



BENARES SCHOOL FUND FOUNDATION

TWELVE AND A HALF YEARS OF BENARES SCHOOL FUND

At the time of our last visit to Varanasi, in November and December last year, BSF had been active for 12 and a half years. Reason enough for looking back. With that in mind we, board members Marien, Conny and Karin, looked with special attention at the changes in Indian society, in our target group and the schools we support.

In May 2003, our foundation started with 23 students at the Deva Public School. Most of them have concluded their full 12-class education by now and some have gone on to university. Meanwhile we have taken many new children under our wing and, as BSF was prospering financially over the years, we also took a number of schools in our care: four in Varanasi, one in Jaipur.



These schools lacked the means to improve the level of their education and our support has led to a considerable quality boost.

Four of our five schools now have a library, computers and special subject classrooms. The fifth school will have a library before the year ends. All the schools have music and dance classes, as well as art classes.

The neighbourhood now finally has a sewer system and public lavatories. Garbage is also collected, albeit on a modest scale.

Most people are doing a little better, but they still hardly share in India's much touted growing prosperity.

In the beginning, Asha Pandey of the Little Stars School had to put a lot of effort in persuading parents to send their daughters to school. Now the school has 900 students. 99% of the children from 'our' Nagwa neighbourhood now go to school and almost all of them also finish it. Only relatively few children go to government schools. These are still of very poor quality with classes of sometimes more than 60 students and teachers who don't even show up.



Kamal 2006

Kamal 2015



Rani 2007

Rani 2015

Indian society is harsh: there is no solidarity, no social security. Things go relatively well as long as the father or mother don't fall ill or lose their jobs. When that happens, the whole family is at risk and the children have to supplement the family income, and of course their schoolwork suffers. But if everything goes well, the children finish their education, get better jobs and higher incomes than their parents and thus escape poverty and discrimination.

That is our ideal. That is what we work for. With your help. <

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There are better teachers now who take regular refresher courses. Unfortunately this is not always reflected in their salaries, so this gain in quality is sometimes lost again.

Every year we visit children in their homes and each time we noticed small improvements: first there was nothing, then there was a bed, a year later a television and now a bicycle or motorcycle and mobile phones. Connie Rao of the Asha Deep School even spotted refrigerators!





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ASHA DEEP SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 8
- > 238 students, 18 teachers (5 part-time)
- > Budget € 36,000 incl. school meals + € 12,500 secondary education
- > Contribution BSF € 8,165 + € 1,625 secondary education
- > www.asha-deep.com

When we decided in 2012 to support Asha Deep, we did so because we were impressed with acting principal Siddharth Singh. Connie Rao, the school's principal, was in the United States for a long stay at the time.

Two years later we met her for the first time and this meeting confirmed that we had made the right choice. Together, Connie and Siddharth are a super team with a sound view on education and insight into their students.

Marlen interviewed Connie, and what she told him said everything about who she is and what the school is like. There's not much we can add, really. On next page we present a couple of highlights.

When children come to the Asha Deep School they have to take an **entrance examination**. This often means that they are moved down



one or even several grades. This is most regrettable and it says a lot about the level of regular education in India. However, if children can accept being in a class with much younger children, then they can look forward to receiving a 'real education' at Asha Deep, as Connie wrote in her newsletter of September 2015. <



SECONDARY EDUCATION

Asha Deep provides education **up to grade 8**. For the higher grades Connie places her students at good, mostly English language schools in the vicinity. This is expensive and so she looks for individual sponsors and often succeeds in finding them. She has chosen this solution, instead of expanding her own school with higher grades, because it gives the students a number of years to get used to Indian reality at a different school, after Asha Deep. We asked former student Suman to compare Asha Deep with his current school and he said: 'Asha Deep was heaven for me.'

Singapore ladies

Thanks to the Singapore Ladies, a group of Dutch expats in Singapore who have really worked hard for the school for two years, with fantastic results, six Asha Deep graduates can now attend grades 9 to 12 at good schools. (see big picture on next page).



We have spoken with the students, all of them ambitious and eager to learn, and it was quite clear that they still had affectionate bonds with Connie Rao and Siddharth Singh.

After the students have finished grade 8, Asha Deep keeps in touch with them. They follow them, guide and encourage them. Connie tells of the great efforts that are sometimes required to keep problematic students on board and she sometimes desponds and wonders to what length she should go. But every time she succeeds, it is a personal victory for her.

After 11 years of hard work, Connie now sees the **first results**: she proudly wrote to us about the top scores of two of her former students who now had a real chance to become a doctor and a microbiologist, in spite of their low caste origins.

