



BENARES SCHOOL FUND FOUNDATION

TO OUR SPONSORS, SUPPORTERS AND ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN OUR WORK



Our secretary Conny van Staalen

As always, our annual visit to Varanasi, which took place last November, was a joyful and satisfying experience. Joyful to see our friends again and the children, who so much enjoy going to school. Satisfying because our projects are doing so well. Our financial support really helps the schools move forward.

Great things have happened during the past year. Two Dutch families donated money for a new classroom at Little Stars School. During our visit we officially inaugurated it.

A group of Dutch women living in Singapore have been supporting the Asha Deep

School for a whole year now. The school and our foundation have greatly benefited from their efforts. More about this elsewhere in this newsletter.

Since a few years, we also support a school in Jaipur: the Udayan School of Vatsalya, an NGO. Jaipur is a long way from Varanasi, which makes it difficult to combine visits to both in one trip.

In February of this year, the son of our good friends from Vatsalya, Jaimala and Hitesh, got married. Our secretary took part in the celebration, which lasted for ten days: quite an experience. In between the festivities there was ample opportunity to visit the school.

In this newsletter of 2015 you will find reports about all our six projects. Unless stated otherwise, all reports were written by our secretary.

We thank all of you for your support, interest and involvement during the past year.

SCHOOL MEALS

Food has become expensive in India. Not all our schools provide nutritious meals to their students, although these are so important to our children, who come from the poorest families.

Their parents income is often too low to afford them a healthy daily meal. Milk and fruit are luxury goods.

A hungry child will have difficulty in concentrating, which is why we, as a foundation, value a proper school meal so much. Whenever possible we attempt to go on providing and improving them, as is the case at Asha Deep



School and Vatsalya's Udayan School. In our fund raising activities school meals are now one of our priorities. <

BASIC PROJECT INFORMATION AS PER 01-01-2015

1. Asha Deep School (p.2)

- > Up to and including grade 8
- > 250 students, 16 teachers (3 part-time)
- > Budget €30,000 incl. school meals
- > Contribution BSF €5,000 + €1,000 school meals

2. Jeevan School (p.4)

- > Up to and including grade 8, from grade 9 Open School
- > 120 students, 15 teachers
- > Budget €30,000, incl. school meal
- > Contribution BSF €10,050

3. Little Stars School (p.6)

- > Up to and including grade 11
- > 890 students, 48 teachers
- > Budget €36,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF €18,000 + €5,000 for class 11

4 Individual Sponsor Programme (p.8)

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 62 students, spread over multiple schools in the city
- > Budget €11,550, incl. supervision, medical care and food aid for the most destitute
- > Contribution BSF 100%

5 Education Ashray (p.10)

- > Primary school up to and incl. grade 5
- > 80 students, 5 teachers
- > Sewing class, 12 girls/young women, 1 teacher. Evening classes (up to grade 12 and incl. computer classes), 55 students, 4 teachers. Dance and tabla classes, 29 students, 1 teacher
- > Budget €3,500, incl. a simple lunch
- > Contr. BSF €8,500 + €1,870 lunch

6. Vatsalya's Udayan School (p.12)

- > Up to and including grade 8, 135 students, 5 teachers
- > Budget €33,000, incl. lunch
- > Contribution BSF €5,000 + €1,000 for lunch



ASHA DEEP SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 8
- > 250 students, 16 teachers (3 part-time)
- > Budget €30,000 incl. school meals
- > Contribution BSF €5,000 + €1,000 school meals
- > www.asha-deep.com

For the first time, we met Connie Rao, the school director, who turned out to be a committed, capable and sympathetic woman. She and Siddharth Singh make a great team together.



Connie Rao, our chairman Marien van Stalen and Siddharth Singh

Of course we discussed with them the art workshop by five Dutch families from Singapore, which had taken place two weeks prior to our arrival. See the special news item on this.

Connie Rao was extremely pleased with the workshop. It had been a festive day for the students at Asha Deep.

The music, dance and handicrafts classes – made possible by fundraising activities in Singapore – are now part of the school's curriculum and take place every Wednesday afternoon. We sat in on these classes and we particularly enjoyed the music class: we have rarely heard such enthusiastic singing!

We also discussed the difficult transition to an English-medium school for children who have finished grade 8. Some of them retake grade 8 this year, mainly to improve their English.

In preparation for English-medium secondary education, grade 6 uses Hindi textbooks with instructions in English, grade 7 uses English books with instructions in Hindi, and grade 8 uses only English textbooks. The only subject that is taught in English from the very beginning is maths.

Connie and Siddharth are well-informed about the family situation of their students. They regularly pay house visits and the other teachers are required to do so as well. New teachers are only hired if they are prepared to do so.

They sometimes achieve small successes, as



in the case when they persuaded a father to stop drinking. His son was suffering because of his alcoholism and was performing poorly at school. Now the boy is feeling better and performing better. A wonderful story.

Some of the older students sometimes visit Connie at home, to ask questions, to play a game or watch a movie together. It says a lot about her relationship with the students.

