

Benares School Fund Foundation

THE NETHERLANDS



CONTENT	
1. Asha Deep School	2
2. Ashray School	4
3. Little Stars School	6
4. Jeevan School	8
5. Individual programme	10
6. Vatsalya's Udayan School	11
Facts & Figures	appendix



A SPECIAL BEGINNING

Deev Diwali is the most important religious holiday in the holy city of Varanasi. Two weeks after Diwali, Shiva first set foot on Earth - in Varanasi. His remarkably small footprints are still visible at asawamedh Ghat. To commemorate this event, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit the city every year. Holding small oil lamps, they position themselves along the banks of the river Ganges, thus forming a magnificent arc of light along the river at sundown.

Those attempting to reach the Ganges View Hotel at that particular moment - yes, our secretary/treasurer and our chairman - have no choice but to abandon their taxi and sway with the flow of the mass of people, carrying their suitcases, backpacks and cello, for the last two kilometres. A hundred metres short of the hotel, the crowd came to a complete standstill.

Thanks to our *local knowledge* we managed to reach the hotel by taking a few backstreets. It proved to be the beginning of an exciting time. <



Board visit to Varanasi 2019: Conny, Maurien, Jantine, Alet and Marien enjoying a meal in the Haifa restaurant

NIOS

Every year, 350,000 Indian students enrol in NIOS, the National Institute of Open Schooling. This makes NIOS the largest Open School system in the world.

Through NIOS, students study individually for the exams of classes 10 and 12. Vocational trainings are also provided by the system.

All examinations lead to diplomas that are equivalent to school diplomas.

Children study the subjects individually and at their own pace.

How they master the material is irrelevant. It is also possible to study online, but the most common method is taking classes in dedicated Learning Centres.

Examinations are taken subject by subject and whenever students want (On Demand Examination System).

Children may opt for NIOS for various reasons. The high costs of regular education in classes 9 through 12 is one of them. And then there is the matter of a student's individual capabilities. On the one hand, self-study requires much discipline; on the other, students can work at their own pace and finish the course subject by subject.

Of our schools, only **Little Stars School** provides education up to class 12. After class 8, **Asha Deep School** sends their students first to NIOS for two years, to lower the costs; the final two years they then attend regular school. Asha Deep gives extra lessons to students of classes 9 and 10 in the afternoon, in addition to the lessons they already follow in a Learning Centre. **Jeevan School** sends their best students to other schools, while the rest study through NIOS and are coached by Jeevan's own teachers.

The vocational trainings provided by **Vatsalya School** in Jaipur will shortly be registered with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), the NIOS for vocational education. Examinations can be taken at ten levels and leads to recognised diplomas.

All in all, the Indian Open School system provides a good alternative for regular schools. <



ASHA DEEP SCHOOL

- > 200 students
- > 18 teachers + 3 part-time arts teachers
- > Contribution BSF € 9.058,50 incl. secondary education

Asha Deep School (eight classes) is beautifully located on the river Ganges. The building is rented and the rent goes up every year. Director Connie Ray therefore very much wishes to build their own school in the future, even if it means giving up the beautiful view!

Seema, a former teacher of Ashray School, now teaches for a few hours each day at Asha Deep School. She is enthusiastic about the school's atmosphere, the open and eager-to-learn students, and the leeway Connie Rao affords her teachers in designing the content of each week's theme. Every week, all subjects have an overarching theme. The teachers do not always know enough about certain themes, says Seema, and then they have to do research on the Internet. It is sort of a 'permanent education' for the teachers.

Connie Rao is a special individual. She is there for everyone, is a good listener for students with problems, gives good advice to

CONNIE IN THE NETHERLANDS

In the summer of 2019, Connie visited the Netherlands coming back from the US, where she had supported her ill mother during her last weeks. Here she visited her son who is a student in Wageningen.

We were used to see Connie in a stately *sari*. She looked really different in her Western clothes.

It was amusing to visit the Delta Works in Zeeland with her; quite a change from holding meetings about school issues in Varanasi. It was an opportunity to discuss things of a more personal nature, far away from daily work concerns. We got to know each other a lot better.

Among other things, we heard that the school is to receive a bequest from the US. It had come as a great surprise to Connie and she now hopes to be able to realise her dream: a school building of her own. She is considering a more distant location where there are fewer schools.

The bequest will hopefully be sufficient to buy a piece of land, but much additional funding will be required for the building itself. We are looking at ways to help her with this.



Connie Rao and assistant-director Siddharth Singh

the teachers, and provides moral support for the parents, who sometimes live in wretched circumstances. We take a walk with her through the neighbourhood where most of her students live. What strikes us is how happy people are with her visit, how well she knows everyone, and how warm her interest is. This is not a pose; this is how she really is.

A few days later, some of the board members do short interviews with parents. They do so together with assistant-director Siddharth Singh. Because of his handicap he remains seated in the rickshaw, which cannot navigate the narrow alleys of this neighbourhood; the parents come to him. They speak freely in his presence and we hear many beautiful stories (*see further on*).

Muheem

The life skills programme for the older students is part of the extracurricular Cool School. We met with recently graduated Swati Singh, who teaches gender-related classes. She does so in a playful and interactive manner. She has good contact with the youngsters and uses a lot of humour. Swati is the head and founder of Muheem, an NGO dedicated to improving the circumstances of women and girls (www.muheem.org). Formerly taboo subjects such as menstruation are discussed by her in class in all openness. BSF has made € 1,000 euros available to further develop this wonderful initiative.



