lives in Switzerland, is busy raising funds for Darjeeling's children.

In January one of her friends celebrated his 60th birthday when – of course – games were played! The 500 Swiss francs raised in the game of bingo was generously donated to DCT. Six months later, in June, the Evangelical church in Binningan, Baselland held a lunch and also kindly donated the proceeds to DCT. This is now 4 years in a row that the church has generously donated a lunch to the Trust. Publicity for the event is shown here.

In August 14th, a Momo (Tibetan dimsum/ravioli) lunch is planned at a farm in the neighbouring village of Reinach. The proceeds and donations of the lunch will be used for the purchase of mattresses and wardrobes for the children's home KBM. All are welcome and Tshering is anticipating that they will be joined by many friends and families.



Darjeeling Cup Golf Tournament

Meanwhile, in Yorkshire the now traditional Darjeeling Cup Golf Tournament took place in the sunshine of Pontefract on 21st June. Organised as always by Trustee, Hugh Heron, 48 Golfers took part and there were both individual and team competitions.



A great day was had by all. This year's winner was Glenn Coburn with 41 points. He completed his incredible round in 71 shots, 1 under the course par – a Darjeeling Cup first! The team prize went to the Evelyn Team (Ian Gibson, Luke Lodge, Harry Scott-Barker and Shaun Rockliffe) with 96 points. Congratulations to everyone who took part.



Including donations, net profit is in excess of £7000. Over the last 15 years, the Darjeeling Cup has raised about £75,000 to support DCT's projects – an amazing effort and achievement! The generous donations, prizes and sponsorship from so many, including those who have been unable to take part, is hugely appreciated. Thank you.

DCT wishes to thank all its supporters, the many people who attend events and all those who support the Trust in a variety of ways including donations of their time and skills, money, books, musical instruments, food and equipment at KBM, sports equipment and clothing. The list is huge and diverse. Without your help the lives of the children of Darjeeling would be poorer in so many ways. Thank you.



A momentous day at KBM

May 5th 2024 was a momentous day. Twelve years after DCT's first involvement with the Kripasaran Children's Home, the official opening ceremony of the new buildings took place. It was a joyous day of celebration involving Pema Bhante who is the monk in charge, the children and young people who live at the Home, the staff, the Members of the Kripasaran Buddhist Mission and its many supporters and of course those trustees of DCT who were able to travel there for the event.

It is worth looking back at the early days when the girls lived in an over-crowded, dark, poorly ventilated building and the boys lived in buildings nearly 100 years old that were cracked and literally falling apart due to age and earthquake damage.



The first major milestone was in 2012 when a spade was first put into the ground by trustee, Hugh Heron, in a ceremony to mark the start the building works. Two years later, in 2014, the boys' accommodation was completed and opened in November of that year.



Much has happened since then. In those ten years, there were breaks whilst money was raised, strikes in the town closed the project down for weeks on end, heavy monsoon rains slowed down construction or forced it to stop, and of course, there was Covid.

Despite everything, the girls' accommodation was opened in 2019 and trustee Marilyn Adams was privileged to be asked to cut the ribbon.



The five years since then has seen the completion of the new kitchen, office, food storage and Pema Bhante's accommodation. A new boundary wall has been built, an outdoor play area surfaced, railings erected to ensure safe transfer between the different site levels, and additional water storage tanks installed. A computer room has been set up after a generous grant from the United Women's Guild. After twelve years from the first ground breaking ceremony, the buildings are complete. DCT's donations amounted to £345,000.

Opening the Home marked an amazing achievement and it was an amazing day of celebration. When asked how they felt about the day, the young residents described themselves as "excited, happy, good, lovely, grateful, gleeful".





In addition to the formal ceremony, there was much singing and dancing by the young students and later, by everyone, including the trustees!

DCT Trustee, Matthew Houghton, first visited the Home in November 2023, and he was at the opening ceremony. Here are some of his thoughts –



“Having visited KBM in October 2023 I was extremely excited to see the completed home. The final push in 2024 has brought the whole site together and the finishing touches of glorious orange paintwork, brickwork, ironwork and tiling have made the home one of the best-looking buildings in Darjeeling!

We are all very fortunate to be able to support so many young people that need the Children's Home and they showed how valued they feel and how appreciative they are in several ways during our visit. It was a very emotional day for all the Trustees, particularly those who have been involved in DCT since the start”.

KBM: More than just bricks and mortar

So the Vision, originally focussed on bricks and mortar, has been achieved. The Home is complete. But we now know that it will be so much more – it is an amazing environment for helping the young people who live there to develop and flourish. One of the older students, Diya, wrote

“I would like to say .. thank you to DCT.. for being supportive and kind to us. Because of you we can learn English, maths, physics, computer classes...on Saturdays and Sundays. We are so lucky to have this hostel. We have been enjoying lots of activities in the hostel like knitting, hygiene class, yoga and racquets in our grounds”

What started as a project concentrating on bricks and mortar now supports a holistic approach to caring for the children. Central to this are Jigten and Sangam, the two supervisors who are funded by DCT and who are guided and supported by DCT Project Officer, Aashwin. They have made a huge difference to the young people's level of daily care. Not only are visits by a doctor and nurses weekly occurrences, the young people also have regular dental and eye examinations, special talks on topics such as online safety, fire safety and the dangers of child trafficking as well as access to the range of classes mentioned above by Diya.