The school has a nice rewards system: the 'lucky star'. When a student has collected 12 lucky stars, he or she receives a reward. This can be anything, including, for instance, standing first in line for the school meal (!).

Currently, there are some 250 students. The non-attendance rate is generally low. According to Connie and Siddharth, this is because the teachers do not hit the children and because the students get lunch.

Children who failed to attend school for one month are expelled. If they return at a later date, they must pay a fee to be admitted again.



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The average school fee is Rs.45 a month, including lunch.

As long as there is no good alternative, Connie prefers to remain in the present school building, which is expensive but very suitable.

The rent and salaries are the highest expenses for the school and take up 26% and 36% of the budget, respectively.

Currently, salaries cost €1300 a month for 16 teachers and 7 other staff members (classroom assistants, kitchen staff). Connie would like to raise salaries by 10%.

Later on, we discussed the financial situation extensively. The school hopes to obtain a *Foreign Currency Registration Act*. Such an FCRA is an official permit to receive foreign funding.

Last year ended with a deficit of €500. This year, the expenditure appears to be more in line with the receipts.

Connie expects that with an FCRA it will become easier to receive money on a regular basis, which would make the financial situation more stable.



Connie has dreams for the future: very concrete ones such as having the basic means to run the school, raise the salaries of the teachers and expanding the school with grades 9 to 12. But she also wants to start a school branch in one of the slum districts, organise a revolving fund for university studies and initiate classes for adults, for married young people and future parents. She is obviously driven and inspired.

Other things on her wish list, which she presented at the end, were extra contributions for school meals, loudspeakers and microphones, mirrors for the dance class, drums for the music class and books in Hindi for the library.

We like this school. There is both vision and pragmatism. The school more than deserves our support. <

SINGAPORE FOR ASHA DEEP SCHOOL



In November 2013, a group of Dutch women from Singapore visited our projects in Varanasi, and became enchanted with Asha Deep School.

The school could certainly use extra support and therefore these women, whom we call the Singapore Ladies, upon their return to Singapore, initiated a number of jaw-dropping fundraising activities. With unbridled energy they devoted an entire year to helping this school. They organised a piano recital, art workshops for schoolchildren in Singapore, and, to cap it all, a workshop in Varanasi itself. Afterwards, they exhibited the children's art works and sold them.



The piano recital alone generated enough money to hire a music teacher, dance teacher and handicrafts teacher for two hours a week for a period of three years. It also covered a scholarship for four years of secondary education for one girl.

In May and June, schoolchildren in Singapore went to work on the theme 'Dream', supervised by two Indian artists. They could choose between a workshop in new media, graffiti, or traditional art.

In the last weekend of October, five families from Singapore, well-prepared and bringing all kinds of material, came to Varanasi to do an art workshop there. There was drawing, clay modelling, batik, and tinkering. In between, much to the amusement

of the Indian children, typical Dutch games were played such as bite-the-cake and sack races.

It was a very successful day, and not only for the more than 70 students of Asha Deep: the children from Singapore also had a memorable experience.



As one of them wrote: *'It was fun to talk to children my age who live in a different world than mine. Overall, the whole trip was a great privilege and talking to girls and boys my age in the school was very wonderful. Meeting the culture of India has definitely enriched my view and I will never forget this incredible experience. I hope to go back one day!*

The art produced in Singapore and Varanasi was prepared for sale by a Dutch artist. The beautiful frames he made without charge gave everything a quite professional look.

On 31 January last, the Singapore Ladies put together an exhibition of the art works made by the children in Singapore and Varanasi.

The proceeds amounted to €20,000! Good for four more scholarships for students of Asha Deep School and for eleven students of our own individual programme! <



Sheelu (with Kati's son Johann), Dan, Jess and Kati

JEEVAN SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 8, from grade 9 Open School
- > 120 students, 15 teachers
- > Budget €30,000, incl. school meal
- > Contribution BSF €10,050
- > www.basichumanneeds.org

Ten years ago, the Canadian NGO Basic Human Needs took the initiative for the Jeevan School. It was good to see how Basic Human Needs founders Jess and Dan are once more fully involved in Jeevan.



Once gone, now back again, their presence and personalities guarantee a return of past enthusiasm and focus. Focus on the poorest of the poorest who do not automatically fit in the present highly qualified and well-equipped Jeevan School.

Jess took over from Kati during the latter's maternity leave. Last summer, Jess made a successful fundraising tour through Canada and Taiwan. A Taiwanese monk gave her money to buy sweaters and blankets, for the school, the hostel and for elderly widows living on the ghats. Jess expects more help from him in the years to come and is confident about the financial future of the school. She herself took charge of the day-care centre and the preschool Kindergarten and she also teaches poetry classes to grade 7 and music lessons to all grades.