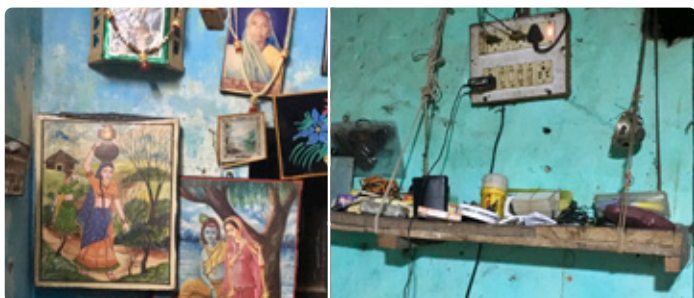
Swati Singh

Connie was very glad with a donation for three years of € 2,500 per year by the One Percent Scheme, a group of business people in England. The money is to be spent on teacher training and technology in the classrooms: laptops and overhead projectors.





Together with Jeevan School a science fair was held, a creative way of teaching science and math. Both schools organised eight experiments around the themes of water, earth, fire, and air. The children made notes of the experiments and if these were correct, they were given the snack that went with each of the experiments. The students loved it: learning by example, interacting with other students, and getting snacks in the bargain. If it's up to them there will be another fair like this next year.



Interviews with Parents

Together with Asha Deep School's assistant-director Siddharth Singh, our board members Alet and Maurien interviewed some parents of students.

'We can see that the Nagwa neighbourhood has changed over the past few years: things seem to have improved. Almost all children go to school and the small dwellings look better. They used to have just the bare necessities, like a bed and some kitchen utensils. Now we see a nice little table in some of the houses or a decorative ornament on the wall. And we see mobile phones being charged. We are curious about these changes over time. We therefore ask the parents how their lives were as children, compared to the situation of their children now.

We conduct the interviews by the car rickshaw with Siddharth translating. They are nice conversations in which we catch a glimpse of the feelings of the parents as they talk about their own childhood and about the dreams they once had. We also hear how much has changed for their children now.'

See the interviews on the following pages.

Volunteers

This school year, Asha Deep had no less than five volunteers, all of them very capable. They relieved Connie of many tasks. One of these volunteers was the American **Dorothy Swan**, who took over Connie's English classes. We met with Dorothy to hear her story. Dorothy Swan is not your average young volunteer at Asha Deep School, but an extremely vital American lady of 83 (!). We talked with her during her lunch break. <

DOROTHY SWAN

I'm from Santa Fe, California, and Connie also. When she came to India and founded a school there, then I, being a teacher, was really interested. My husband passed about a year and a half ago. I was free to explore the world, so to speak, so I wrote to Connie: 'Can I come to Benares and be of some help for you and the school?' She said 'Yes!' - so here I am.



Dorothy Swan talking to board member Maurien

In my career I specialised in 'English as second language'. This experience gave me an excellent starting point for my work here. I want to serve until the end of next school year, June 2021. After that we'll see.

When I give the Asha Deep children something to do, they do the best jobs. I wasn't used to that in the USA, I'm kind of open mouth about that. They don't need to be told what to do, they go ahead and they do the whole job. They must be very used to helping their parents.

They are fighting sometimes, like American children do, that can be challenging. It's mostly the proximity to each other in the small class rooms. For me it's more energy than aggression. Nobody is complaining - except the teacher.

Today I brought in The big fat enormous lie, a story about this little boy who lies to his father. The father asked: 'Who ate the cookies?', and he said 'I didn't.' This small lie is a little monster that gets bigger and bigger. So finally he tells his mom and dad that he lied, and the monster disappears.

We asked one of the teacher to help translating, and she did a great job. We talked then about what is a lie, why is a lie a lie. A lie is often because we're afraid of something, punishment or so. We agreed that it takes courage to stand up and tell the truth.

Some ex-students of Asha Deep have showed me around in town. They told me a good hairdresser - he is actually quite good - and they learned me how to explain a ricksha driver where I want to go. In the States I didn't meet young people so friendly, so devoted.

I like to walk to school, but at 83 I have to be just a little careful. Recently I was almost injured by the horns of a cow on the main road nearby. I have to look around better than in California.

My view on Asha Deep School is extremely positive, and that has a lot to do with Connie-mam. She shared with me some advice she gave to some students, and she's right-on. It's great that she can react so profound on the problems of these youngsters.





ASHRAY SCHOOL

- > 95 students
- > 7 teachers
- > Contribution BSF € 7,500

The Ashray School, with its infant school in Nagwa and seven small primary school classes in the nice new building on the edge of town, hopes to receive its official accreditation this year.

Then the new building will be filled with more students, so it can grow into a fully-fledged school. Manager Rakesh Saraogi can hardly wait.

For our board members Maurien, Alet and Jantine, who have never met Rakesh Saraogi, it took a little while to get used to his omnipresence, the decisiveness of his opinions, and his loud voice. He completely dominated the *Annual Function*.

But no matter, the children gave a fine performance and were obviously enjoying themselves. To our surprise, there was a new element: karate.



Accreditation

Over lunch at his home, a few days later, Rakesh struck a different note, that of a school director with worries. The accreditation of the new school, which after many problems seemed to have been almost completed, had been put on hold because of the national elections. Everything in India comes to a standstill then. It's just how it is.

With the new government come new rules. Now the costs of accreditation have risen to almost € 5,000. That is a lot of money and if it is not found by the beginning of the new school year, all lessons will have to be suspended.