The bright yellow ochre buildings shine as symbols of peace and demonstrate the ability of different people from different countries to work together for a common good. They provide a wonderful home to 100 young people. They are a testament to the generosity to a huge number of people in raising and donating money over many years.

A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed!

Some recent DCT-led events in Darjeeling

Choosing the right career is critical and two recent events have been held to help students make the right choices.

Our college students recently attended a seminar hosted by the Darjeeling Welfare Society (DWS), focusing on coaching for the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) exam, renowned as one of India's toughest civil service examinations. It was led by Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, a distinguished figure from Darjeeling who served as former Foreign Secretary of India and G20 Chief Coordinator. The seminar covered DWS's commitment to providing free coaching at their centres and covering all associated expenses, including travel and accommodation in Delhi for the exam. This initiative presents a significant opportunity for our young adults to pursue their aspirations in public service.



A Career Awareness Day, organised by DCT Project Lead, Aashwin, and held at KBM on June 16th. It brought together alumni and students for an exchange of ideas, experiences and advice. Those speaking included a teacher, an hotelier, a homestay owner, an ex-army officer and a hotel front office manager. They provided great insights for the young people.



Delegates from the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR) recently visited the children's home led by Chairperson Smt. Tulika Das. They shared their valuable feedback on the exceptional care provided to the children. We deeply value this important connection and look forward to collaborating with WBCPCR to further enhance our safeguarding strategies.

State Bank of India representatives visited the Children's Home in May bringing generous gifts of sheets, towels and food. They also provided valuable financial advice to the young people and showed their readiness to help with banking issues and advice on government schemes affecting children and young people. We look forward to future collaborations and continued local support. Together we can make a difference!



If you would like to keep up with events in Darjeeling, news is posted regularly on our Facebook page.

Don't forget to buy your ticket for our fundraising Charity Ball.

Taking place on Saturday November 23rd, it should be a great event.



Some reflections: Marilyn Adams, Co-Founder, Chairperson 2008-2020, Trustee 2008 - 2024

Darjeeling Children's Trust has been an integral part of my life for the last sixteen years. Following a visit to Darjeeling as a volunteer in a local school for six weeks in 2007, I returned determined to do something to help the amazing children I had met. Despite their difficult lives they retained a joyousness and spirit that couldn't be ignored. And so, in 2008, and after meeting Sharan Patel, a small Board was set up and DCT was founded.

It has been an amazing journey. I have grown to love Darjeeling and the mountains with the view of Kanchenjunga which dominates the skyline on clear days. I have been incredibly lucky to have been greeted with friendliness and have met wonderful people that I feel lucky to call friends both in India and in the UK. It has been a privilege to work with DCT's trustees who from the beginning have given their time, energy and skills towards making the Trust the undoubted success that it is. And throughout, the children and young people have been wonderful. What a privilege to share a small part of their lives and help them, even if only in a small way, to achieve their dreams.



Over those sixteen years the Trust has of course changed. With the help of Major Wangdi, DCT's "man on the ground" we were very hands-on in those early days in developing and implementing projects. There have been many evenings sat round his table planning future activities, sharing the Honey Bee brandy with fellow trustees and a variety of volunteers who were staying at his hostel. I was also supremely lucky in all those times to have the support of husband, Robert, who was DCT Treasurer for many years and who, at the very least and amongst other things, walked the hills finding the best exchange rate for DCT's money!

The emphasis has changed over time from mending school roofs to stop the rain coming in, putting glass into classroom windows to keep out the cold winter winds straight from the Tibetan plateau, building partitions in classrooms to provide better teaching spaces, and providing new toilets in schools where there were none. Emphasis now is upon the young people themselves – projects such as career counselling and vocational training. Some events stand out – the joy of seeing children as they look at colourful story books provided by the Trust when before they had none; the amazing DCT children's festivals of music and dance and meeting Sherpa Tenzing Norgay's nephew, himself a famous mountaineer, who had scaled Everest a number of times and who was patron of our first festival; the joy of seeing the young sponsored children grow and flourish; the emotion felt when a young man, who had undertaken the hotel management course and gone on to get a good job, turns to me as a symbol of DCT and says "You have given me a life"; and last but not least, the opening of the completed Children's Home at KBM.

The Trust today has the benefit of the wonderful DCT funded team in Darjeeling supported by advice from Major Wangdi and guided by trustees in the U.K. It continues to pursue its goals of helping the children and young people of Darjeeling to grow and flourish; and it has an amazing Board of dedicated and enthusiastic Trustees. On a personal level the experiences I have had have enriched my life immeasurably, and it has been huge fun. I look forward to hearing news of its achievements in the future and I know that it will be well looked after.