Besides this, Jess teaches evening classes to illiterate young adults and, together with a group of women, she makes leather bags that are sold in Canada and Taiwan. Dan also teaches: maths, history and political science. Although Kati is back, she still needs to be home a lot, in the hostel, with baby Johann. There, together with another teacher, she teaches problematic children for a few hours a day. She cheerfully refers to them as 'grade 11' (Jeevan's highest grade this year is grade 10). The keyboard we donated last year is being used at the hostel. The children had rehearsed a special song for us and Katie accompanied them on the 'piano'.

The school building has been recently demolished to make way for a new road, as already expected. It's a pity that those nice classrooms are now gone. The children are temporarily accommodated in three rooms in the neighbourhood, pending the construction of six new classrooms that their landlord intends to build for them.

This year, as always, a meal was prepared for all children and their parents in the neighbourhood. It is called 'mass feeding'.



For us it meant that we literally had to roll up our sleeves: while singing, we kneaded dough into balls, under the continuous critical commentary of hostel girl Radha: too big, too small...

At our first official meeting in the Jeevan hostel a wonderful chocolate cake awaited us, bearing

SARNATH

On a Sunday, we and all the children of the hostel, went to take a look at the new site of Jeevan in Sarnath. A beautiful, large plot, already walled-in and with a small pump installation. It obviously has great potential, although realising a new school and hostel may take some time yet: the sponsor of the plot and the buildings has considerably less funds at his disposal than previously expected. First the ground has to be paid off, before there can be any talk of building. Nevertheless, Sheelu, Kati, Jess and Dan are already drawing up floor plans and are studying construction methods, which must be simple and appropriate to the environment. We planted the first trees.



Dan and Sheelu plant the first trees.



the text: OMKOPING for ODD (our dearest donors). Kati and Jess had taken the trouble of looking up the Dutch word for BRIBE.

They are optimistic about the future, even though the organisation's expenses will more than double with the new location in Sarnath. Kati plans to start her own foundation in Germany, while in Canada and Taiwan and possibly also in Australia special foundations will be founded on behalf of Jeevan. They expect that this will enable them to cover the future expenses.

We also discussed our contribution and to what extent they depend on that. We made no changes to our pledge for next year, but we stressed the importance of finding new funding, especially in view of their ambitious plans. We donated ten ukeles for Jess' music lessons, on the condition that they will treat us to a ukelele concert next year!

We visited manager Sheelu's home, met his wife Lalita and their young daughter Sami and enjoyed a lovely meal. Sheelu is truly a wonderful person. <



LIVING IN THE SLUM

Our board member Theo van Pinxteren describes the impact that living in the *basti*, Nagwa's oldest slum, has on children. Theo has lived and worked with his family in Pakistani Muslim slums, from 1970 until 1975. Six years ago, he obtained his PhD degree with a sociological thesis about Dutch children's rooms.

India

India has 1.3 billion people. 200 million of them, over 15%, are living in degrading circumstances with regard to income, housing, healthcare, food and education. A new middle class, also some 200 million people, is on the rise. For the first time in generations this group is able to provide for themselves. And there are 200 'extended families' who own and control about 90% of India's wealth. They are living lives of luxury we can barely imagine.

The Benares School Fund Foundation works on behalf of the very poorest children and their families. We determine criteria for support in the form of extra daal, so important to a healthy diet. This is a hard decision to make, each time again. Above what family income do we stop support? Do we draw the line at 3000, 4000 or 4500 rupees (50 to 75 euros) a month? Just imagine this. *These are the people we work for.*

Family

People in India prefer to live in extended families. This provides a sense of protection in a situation of practically no social security. Mortality rates are high and many children have no

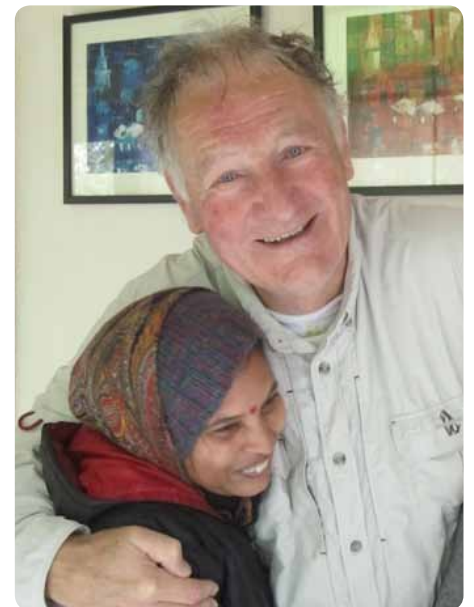
father or mother, so help from uncles and aunts, grandparents and others is essential. Whereas in the modern world the number of core families is increasing, in India the three-generation family is much more common, although more so in villages than in the larger cities. In the *basti* of Nagwa this village structure has been preserved. Marriages are arranged between families, you marry a family, rather than an individual. Despite this structure, daughters-in-law are often threatened and live harsh lives.

The basti

The streets in the *basti* are narrow, too narrow even for handcarts. It is a very densely populated slum. For instance, in Dutch cities one hectare will have between thirty and fifty houses, but in this part of Nagwa that number is 300. A house is often no more than a single room and sometimes you have to pass through one family's room to arrive at another family.