Without accreditation the school will face difficult times. This year Rakesh already had to turn down 26 paying students. They would not have been able to go on to secondary education because



Lunch meeting with Rakesh (here with his wife)

Ashray School has no formal accreditation. With 26 times Rs 300, Rakesh could have appointed an English teacher. The business model of Ashray School is built on paying students, so that education for the poor children can be free. Considering the importance of the accreditation, the board has decided to make € 2,500 available for this purpose.

Together with Rakesh and all the teachers we attended the wedding of Sunita. She and her sister Suman come from a very poor background and have now been appointed as junior teachers at the infant school. Thanks to our individual programme, both of them have been able to study up to class 12. Working with infants will give them their first experience in teaching. Her job at the school suddenly made Sunita an eligible candidate for marriage!

Like all brides, Sunita as well gave the impression of being nervous and not very happy. Arranged marriages come with much uncertainty. Quite often, the partners have never even seen each other before the ceremony.

The school team brought loads of gifts. It's wonderful to see how strong the cohesion within such a team of teachers is and how, as a matter of course, they had bought numerous saris from their quite meagre salaries, probably enough of them to last Sunita a lifetime.



At the school we attended a library class and a karate class, both excellent classes taught by excellent teachers. It makes one happy.



The programme also included a picnic. We spent a lovely afternoon on the other side of the Ganges, in a superbly fresh and green park/garden full of fruit trees and vegetable patches, far from the dirt, noise, and stench of the city.

Marien and Conny, chair and secretary, recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. In good old Indian fashion, they 'renewed their vows', complete with garlands and cake, before sixty clapping and cheering children. What more can you wish for? <



LAXMI

Laxmi stays outside of the rickshaw and her husband comes by later to say hello. Laxmi has two sons: Anuj (class 2) and Ajay (class 4) and two daughters: Anju (class 3) and Anjali (class 6). All four of them attend Asha Deep School.

Where did you live as a child, and how do you live now?

I lived in a village outside Benares. My parents were very poor. We lived in a small clay hut. My father was a weaver and my mother did odd jobs. I went to school up to class 3. We now live in a small brick house in the Nagwa neighbourhood. We have gas for cooking, and electricity. We live here with our own family and some other family members.

How did you play, and how do your children play now?

Us girls used to play indoors, with small stone balls, kind of marbles, and with bigger balls. My own daughters are usually indoors too. They play, and they help me. My sons play outside more often, for example flying their kites. They also have a mobile phone, but her father doesn't want them to spend all their time on it.

What was the most important thing in your family? And what is it today?

Money used to be the most important thing. Now it is school. I want the girls and the boys to go to school.

How was social life in the neighbourhood then? And how is it now?

We used to have many contacts in the neighbourhood. Less so now, I think. People have less time. I work too, cleaning house with another family and so I am less home now.

What did you dream of as a child, and what are your dreams for your children?

My biggest dream was that I could support my family. For my children I dream that they will have a good education, so they will get better jobs.





LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

- > 900 students
- > 45 teachers (several part-time)
- > Contribution BSF € 25.000

With 900 students, Little Stars School is the largest school that our foundation supports. The school provides the full educational package, from infant school up to and including class 12, which is unique in the neighbourhood.

Little Stars School has two buildings. Dutch volunteer Pierre Satijn has worked hard for many years to realise the new building. The students are very proud of it.

The first thing we noticed when making our customary rounds of the school were the smart-boards. None of our schools have them. Three were donated and installed by an Indian NGO from Delhi. This is support from the country itself, as we like to see it; unfortunately, support in kind is not reflected in the annual figures.



Kabbadi, the popular Indian tag

Children's Day

Every year we are there for *Children's Day*, the sports day and food market. The children sell their home-made snacks from beautifully decorated stalls. The official guests perform the opening of the stalls and then have to pay extra for the snacks. Especially

resourceful kids have their stalls opened no less than three times... If they are lucky, they earn a nice bit of pocket money. But then, *Children's Day* is only once a year!

Director Asha Pandey always makes the most of our presence. We cut ribbons and give the starting signal for the activities.



Asha Pandey

On a regular school day, everyone is hard at work. The students listen attentively to their teachers. The quiet, concentration, and discipline are striking, as is the unusually large number of male teachers, many of them young and enthusiastic.



SPONSORED CHILDREN

Sponsored children at Little Stars School are given warm winter sweaters. Thanks to individual sponsors, the education for these poorest of the children is free of charge. Other students buy their own uniforms and books and pay an annual school fee of Rs 1200 (€15).





Young teachers, who often are still students themselves, gain experience at LSS and then often move on to better paying jobs, which is a pity. However, since salaries at LSS, thanks to our sponsor Globewise, were raised by 15 percent, it has become easier to attract good new teachers.

The school's management is stable and staff are dedicated and have natural authority.

The hostel girls

The hostel houses 33 girls, more than ever before. Besides the permanent group, girls are frequently brought in for a short stay. It causes Asha Pandey much concern, but also brings her much joy. She is obviously enjoying her girls, who all look well-dressed and healthy, wanting for nothing. In spite of their problematic backgrounds, they appear to be pleased and happy.



With the school and hostel Asha Pandey has realised an impressive project in Nagwa, to the benefit of many, many children. <



DHOLU

Dholu comes and sits in the rickshaw. His sons and some of his neighbours are listening in. Dholu has one married daughter and two sons: Litan (class 11) and Mithun (class 10). Both have been to Asha Deep School and are now continuing their education elsewhere, sponsored by their old school.

Where did you live as a child, and how do you live now?

I come from a family of ten and grew up in West Bengal. We all had to help with the work, either in the house or outside: fetch water, sweep the floor, or work the land. I could not go to school.

My parents migrated to Benares to find work, 25 years ago. They both died young.