SUMAN

The smartest kid to graduate from Asha Deep School so far. He is crazy for knowledge and studies hard.

If he is given the chance he is sure to succeed. Suman is the son of a below-average intelligent fisherman; not just illiterate, but actually mentally deficient. As an example of his father: he came with Suman to pick up his exam results. Suman had gotten straight A's. His father looked at the piece of paper and asked, "Did he pass?" He really has absolutely no idea about how well his son is doing in school.



Out of a student report by Connie Rao



Connie and Conny with the former students sponsored by BSF

teachers do have a book but they supplement it with a lot of different activities. They have worksheets, got from internet, or they play games, do an art class or drama. But besides that, our teachers care about the kids. They know the home situations and take care of personality development. A lot that our kids learn at home about dealing with conflict or insult is quite harsh. We try to teach the kids to talk in order to resolve a problem, you don't have to hit someone back who hits you. We work on esteem, compassion, and cooperation.

Tell me more about the kids' home life.

Our students' parents are illiterate or very low educated. They have menial jobs. A lot of the fathers are alcoholic, they may not be working at all. The mothers are the backbones of these families. Above everything that they have to suffer due to poverty, they have to suffer maltreatment from their husbands. They try hard to keep the family together. They get up at five in the morning, clean someone else's houses so that they have money to send their kids to school. They are the ones who cook and clean and bring the water. The kids also help. But most husbands are really contributing very little or are even taking away from what the mother is trying to do.

Nagwa is extremely crowded. You have a whole family living in one room. And just behind that brick wall is the next family. The anxiety and the fighting, all the beating and insults, all the gossip, everyone hears. You've read about these experiments where you cramp a

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'WE DON'T FOLLOW THE BOOKS SO MUCH.'

Connie Rao, principal of Asha Deep Vidyashram, comes from California. She got her MA Linguistics, with emphasis on teaching ESL (English as Second Language). In 1998, she and her husband, a half-Indian, half-American, moved to Benares. At first, she was mostly being a mom and learning the language and culture. In 2004 she joined a small school for poor children.

Marien van Staalén interviewed her.

What can you tell me about typical education in Benares?

There is so much rote education in India. Children are told: you need to learn this. The teachers write questions and answers on the board. The children copy it down, go home, and memorise it. They may understand what they're writing, or they may not.

My servant once asked me to help her daughter study English for the 10th class exam. When she came to my house, I asked her the simplest of questions - do you like ice cream - and she really didn't know what I was talking about. In the exam they were doing things like changing positive statements into negative statements, changing direct force into indirect force. She had no understanding at all what she was doing. But she passed the exam. I was shocked.

That was the first time I realised that a school certificate here is almost meaningless. They don't understand the basics. They even memorise math questions! If one digit changed on the exam, they would give the wrong answer.

The teachers don't really teach. In private evening classes they do, but even there there's no concept of critical thinking or being able to synthesise material and come up with your own opinion. Even writing, you memorise the paragraph. No one knows paragraph construction.

I think the whole education system that's been built up now is based on the old British system of just training clerks who would listen and do as they were told.

How is Asha Deep different?

Of course, we're teaching for understanding. We don't follow the books so much. The



lot of mice together into a small space, what happens then... This is the kind of atmosphere our kids are coming from.

There is little family support in education. The kids really have to want to come to school. The mothers are out working, so the kids have to get ready and come to school on their own. And they have to stubbornly decide to do homework because no one makes them do it.

So far, 32 kids who have graduated from your school now study in local high schools. Tell me more about these kids.

In the beginning the school was small. The students were like sons and daughters. Of course you have dreams for them. After class 8 you just can't say: 'Okay, bye guys, good luck in life, I hope you can somehow manage it' - because if they stop after class 8, they're not gonna be able to get a decent job that changes their lives.

So, we had to find a way that they could at least finish class 12. So, we searched for sponsors and found a way. We've thought about teaching up to class 12 in our school because it would be cheaper and the quality of education would be as good as anywhere else - maybe better. But we've seen the advantage in sending them out: they are forced to learn to survive in society.

Asha Deep is quite a bubble. Students here have to learn a whole different culture. The way to act and react here is not the way to act and react in the slum. So if they spend their whole academic career in Asha Deep, they're very protected. We're quite forgiving, loving, encouraging.

And then, when they're out to try to get a job, they may not know how to act, they may not realize standard expectations of respect or know how to manage when someone mistreats them because of their caste, or the color of their skin.