Purdah

There is a general difference between the homes of Muslims and Hindus. In Muslim environments, even in poor quarters, there is al-



ways an open space for the women. This has to do with the purdah system, in which women lead reclusive lives, isolated from the outside world. Hindu slums like the Nagwa *basti* are more densely populated. In Muslim slums, male bachelors live in designated streets. They are not allowed to reside in a mixed environment and this even applies to married men when their wives are away for a longer period of time, for instance to have a baby in the family village. In Nagwa, there is no such system for men who live alone and one of them is 'our' father Francis. He washes himself at the same pump as families around him.

> continued on page 7



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Volunteer Pierre fooling around with the children in their new living space

LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 11
- > 890 students, 48 teachers
- > Budget €36,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF €18,000 + €5,000 for class 11
- > www.littlestarsschool.org

As always, going to Little Stars School felt like coming home, with Asha as welcoming and hospitable as ever.

The old building underwent some serious renovation: the entrance is now wider, which is definitely an improvement, and the floor of the hostel girls now has beautiful tiles, making it a wonderful space to eat, play and do homework.

Two rooms have been combined to create a lovely, light classroom. Here we met with the sponsored students and their parents.

Asha's office and living space have also been improved with new windows, fresh paint and a new kitchen.

The new building is also coming along nicely, with the top floor now finished. Two class-



rooms there are ready for use; the others will soon be. A lot of work has been done with paint, stucco and tiles. The basement has nice tables and chairs for the library; a gift from former volunteer Marie, who likes to visit the school every year.

One of the new classrooms is a gift from two young Dutch families. We officially inaugurated it (also see the separate item).

We discussed the finances and priority of the building works with volunteer Pierre, our 'building father'. There are sufficient funds to basically finish the top floor. The computer room will be moved from the old building to the basement of the new one.

In a later stage, two small rooms will be created on the new floor: one for a doctor (who will visit once a week) and one for a social worker



(three times a week). It seems like a good idea for such a big school.

At the old building, on the rooftop, two classrooms for toddlers will be built and the former computer room will become a classroom for art lessons.

We usually meet with Asha over lunch, but this time we also had a formal meeting to discuss the financial situation in more detail. Here too, we discussed the duration of our support. A new item is the earmarked gift of €5000 a year to start with groups 11 and 12. This donation is for the duration of three years and it is always good to emphasise the temporary nature of such funding and to think together about what to do when this support ends.

How sure can Asha be about her sponsors?

None of the sponsors of LSS have committed themselves for several years, except us and one Indian individual who lives in Dubai and sponsors four students for the length of their study, even if they go on to university.

With other sponsors, new applications must be submitted every year and sometimes they renew their commitment. Asha is sure that some foundations will do so.

How about finding new sponsors, especially in India itself?

We have spoken no one who was optimistic

STARTING GRADE 11

Expanding the school with two higher grades takes both space and money. Our main sponsor was willing to finance the start of these groups for a number of years. This year grade 11, next school year also grade 12.

These highest grades need highly qualified teachers for the subjects chemistry, physics, math and English. This means higher costs in salaries.

With these two new groups, school director Asha is providing full secondary education for the poor, which is unique for Varanasi.

DUTCH CLASSROOM 'ELIZE AND THIJS'



This sign hangs next to the door of a brand-new classroom at Little Stars School. Two Dutch families together donated this classroom on the occasion of the birth of their children Elize and Thijs.

On three December, during our annual visit, the classroom was officially inaugurated. It was just finished, with nice tiles and a fresh coat of paint. It is a wonderful and light room.

It was a festive occasion, with a real ribbon

to cut, a nice welcome ceremony, candles and garlands in honour of Shiva, fine words and beautiful dancing.

LSS is expanding to include groups 11 and 12. The new classroom is for group 11, which started this year and happens to consist of girls only. These girls, in their dark red uniforms with white scarves, proudly attended the opening.

The drawings we brought with us by Elize and Thijs, who are now three years old, will become the first decorative elements in the still bare classroom.

about donations from India itself. Indians prefer to donate in kind and almost never donate money. For instance, almost all fans in the school are gifts, even without Asha having asked for them. Sometimes sponsors simply ask her for a wish list.

Every year, Asha has an American student working in the office as a volunteer for a longer period. These students take care of many of her tasks: the newsletter, the annual report, student lists, et cetera, and they also search the Internet for potential new sponsors.

The website of LSS is well maintained: most new foreign sponsors learn about LSS through the website. The school has an FCRA.

Pierre, who spends more time in India than in the Netherlands, has joined two local Rotaries. Very useful to make new contacts!

We attended a convention of NGOs that are active in Varanasi. Our chairman learned about large Indian companies, such as Tata and Birla, which are certainly active in charity. 'However', Asha explained, 'this usually concerns projects initiated by the companies themselves.'

Asha's main task is coaching, helping and training teachers. Some of them also take external training, but hardly seem to apply the things they have learned. Guarding the quality of the teaching requires Asha's full attention.