Together with other Bengali families we live in small huts on a walled plot in the centre of the neighbourhood. I operate a bicycle rickshaw, bringing children to school. My daughter didn't attend school, as times were hard back then. My two sons do go to school now.

How did you play, and how do your children play now?

I would play football outside with the other children, and kabbadi, a kind of playing tag. My children play on their mobile phones. I don't know what they are doing exactly but I see them looking up many things and talking to others.

What was the most important thing in your family? And what is it today?

Then and now: being respected. And now also that the children go to school, which I fully support.

How was social life in the neighbourhood then? And how is it now?

We used to have a lot of contact with other people in the neighbourhood. Today the contacts are still intensive; we look after each other.

What did you dream of as a child, and what are your dreams for your children?

I had dreams, but they didn't come true. I have become a cycle rickshaw driver. For my children I dream that they will have a better life than me. That they may find work, that people respect them and that they will accomplish something in their lives.



4

JEEVAN SCHOOL

- > 150 student
- > 12 teachers + 3 parttime
- > Contribution BSF € 8.000

Head of the school Kati Richter and manager Sheelu Kujur run Jeevan's school and hostel in exemplary fashion. The hostel is a refuge for some 35 children from the nearby slums. The school provides these children and some 150 others from the neighbourhood with modern Montessori education.

Adjacent to school and hostel is a wonderful playground, where there is also room for flower beds and a small vegetable garden.

The children at Jeevan find maths difficult. So, every year Kati organises a *math market*: using toy money, the children 'buy' vegetables, fruit, gifts for their mothers, and clothes for themselves. They have to speak English, which is not easy for them. Even the teachers frequently 'slip'.

This year, chairman Marien's job was to play chess with the students. To his delight he won all his games, even though some of the children played very well.

Dan, one of Jeevan's founders, played a double role that day: first as a beggar and some time later as a tax inspector. He acquitted himself admirably of both roles.



Radha, who was very bad at maths and really disliked it, is now in a special class of three. In the mornings they work for two hours in the technical class, under supervision of former student Anil. They repair furniture, change lightbulbs, that sort of thing. Useful for them, but for the school as well! In the afternoon they follow regular classes and sometimes even have private tutoring: Dan teaches Radha arithmetic and she hasn't skipped a lesson once!

The students and teachers work diligently, using fine, sophisticated materials. The number of students has reached 190, with the older ones now attending class 9, 10, 11, or 12. They do this by

self-study and *coaching* through the Open School, or at other schools. According to Sheelu Kujur, the connection with secondary education is still not ideal. The children's background, their parents' alcohol addiction, the neglect, these are all things not easily eradicated. Still, Kati continues to work with her kids with unrelenting energy and devotion.



She tries to compensate for what the children lack as much as she can: she gives them her full attention, teaches them about nature, gives them their own vegetable patch, and takes them on field trips. For example, to an organic farm, nearby waterfalls, and, as a final flourish, summer vacation by the sea, which is an unprecedented experience for both the children and the teachers. The teachers too have often never seen the sea before.

There is much attention to food at Jeevan. All the meals are prepared with great care. No meal is simple, there's always something extra special.

Shortly before our meeting, Kati had baked muffins, spreading a wonderful smell throughout the building. The second batch was finished by a student, who unfortunately had placed the muffins into the oven together with the wooden dish. Soon after, the windows had to be opened to get rid of the smoke and the smell of burning!

Children are constantly going in and out of Kati's room and are always allowed to speak, whether we are in a meeting or not.

Jeevan is doing well. Thanks to the support of a major company, the school now has extra funding. The teachers are becoming more and more skilful with the computer. Some of them are taking the computer lessons of the highest classes! They are being well paid and the school does not have to economise on food.

There is still a beautiful piece of land in Sarnath, ready to be developed. In due course, Jeevan's new school and hostel will be built there, but this may take many years. <



KATI MA'AM

Kati Richter, the Head of Jeevan School, is a very special lady. She has set herself an almost impossible task, of which she nevertheless acquits herself with conviction and optimism.

Her husband, Sven Cysarek, M.D., lives in Germany for half the year while their five-year-old son Johann lives with Kati all year round. Johann is growing up amidst Indian children of his own age and is fluent in Hindi.

Like the other children, he calls his mother 'Kati ma'am'. Only in German is she 'mummie'.

In spite of her busy life, Kati finds room to study Psychology. She and Sven are expecting their second child in April.



Board members Alet and Maurien interviewed her.

Please, tell us your Journey to Varanasi; what enticed you to stay? How does this fit in your family situation?

I didn't plan on a long-term stay, it was supposed to be a 5 year stay. However, there's a responsibility once you start working with children. If you give them a glimpse of what a better future could look like, there's no way you could possibly leave them if there's no-one to take over your job.

In addition, caring for children inadvertently creates attachment. Eight years ago, I still could have left, with just a little bit of bad conscience; but now? Anyway, the children 'fit' quite well with my family situation, because they now are part of my family.



For my 'self-made' son, I feel the Hostel is an awesome environment to grow up, and I feel he's very privileged to be able to have so many friends around the whole day. Plus, being removed from the over-consumption in Germany for a big chunk of the year has additional advantages. I want him to be able to be joyful with only a few gifts or sweets, for example. I want him to experience rather than to consume. Which works very well in a place where all the children (at the hostel) get the same amount of everything, and I'm the one choosing the gifts.

Sven, my best friend and husband, and me got to know each other when I already lived in India. Thus, balancing the closeness when we are together with the great distance between us when we're apart is nothing new to us, and I think we're doing quite a good juggling job. Every way of life has its disadvantages and struggles, but at least our lives will never be boring. And we have the huge privilege of having been able to deliberately choose our paths, not like so many others around us.