In December, a group of four students and four teachers from Holland arrived here on the

initiative of the organisation 'English for Kids'. These very experienced teachers began teaching the teachers at LSS. They took two tests: one at the beginning of the three-months course and one at the end. Teachers with good results are given a raise in salary of Rs.500.

Legally, the ownership of both buildings has been arranged in such a way that they will be used for education for many decades to come, and also provide Asha with a small pension. She has officially adopted seven of the girls in the hostel, who will later go to university, get married...

Her daughter Rishi is about to finish her Master's in English at the University. She will then work for five years at various schools to gain experience. Eventually, the idea is that she will one day take over from her mother at LSS. But for now, Asha Pandey remains the face of LSS: stable, reliable, but also flexible and creative. A great woman! <



Asha praying for a safe journey home of our boardmembers

>> continuation of Living in the slum

Rooms

In the *basti* you can hear your family members' breath and sometimes even that of your neighbours. The rooms, if you can call them that, are often semi-separated rooms without a proper roof. Under these conditions people must sleep, eat and lead their daily lives. A private room for a child, or even for the parents, is not available. The father sleeps with his sons on one bed and the mother with her daughters on another, though most of the time still in the same room. The family possessions are stacked against the walls and clothes hang on lines from the ceiling.

Brief childhood

Children can only briefly enjoy their childhood. They carry responsibility, have to find small jobs or take care of the younger children because their mother works as a kitchen maid or servant. They already know all the secrets of family life at an age when Dutch children are at play or busy with their hobbies. The children supported by BSF have to do their homework on bed. In the daytime, the beds are often put outside, if there is enough room in the street and the neighbours do not object. The people living here sit quietly in the street, do the dishes, wash clothes and talk to each other in an atmosphere of apparent contentment. We cannot imagine how frustrated these people are. To us outsiders it is difficult to grasp which room or which wall belongs to which family, as the homes are intertwining. Moslim slums have a more linear street pattern; daily life takes place much more indoors. In the Hindu *basti* of Nagwa there's hardly any private space in the rooms surrounding small courtyards.

Education

If they don't have jobs, children love to come to the evening classes at the Ashray School. There is electric light, there are no worries, no fighting. The sentiment of 'it has always been like this and it will always be like this' prevails among the elderly residents, but the youth and the children realise that education is an important tool to escape poverty. It is a great drawback that the parents do not understand how valuable the knowledge is that the children bring home with them.

It is therefore a good thing that in the educational projects of our foundation the parents are being involved in the education of their children and see how they learn. In the *basti* of Nagwa children are very eager to learn, which means that education can be the tool to make a change for the better. <



4

INDIVIDUAL SPONSOR PROGRAMME

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 62 students, spread over multiple schools in the city
- > Budget €11,550, incl. supervision, medical care and food aid for the most destitute
- > Contribution BSF 100%

Throughout the year we are kept well-informed, especially by Surendra, about new admissions, medical care, *daal* or no *daal*, and about problems at school or in families. He often seeks our advice in practical matters and often brings important information to our attention. Surendra is a vital source of information for us to know what is happening in the Nagwa area.

Manish provides the lists of report marks and (non-)attendance, as well as the complete student information. As liaison between our foundation and the schools he is equally indispensable, as he knows each child and each school very well.



Manish and Surendra

The students are doing fair to good, with results between 30% and 80%. The average for the school year 2013-2014 was 60%. The worst result was due to illness, two students were expelled from the programme because of lack of motivation and being absent too often, one rather poor student will be advised to stop after completing grade 10, and one student will be sent to a Hindi medium school, as he struggles too much with English.

Surendra and Manish know the children, their parents and their home situation very well. This is evident time and again at our annual meetings with parents and students, which took place again this year on the large roof of Manish's home. Parents and children sitting on mats on the floor, with us on chairs behind a table and Manish's daughters at tables with attendance lists and vitamin pills. Sitting in another corner, for the first time and free of charge, was doctor Mathur, who examined all the students.

A few families were taken of the *daal* list, and new ones were added. Year by year, family situations may improve or deteriorate, and we keep track of that. Currently, 23 families receive full support, which means that 31 students benefit from it.

We informed Surendra that all the money for this should be spent, so we can give more to families with more children.

Fellow board member Theo and I discussed finances with Surendra, going into more detail at some points. We do so every year, targeting a different aspect each time. The expenses were well within the budget. However, we must expect an increase in costs, as school-

ing in India becomes more expensive each year by approximately 10%.

The school year 2013-2014 showed a surplus of over €1000, mainly thanks to the favourable exchange rate of the euro against the rupee. Unfortunately, the situation is now radically different.

We also talked about Ashray's evening classes. Once they were especially created for the students of our individual programme. Too few students though in our programme make use of these classes, because according to them the quality leaves much to be desired.

We discussed this with Ashray's board and urged them to better guard the quality. We expect adjustments to be made.