What makes you get out of bed?

Why I keep continuing my work is difficult to say, especially considering how emotionally exhausting daily life can be here. A sense of meaningfulness, a sense of belonging, a sense of duty, and a sense of doing something worth dying for are all parts of the answer.

The way I perceive the world is captured beautifully in 'The Plague' by Albert Camus: 'I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when this all ends. For the moment I know this: there are sick people and they need curing.'

My life has been accompanied by much fear and sadness. I could cry for the many traumas our children are subjected to and have to live with. I dread the future of our planet, I dread the future of the children in the hostel, I dread the future of the children I gave (and will give) birth to. At the same time, all of this doesn't matter, or at least it doesn't matter enough to make me un-see that right now there are children that don't get cared for well - and they need caring.

Wanting to carry on despite the absurdness of it all; I suppose it is this what gets me out of bed in the morning. Not literally, though, because it's usually a slammed door or shouting kids that do the trick.

How do you see your role for now and in the future?

In future, I'd like to be superfluous at the NGO, I'd love to spend my old age doing only beautiful things, creating mandalas and murals, working in the garden, stuff like that. And doing research on how to teach more effectively. Right now, my role is another one, a mix between police woman and cleaning lady. On a more serious note, I think my role right now has a lot to do not only with implementing, but foremost maintaining implemented structures. Starting something new, a new activity, rule, program or ritual is comparatively easy. Enabling established structures to become permanent and, to some extent, internalized by students and teachers, takes a lot of perseverance and effort - and a bit of perfectionism.

What are your goals for the next five years?

Finish my B.Sc. in Psychology, give birth to our 2nd child, get a Ph.D. in Psychology, get a fellowship in B.H.U. as a researcher and social activist, see the start of the building of our village school and hostel.

Tomorrow you win the lottery; 100.000.000 rupees.

What would you do with it?

1. Order pizza for all school kids.
2. Go for a winter camp with the kids to the Himalayas.
3. Set aside a fund to start a resident teacher training centre attached to our new (and still not existing) village school.

What do you do in your leisure time, if any?

I read or watch movies while eating. It feels like a waste when I eat without reading or watching, especially when it's some special dinner. I love the violin and the piano, and rarely practice those, meaning I'll probably stay on the low level I'm at.

I love to dance, and do so regularly in India, by running a dance class three times a week. I've learned that that's the only way I'm able to continue hobbies while in India - by combining work and pleasure.

I like making traditional mandala's with the children. This Diwali, we made a Rangoli (a mandala made from coloured sand on the floor). We worked for three hours. Within one hour after finishing it, our dog made it his bed... That's how life shows you that nothing is forever.





Namrita (large photo on the left), Akshya, Himshera and Anjali

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMME

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 18 students
- > Budget € 7.175 (contribution BSF 100%)

In 2003, this programme was the start of our foundation. Eighteen children got the chance to go to school, all with their own Dutch sponsor. Over the years the number had grown to more than 60 students.

As we were paying for everything, the programme became too expensive. We decided to phase it out and shift individual sponsoring to our schools.

At the moment, our individual programme has only 18 students left. It makes the annual meeting with them and their parents on the roof of Manish Bhatia's house an intimate gathering. Together with accountant Surendra Srivastava, computer teacher Manish has been making sure that the programme runs smoothly for many years. We can safely leave it to them.

The students are obviously pleased to see us again. Likewise, we also look forward to this get-together. The greetings, also with the

parents, are most cordial. After all, we have known each other for years now.

To our surprise and delight, some former students also join us. It is very nice to see them again and to hear what they are doing now. Many children come with gifts for us, such as things they made themselves and greeting cards. Anjali Bharti makes Conny happy with a gorgeous sun hat. It has survived the journey home.



Rupali Mehrotra, sponsor student at Little Stars School

Two of our students are taking a technical training to become plumbers or electricians. Such a vocational training is a good alternative for those who have no good head for study. We would like to provide this option to more students, so we will discuss with our schools whether this is a good idea. Surendra and Manish could play a role in this in the future.

We conclude our meeting with the traditional lovely dinner with Manish and Surendra. Manish's wife and daughters do the cooking and serve the food, but they never join us at the table. Such is the custom in India.

Individual Sponsoring in Our Schools

In our schools we also sponsor individual children who are either too poor or go on to the higher and therefore more expensive classes. By now they number 21. In this way we guarantee a full school education for all our students. <

DIVYA JYOTI

Anand is one of the 21 students who go to the Divya Jyoti disability centre, where Sheela and her volunteers are at the ready with a nice, instructive, and useful programme, each and every day. They meditate, sing, exercise and, if possible, play some educational games. And they do craftwork, not just for fun, but to sell the things they make. It earns them a bit of pocket money and by doing this they can demonstrate to their families that they do have certain talents.

Anand (22) is a spastic, and heavily handicapped. He can't talk and has no strength in his hands, but all the more so in his feet. He does everything with his feet, even saying yes and no.

He writes with his foot, produces paper bags, and paints candleholders. With his foot he scrolls through his mobile phone to show us a picture of his mother. Anand's mouth muscles are very weak, so he can't eat solid foods. With much patience and love, the staff feeds him mashed food and juice.



Anand has been coming to Divya Jyoti for many years and seems to be quite happy there. We have the greatest appreciation for the unrelenting support the organisation gives to young people like Anand.