Together with Surendra and Manish we visited two families and one school. One family lives in Nagwa and the daughter is new in our programme. Her mother is Surekha, an assistant nurse in the Ashray Clinic, where she earns Rs.3000 (€40) a month. Two years ago, Surekha's husband went to visit family members on the other side of the river Ganges, but he never came back; no one has ever heard anything from or about him since then. An accident, a crime? It remains an enigma.

The other family lives farther away, so we took a rickshaw, with Surendra and Manish leading the way on a motorbike. This family has six children, two of which we included in the programme at the request of their school. Their father has died. The family is poor, is very decent and the children look happy. The family income of Rs.4500 a month comes from selling vegetables and fruit. When we left, they gave us a large bunch of bananas, which I later distributed among the beggars in front of our hotel.



MEDICAL CARE

Over the past few years we have been increasingly confronted with illness of our children and their families.

A healthy diet is important. We provide the poorest of the poor families, 23 out of the 60, with a fixed amount of protein rich lentil each month. However, this doesn't solve everything.

Two children in our programme urgently needed ear surgery. Although we are not a medical organisation, we simply couldn't risk deafness in these two cases. We therefore asked Surendra to organise hospital admission and surgery, a task which he acquitted himself most admirably. However, the result was that more and more people came to him with their medical problems.

Surendra and Manish came up with the splendid idea of combining the meeting with parents and students, which always takes place during our stay in Varanasi, with a general medical examination by a doctor. This doctor was easily found: he was a friend of Surendra's and was happy to do this, free of charge. We limited the

examination to children, but we couldn't prevent that an occasional mother slipped through with a medical question. The doctor found shortages or ailments in 24 students, mainly vitamin deficiencies, anaemia and poor eyesight.

His prescriptions were collected by Surendra and Manish, who then took care of buying and distributing the medicines and supervised their use.

Next year we will probably see a few more children wearing glasses. Hopefully, Puja will then no longer have cotton pads in her ears. She kept them in for now, because she wasn't yet used to so much noise.



Having the children examined once a year will hopefully contribute to improving their health.

Then we visited the institute where students can learn to be professional electricians. This year, the first of our students, Raju, went there. He took pride in giving us a tour of the facility. Unfortunately there were no classes that day because of the wedding of the school director's daughter: the school was being transformed into a party location. This is India...

Some of the teachers accompanied us on our tour of the building, demonstrating the equipment used in the practical lessons. Coming school year the next two students will go here. Parents and students are now aware

that there is the possibility of a vocational training following grade 10.

We had dinner at Manish' home and, true to tradition, at Surendra's on the last evening of our stay. It feels good. We have a bond with both these gentlemen and we respect and appreciate each other, which makes our collaboration so effortless.

Home again, I made a list of everything we discussed and decided. This gives us something to go by throughout the year, for Surendra and Manish, and for me as well. <



SCHOOL SPONSORS

We guarantee the children in our individual sponsor programme a full education up to and including grade 12.

This means a continued effort on our part to find school sponsors who are willing to finance a couple of years of education of an individual child.

For only €275 a year (tax deductible) you can make this happen.

More information can be found in our supplementary sheet Facts & Figures.



5

EDUCATION ASHRAY

- > Primary school up to and incl. grade 5
- > 80 students, 5 teachers
- > Sewing class, 12 girls/young women, 1 teacher. Evening classes (up to grade 12 and incl. computer classes), 55 students, 4 teachers. Dance and tabla classes, 29 students, 1 teacher
- > Budget €3,500, incl. a simple lunch
- > Contr. BSF €8,500 + €1,870 lunch
- > www.ashray.org

By our chairman

You can't miss it, the Ashray building! It is a large, dark-red cube next to the bridge across the River Assi, right on the edge of the basti. A short alley is the gateway to a maze of tiny streets.

In the 1960s, with Dutch money, a drain was dug from the River Assi to the River Ganges. It is a straight canal, a couple of hundred metres long. The result: an enormous deposit of silt on Assi Ghat every year during the high water season and rows of slum dwellings along the bank of the canal. They spring up like weeds again every time when the city has flattened everything with bulldozers.

The school occupies the upper floor and the roof terrace. Classes are distributed somewhat haphazardly: some in small rooms, others in the hallway or under the canopy, which conserves the school's informal atmosphere, year in, year out. Whereas a school such as Little Stars has evolved into a well-oiled machine, the Ashray School keeps up the same



appearance: a small, seven-class school for the youngest children from the *basti*, to prepare them for 'real' school life. This is good and functional; not everything has to be slick and efficient, as long as we do not lower our quality standards.

The school is doing well. There is a close team that has been the same now for many years. The teachers know each other's strengths and weaknesses and help each other out. Each year they take a further training course, which impresses us as a sign of reliability. In the future, an exchange with another school will be initiated in order to gain new ideas and learn about other teaching material. All formal aspects, school reports and such, are well taken care of and we were allowed to hand them out again this year.



Rakesh Saraogi, the treasurer of the board, has manifested himself as the new executive within Ashray. He is running a slightly tighter ship, which initially worried the staff, but there was definitely room for improvement in this respect. We are quite happy with this development.