VATSALYA SCHOOL

- > 110 students
- > 10 teachers
- > Contribution BSF € 7.500

The Vatsalya School, part of the Udayan campus, is located near the city of Jaipur in the sandy desert state of Rajasthan. All the same, there are trees growing in the sand and, thanks to an ingenious irrigation system, vegetables are grown here. It's an oasis of green and quiet; a special place indeed.

'Stick to the plan', is our biggest sponsor's motto. It's an advice we ought to give Jaimala Gupta. She and her husband Hitesh are the founders of Vatsalya and Jaimala is always full of plans and she is rather impulsive. These two elements combined make for many changes in the school and campus every year.

Jaimala's son Kartikey, who has taken over many of his mother's tasks as manager, is equally driven in implementing new plans. This year the school has an accreditation to provide education up to class 10. They hope that this makes the school more attractive to new teachers. Until now, it was hard to find them for this remote country school.

The English language infant school has not materialised. The Indian sponsor - who resides in England - made high demands, which Vatsalya was unable to meet. They simply could not find a good English teacher, not even with a salary offer that was many times higher than that of the other teachers. Instead of English language



CHANDA

This is Chanda. She was brought to Vatsalya when she was just three years old. Her parents had died and her grandmother was begging in the streets in order to feed Chanda and her little sister. Chanda is 19 now, has passed her class 10 exam and is an experienced *block printer*.

education they have now chosen to teach English starting in class 3. In order to learn a second language, a first requirement is a good command of one's own language, in this case Hindi.

The biggest change is on the campus, which had been sheltering orphans since many years. There weren't many of them anymore, as board members Conny and Nienke noticed last year. Something had to be done. Now that the Indian government has ruled that orphans should be adopted by private individuals, Vatsalya has decided not to renew its permit for housing this target group and to shift its focus to improving the quality of its education.

Most of the students are children of poor farmers and day labourers from the surrounding villages. Therefore, a new school schedule was put in place, from 7 in the morning until 7 at night. This means that the children are given breakfast when they arrive, then take lessons between 8 AM and 1 PM, and then have lunch followed by mandatory rest (in the bedrooms of the campus). Following the afternoon rest there is vocational training, homework, and sports. Then, after having a snack of milk, fruit, and biscuits, followed by meditation, the children go home again.



One day a week, the schedule is augmented with handicrafts, music, and sports games. And sometimes there is storytelling, or they watch a film, or discuss important world news. On those days the children go home one hour later.

We are curious to see if the new programme will be satisfactory, and whether it is financially viable. The parental contribution of Rs 4,000 covers only ten percent of the real cost.

In addition to the library/computer room that was realised last year, Vatsalya is now building a unique *science centre*. The building is to have three departments, for natural science, biology, and chemistry. There is room for experiments and demonstrations. This will instantly improve the quality of their own education tenfold (says Jaimala). The new science centre will also provide access for other schools so that more students can benefit from this special initiative.

In order to improve the quality of its vocational trainings, Vatsalya will follow the curricula of NIOS, the Indian Open School system. Formal examinations lead to recognised certificates. It is one of the conditions for BSF to give extra support.

All in all, much is changing at Vatsalya. This year, Jaimala and Hitesh are celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary with a tour of Europe; they will also visit the Netherlands. We will have much to discuss. <

BSF'S FUNDS AND DONATIONS

This year is the tenth and also final year that our biggest sponsor supports us. We are extremely thankful to him, also for his trust in us. Thanks to his support we were able to give two of our schools, Little Star School and Jeevan School, a substantial extra impulse. To improve quality, was our sponsors urgent request. Both schools have more than lived up to that. In all aspects, from the quality of the education, of the organization and administration to financial reporting, they have shown spectacular improvements. We hope that the sponsor will go there to see with his own eyes how much good his money has done.

We are very glad that we have found a new sponsor to replace him. This new sponsor has pledged his support for five years, which makes us feel calm and reassured.

All other donations are stable. However, each time one sponsor leaves we have to find a new one, especially to continue funding the education of sponsored students. <

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

BSF would like to support more students in vocational training and we are looking into how to do this. We go to Sarnath, where a number of nuns are running a hostel for Dalit girls. If there are sufficient funds, after class 12 these girls may follow a secondary training to become teachers or nurses. We are very enthusiastic about this initiative.



Impression Sarnath

In 1996, when we first came to Sarnath on bicycle together with Frans Baartmans, it was a sleepy little town in a very lush and shadowy setting. A few tourists wandered around the famous *stupa* among the *sadus*. In a small museum the famous Wheel of the Buddha was gathering dust among some other antiques. Today, Sarnath is more a Volendam-like attraction. Hundreds of large white buses deliver tourists from far and near to this historic site, which is now anything but enchanting. Across from the less prestigious Chauthandi Stupa we are met by a friendly lady who leads us to a brown gate set in a long wall. Through it we enter into another world.

Behind the wall is a parklike space in which we find one large and a number of smaller buildings, far apart. In between the houses are lawns, palm trees, flowering bushes, and a vegetable garden - it's an oasis in the middle of the tourist jungle. The large building is home to three sisters of ICM (Immaculate Heart of Maria) order - there's room for thirty of them. The smaller buildings house the 26 casteless girls of the hostel, all between the ages of 14 and 18. They attend classes 9 through 12 at a nearby school, where they go by bicycle every day. Upon their return at three o'clock in the afternoon, the sisters provide *coaching*. Then they do their homework, practice karate, work in the garden, play, and cook their own meal. The girls all sleep together in one large room. In winter they have straw beds with sheets; the rest of the year they sleep on the floor. It's what they are used to at home. At night they watch TV, especially to learn all the new dance moves in Bollywood films. Our board has decided to finance a vocational training for one of these girls. <

KNIGHT CONNY

On 26 April 2019, our secretary/treasurer Conny received a great honour: on the yearly shower of birthday honours the limelight was definitely on her. On a beautiful day, the mayor of Roosendaal surprises her with a Royal Honour. A large gathering of family, friends, and acquaintances, including our full board, witnessed the relaxed ceremony in the garden in Wouw.