The building has two front doors, side-by-side. The left one gives access to the clinic, the right one leads to the stairs. The interior dividing wall has one very small door, giving the internal communication between clinic and school a somewhat sneaky character, as if that little door should not be there at all. Still, it is used very frequently. Except by Theo, who has to wriggle and squirm too much to get through. He prefers to use the front doors.



The Ashray School has a chronic shortage of space. Ashray intends to transform the clinic into a first-aid station and this would mean that more space on the ground floor becomes available for the school. The sewing classes have already moved there, working in multiple shifts. The graduation gift of half a sewing machine has been cancelled, as the increasing costs could no longer be afforded. Rakesh Saraogi wants to increase quality standards so that the best students can find paid work. It is an initiative that we fully support. *Don't give them fish; learn them how to catch fish.*

Three board members had a work breakfast in the home of Rakesh Saraogi. He is a businessman and travels a lot. His family comes from a long line of weavers and he still has a factory where silk is produced and used to make beautiful saris, using old techniques and craftsmanship. Rakesh designs the saris and he lovingly showed us some truly magnificent samples. This is not a profitable activity. It is actually losing money, but Rakesh is happy to invest in the conservation of a traditional craft.

Unlike a couple of years ago, the link between the Ashray School and secondary education is now excellent, also thanks to the afternoon classes for the two highest groups. The building is also used intensively during homework assistance and coaching classes in the early evening. We noticed that fewer children from our individual programme were taking part in the coaching classes. This may have to do with the quality of the coaching. We agreed with Rakesh Saraogi that this quality will be closely monitored.

The annual festive 'function' has once again convinced us of the joy and enthusiasm among both teachers and children in shaping school life here. Tabla players, kathak dancers, singers, actors – they all performed in front of children, parents, board members and other interested parties. I still can't figure out where that Coke bottle went in that conjuring trick.

The Ashray School is making progress. All that is needed now is that it makes as much progress as our other schools! <

INTERVIEW

Jacques Baartmans and his wife Joep Baartmans-van den Boogaart are both long-time board members at BSF. Joep had a career as a Dutch language teacher, as a member of the Provincial Executive and as acting mayor. Jacques was a Dutch language teacher. A conversation with Marien van Stalen.

BSF was originally founded to continue the educational work of Francis Baartmans. You are his brother and sister-in-law. What made you decide to join our board?

Jacques: We always considered ourselves to be Francis' home front, and he inspired us. We were fascinated by his stories about India, in which education figured so prominently. I was in Varanasi to attend the opening of Deva Public School and that made a lasting impression on us.

When the Benares School Fund foundation was established we were very keen on joining the initiative, as education is its core activity. Education is the foundation for anything you want to do over there. Other big things, such as social change, are much more abstract.



1994: Jacques visiting his brother Francis in Varanasi

Joep: Jacques was painting school benches in the heat...

Francis looks at other cultures with a great social and artistic sense of what chances a society has to offer. At the same time, his heart is with the people, to try and lift them to a higher social and economic level. That is a constant in Francis' work.

Jacques: I wrote a report of my visit at the time and the last sentence was: the most complete Indian I have ever met, is Francis.

Joep: He can squat down on this flat feet as well as any of the people there...

Jacques: Francis is very sociable, but in his work he is a soloist, in a completely independent position.

Joep: Francis never had any colleagues. His position was a lonesome one. That was his own choice, as it is part of his nature. He discovered his special qualities in the work he chose. People grow in the way in which they approach their work.

What can a foundation such as ours accomplish with such limited means?

Jacques: As long as you limit your sphere of activity you can of course accomplish a lot. It's no good thinking how big India is and that you cover only one small area and a few schools. It's all about goal-oriented action for a certain group of people, and that is very meaningful. And you see the results of helping people in a very direct way.

Joep: That personal element is expressed by our foundation in a special way: every year board members who know the children and their parents and the people running those schools visit India.

Jacques: Two problems that one often sees in development cooperation do not occur with us. First, in development aid a lot of money disappears because of corruption. Not so with us. Second, it should always be development cooperation, and that element is safeguarded with us simply because the children are the ones that are achieving something. So there is also activity from the other side, because the children work hard at school and parents are involved as well. Therefore, the cooperative element is also guaranteed.

Joep: Besides, we try to pay much attention to what people say they need. That is always taken into account in everything we do. It is the only way you can give development aid in a respectful manner.

Jacques: It is their education. We may sometimes tentatively think, for instance: 'Shouldn't they be doing something about physical exercise?', but in the end it is their way of educating.

Joep: Which doesn't mean you can't make demands, especially when it comes to accountability with regard to the money. That is of course very important and it is right to be very strict about that. This form of development cooperation, whereby you are dealing directly with the people you are doing it for, is very acceptable. No one can say that there is any rake-off, because there simply isn't.

Jacques: Within the board we do think about the proportion of girls to boys. It is okay to accentuate that, and we do.

Learning to read and write is of vital importance for the underprivileged in India. With the ABC Foundation, you, Jacques, are combating functional illiteracy in the Netherlands.