Three BSF board members had recommended Conny for this honour, because they felt that after 15 years of working so hard for our foundation, she had earned one. Our chairman was also in on it and he could testify that Conny had been a board member of many organisations - more than twenty - ever since her days as a college student.

Not just our foundation but also cultural institutions, the care for the elderly, development work, education in Wouw, orchestras and concert organisations have benefited from her commitment, knowledge, and skills. The honours committee was so impressed by this that they gave Conny a Knighthood in the Order of Oranje Nassau.

This wonderful day was concluded with a festive reception and special musical contributions. <



INDIA TRIP MERLET COLLEGE CUIJK

Since 2011, every year a group of 15 students from the highest classes of the Dutch Merlet College Cuijk take a trip to India. The students not only work to pay for their journey themselves but also raise extra money. Each year they visit a number of schools for disadvantaged students. 'In this way we support good causes and our students gain an experience they will never forget', says teacher Ton Hezius, initiator and 'tour guide'.

In 2019, for the first time the group visited two schools of the Benares School Fund. The students brought refurbished laptops with them for Jeevan School and Asha Deep School, and a donation of € 1,000 euros for each school. They were enthusiastically welcomed and spent a lovely day with their Indian peers.

This year they visited Asha Deep School again, bearing the same gifts. <

Benares Schoolfund Foundation

Lenaertsstraat 6, 4724 AM Wouw, The Netherlands

Chamber of Commerce 20110334

Rabobank IBAN NL97 RABO 0194 3913 53, BIC RABONL2U

T +31 (0)165 301422 · benares.school@xs4all.nl

 benaresschoolfund · www.benaresschool.nl



FACTS & FIGURES 2019



FINANCIAL REPORT 2019

> all figures in euros

IN

Regular contributors	30,730,44
Other donations	12,935,56
Contributions funds/foundations	34,500,00
Interest	10,00

78,176,00

Added to the earmarked reserve - 4,600,00

TOTAL IN

73,576,00

OUT

Asha Deep School

General donation	7,585,50
Extra donation for salaries	1,500,00
Earmarked donation <i>One Percent Scheme UK</i>	2,505,72
Extra donation <i>Merletcollege Cuijk</i>	1,000,00

Ashray School

General donation	9,000,00
Extra donation for computers	2,000,00
Picnic	250,00
From library fund	200,00

Little Stars School

General donation	21,000,00
Earmarked donation for salary increase	4,000,00

Jeevan School

General donation	8,000,00
Extra donation <i>Merletcollege Cuijk</i>	1,000,00

Individual programme

	7,175,00
--	----------

Vatsalya School

	7,500,00
--	----------

Other donations and costs

Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	6,025,00
Library costs (incl. library training)	363,00

Expenses foundation

Bank costs	245,21
Newsletter, incl. postage	448,16
English newsletter	70,00
Website costs	75,50

79,943,15

Taken from the earmarked reserve - 5,572,00

TOTAL OUT

74,371,15

Result financial year 2019

- 795,15

This amount has been taken from the general reserve.

Balance per 31-12-2019

Current account: 12,069,74. Saving account: 102,056,78, 45,000,00 of which is fixed reserve* and 31,854,14 is earmarked reserve
Remaining balance: 30,202,64

Earmarked reserve

In 2019 4,600,00 euros have been added to the earmarked reserve and 5,572,00 have been taken.

On balance 972,00 have been taken from the earmarked reserve.

Overhead Costs in 2019: 1%

Our board members pay for their own travel to India.
This keeps our overhead costs low.

BUDGET 2020

> all figures in euros

IN

Regular contributors	20,635,00
Other donations	10,650,00
Contributions funds/foundations	45,500,00
From earmarked reserve	7,925,00

TOTAL IN

84,710,00

OUT

Asha Deep School

General donation	7,435,00
For salaries	2,000,00
For class 9-12	1,500,00

Ashray School

General donation	9,000,00
For English teacher	1,000,00
For low literate parents education	500,00
For registration school	2,500,00

Little Stars School

General donation	15,000,00
Earmarked donation for grade 11 and 12	5,000,00
Earmarked donation for salary increase	4,000,00
Earmarked donation for nurse training	3,000,00

Jeevan School

	8,000,00
--	----------

Individual programme

	4,000,00
--	----------

Vatsalya School

General donation	7,500,00
For vocational training	1,250,00

Other donations and costs

Library costs	1,000,00
Ngo Muheem (<i>life-skills-lessons</i>)	1,000,00
Nurse training Dalitgirl Sarnath	1,000,00
Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	6,025,00

Increasement fixed reserve

2,500,00

Expenses foundation

1,500,00

TOTAL OUT

84,710,00



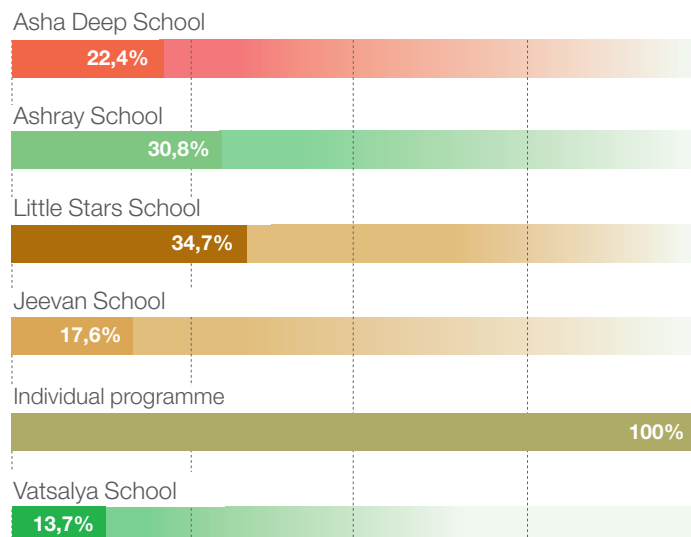
OUR SINCERE THANKS GO TO ALL OUR SPONSORS AND DONORS WHO HELPED CONTRIBUTE THIS PAST YEAR. THEIR FUTURE DEPENDS ON YOUR HELP!

* Information about our fixed reserve

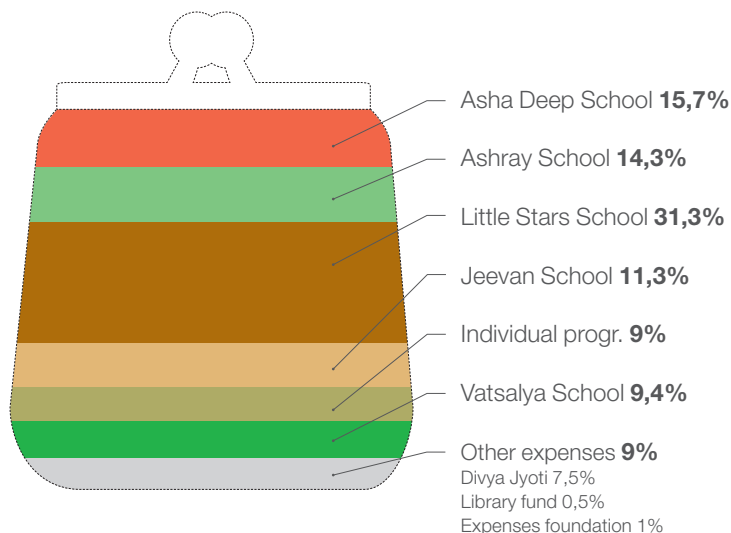
In order to guarantee the continuity of our work our foundation has long been striving to have a higher fixed reserve. Our main aim is to improve quality. That is why we pledge financial support to our projects for more than one year. A sudden decrease in donations and yearly fluctuating revenues would make this risky and that's why we need a substantial fixed reserve. By the end of 2018, thanks to a positive balance, we were able to raise the fixed reserve to 45,000.

SOME FIGURES

Contribution BSF as percentage of the project budget



Expenses BSF spread over the projects



HOW CAN YOU HELP OUR FOUNDATION?

As a school sponsor: For € 23/month (or € 275/year) you can provide education, books, a uniform, homework aid and tutoring for one child. Those who like it, will receive a photo and report of their student yearly.

As a (permanent) donor: All donations, whether one-off or a fixed amount per year, will benefit the children and their education; it will be spent on extra educational materials, salaries and yearly teacher training.

Benares Schoolfund Foundation has been classified by the Inland Revenue as an Institution Aiming for General Welfare (Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling). Donations are tax-deductible beyond a certain threshold. Donations by a written agreement with our foundation have no threshold and are fully deductible. See www.belastingdienst.nl under **Periodieke giften**. The secretariat can provide the necessary papers (license for donation).

New sponsors are kindly requested to give their address to our secretariat, so we can enter them in our records.

Rabobank IBAN: NL97 RABO 0194 3913 53 · BIC: RABONL2U

BASIS PROJECT INFO 01-01-2020

1. Asha Deep School

- > Up to and incl. grade 8 + secondary education elsewhere
- > 190 students, 18 teachers + 3 part-time arts teachers
- > Budget school € 45,000, incl. school meal
- > Budget secondary education (36 students) € 17,000
- > Contribution BSF € 9,058,50 incl. secondary education (+ 1,000 from Merletcollege)
- > www.asha-deep.com

2. Ashray School

- > Primary school up to and including grade 7 (+ music and computer classes, and homework assistance)
- > 95 students, 9 teachers
- > Budget € 26,000, incl. a glass of milk
- > Bijdrage BSF € 8,000 (+ 2,000 for computers)
- > www.ashray.org

3. Little Stars School

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 35 teachers (several part-time)
- > Budget € 72,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF € 25,000
- > www.littlestarsschool.org

4. Jeevan School

- > Up to and including grade 10 + secondary education elsewhere
- > 190 students, 12 teachers + 3 part-time
- > Budget € 45,500, incl. school meal
- > Contribution BSF € 8,000 (+ 1,000 from Merletcollege)
- > www.jeevaneducation.org

5. Individual programme

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 18 students
- > Budget € 7,175
- > Contribution BSF 100%

6. Vatsalya School

- > Up to and including grade 10
- > 110 students, 10 teachers
- > Budget school € 55,000, incl. breakfast, lunch and snacks
- > Budget vocational training € 15,000
- > Contribution BSF € 7,500
- > www.vatsalya.org

Colofon

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Board

Marien van Staalén (president)
 Conny van Staalén-van Leeuwen (secretary/treasurer)
 Jacques Baartmans, Jantine Unger, Alet Meurs, Theo van Pinxteren,
 Karin van Duijnhoven, Nienke de Graaf and Maurien Wetselaar