What does it mean for someone to not be able to read and write?

Jacques: In the Netherlands too, functional illiteracy is a great handicap as it makes it very hard to participate in society. These people are often lonely and unhappy. They need assistance but they always run the risk of losing that help. They are really caught between a rock and a hard place. It is difficult to reach out to this group and it is tough and difficult work. The approach is a little bit like that of BSF: offering concrete help to a limited number of people.

However, if and when these people somehow get started, the sky is the limit. Then things can go very fast. Then they come out of their shells and start contributing to their immediate surroundings. It improves their happiness in a very concrete manner.

In India, education is the best way to fight poverty. Joep, you have had dealings with people in vulnerable situations over the course of your career. What role do you see for development cooperation?

Joep: Poverty is always relative. In the Netherlands, being poor means something completely different than in India, where it is really about food and clean housing in hygienic conditions. Personally, I have always felt that resources should be distributed fairly and that still leaves a lot to be desired, in the Netherlands as well. So I do take poverty in the Netherlands quite seriously, but fortunately it is not about hunger or cold.

I have enough trust in our Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lillianne Ploumen, to think that the combination of these two things may work. Obviously, emergency relief comes first. If there are floods or other calamities, including those caused by armed conflicts, we have to spend extra money. But in trade relations, as long as you remain respectful of local tradition and of what the people there can do themselves, and you support them in that, I see no objection in developing profitable enterprises.

Microcredits are also a very interesting aspect. It is wonderful when, through authority and knowledge, you can create more opportunities on a small scale, especially for women. Just look at how the sewing courses that BSF supports help make women become independent...

I think we should move to new ideas about help. The time is ripe for it. I don't think it is such a bad idea to say that trade and development cooperation can go hand-in-hand. <



VATSALYA'S UDAYAN SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 8, 135 students, 5 teachers
- > Budget €33,000, incl. lunch
- > Contribution BSF €5,000 + €1,000 for lunch
- > www.vatsalya.org

During the past year, I have been closely involved with discussions about Vatsalya's financial situation, as chair of Vatsalya's international advisory board (VAC). If one thing is clear, it is that all our schools have trouble to make ends meet, as they depend so much on donations. Moreover, there are less and less donations.



Within the VAC, we have formed a special fundraising group. Both Vatsalya's international partners and Vatsalya itself have intensified their activities, and successfully so. From Belgium, money was given for extra classrooms and our own foundation donated extra funds for furnishing them, as well as for school meals, which had been reduced to a minimum.

Vatsalya itself has achieved some great results: from a large group of NGOs, Vatsalya was chosen to receive a large sum from the well-known Indian Birla family. Also, Vatsalya made it to the list of NGOs from the Give India organisation. This is a list of NGOs worthy of donations. It is a sort of quality mark for good causes. Both examples demonstrate how highly Vatsalya's quality is regarded in India.

There were some sacrifices too: cuts were made and seven staff members had to go, including Udayan's full-time sports teacher. Hopefully, he may be reinstated when times are better.

Despite financial worries, the Udayan village and school are doing well. By admitting students from surrounding villages the school now has some 135 students. Vatsalya's annual report states the vision behind the education of these children: academic education, learning a trade and acquiring norms and values are regarded as equally important.

Vatsalya's school is registered for teaching children up to and including grade 8. Eight children, grade 9, 10 and 11, go to school outside the campus.

Over the past school year, results were between 38% and 97.5%. The average was 56.5%. This could be better and it will certainly improve. The low score is mainly caused by 'external' children who still have to get used to going to school. Also, the teachers must get used to handling these children, who require a different pedagogical and educational approach. These are issues that deserve more thought.

The new classrooms look great. The structure has half-length walls, so the wind can bring some relief during hot summers. Three classrooms have been built and a larger space for



various activities. The courtyard has a canopy to keep the sun out.

It was the time of mid-term exams. The students were working with concentration and the teachers seemed very dedicated. I saw one of them doing sports with the children on his day off.

At the moment, the children are taught English by a young American woman who is temporarily living in Jaipur. Computer class is given each Saturday by one of the students from grade 12.



The money we donated for expanding the library has been well spent. I saw many new titles. Twice a week, all classes spend time in the library.

The school management and those members of Vatsalya's advisory board that were present have decided to not let the school grow, for the time being. First we must improve and consolidate finances and quality. The original plan to have children from outside the school pay a fee to help finance the school proved to be unrealistic. Therefore we are now in a situation where admitting more children will make the school more expensive and that is something Vatsalya simply cannot afford.

Rajasthan is a desert state. The school sits in the middle of a sandy plain where each foot-step causes a tiny sandstorm. There is dust everywhere. However, the computers are neatly covered and the books and other materials are stored in closed cupboards. Udayan is certainly a special place. <

OUR SINCERE THANKS GO TO ALL OUR SPONSORS AND DONORS WHO HELPED CONTRIBUTE THIS PAST YEAR

THEIR FUTURE DEPENDS ON YOUR HELP!