When our kids transfer to other schools, they tell me, ashamed, 'The teacher asked me my name right in front of everyone.' As soon as they say their names everyone knows they're low caste. That's what I mean: they have to face up to what they are going to face from the world, starting from being able to say their names. Other schools help them learn social strategies and help them realise: hey, I'm good enough to be in this middle-class school. So it gives them a good sense of self-pride. Other schools are more costly, but we're receiving something of value there. <

This is a condensed version of a bigger interview. See for the full interview on our website.

Siddharth Sir, as he is called by Connie and the children, wrote a beautiful poem about Asha Deep. We are happy to share the best verses of it, even though the choice was difficult.



OUR MAGIC SCHOOL

Let me tell you the story of a school today.

It's a school where a pupa becoming a butterfly is celebrated as the birthday of a magical being which, can you believe, came out with all its magic and riot of colors from that scrawny little pupa? Believe me, it really happened and we all became part of this magic

It's a school where, if a monkey comes into the office he is asked gently to leave and the monkey actually leaves.

It's a school where, from time to time, you find a shoe in the drinking water tank or some school crayons stowed in someone's backpack but the next day these kids are not horrified to come back to school. When they come back then somewhere there is a solemn promise that today I will not dip my shoes in the water tank.

It's a school where kids sometimes dance at the beginning of their classes and some teachers weep in the teachers' meeting because they feel bad about a kid's family situation.

It's a school where you see hope, joy, and faith taking birth right in front of your eyes.

It's a school where broken, beaten, and battered souls are healed, soothed, and reborn.

It's a school where no matter how much darkness you are coming from as you come here you enter light.



by Siddharth Singh



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LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 41 teachers
- > Budget € 50,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF € 18,000 + € 5,000 for class 11 + 12
- > www.littlestarsschool.org

In spite of the large number of students, this school makes a fresh and vigorous impression, striking a fine balance between Indian tradition and modern life. There is no doubt that the special personality of director Asha Pandey plays a key part in this. She is undeniably the head of the school, yet she exercises her authority in an almost casual, amicable manner.

Wisely, she gives the teachers who assist her much room and confidence. At 'functions' Asha typically does not sit at the table with the guests of honour.



The atmosphere at the school is relaxed and happy

LSS demonstrates the importance of a good **location**. The new building is light and airy and the old building, which used to be dark and gloomy, has seen many improvements: classrooms have been enlarged and new windows installed.

The school's budget is remarkably modest compared to our other schools, especially with this many students.

The main reason for this is that the salaries of the teachers are low, too low in fact. This is an ongoing concern, as the large turnover of staff harms the quality of the education. Still, the school results are excellent, in terms of examination scores.



MALTI MA'AM

In the new building Malti Ma'am holds sway. She is a retired head of the (very expensive) Little Flower School and is now continuing her teaching career as a volunteer at LSS. She is Asha's help and stay.



SHANTI'S LUNCH

Most of our discussions with Asha take place at the kitchen table over lunch. She had written 'Lunch at LSS' in our agenda almost every day, as she feared we might not see each other often enough.

These luncheons are always prepared by Shanti, who is happily juggling pots and pans in her new kitchen.

The menu is never the same. Once in a while she takes pity on our tender Western stomachs and weak intestines and prepares mild dishes. They are all very tasty.

So we have written this to honour this tireless and hard-working Indian woman. Asha and Conny chose a sari for her, which we gave her to thank her for all these years of delicious food.



Grades 11 and 12

Last year, LSS started with grade 11 and this year with the first grade 12.

This makes the school a full Indian high school, the first in Nagwa for our target group.

These highest grades are expensive, as teachers must be highly qualified, and this could only be realised thanks to an earmarked extra donation for three years. We hope to engage more sponsors to finance a teacher's salary so that LSS can continue to provide this unique facility.



THE LITTLE STARS SCHOOL HOSTEL

Nine girls at the Shanti Niketan hostel bear the family name 'Pandey'. They were all adopted by director Asha Pandey.

The oldest, **Shobhana**, who is 19, is in grade 12. Shobhana is an orphan and came to the hostel through Childline, an emergency line for children. When her parents died, one of her mother's brothers took her in, but disowned her when she was three years old. For two years, she lived in a temple until a family took her in as a maid servant. She would sometimes attend school, but more often not. In 2010 she ran away. She is happy in the hostel and doesn't want to go back: 'Here I have my best friends', she says.



Shobhana likes to draw. On the day before we left there was an exhibition of school drawings at Assi Ghat. We bought a beautiful drawing by Shobhana, reproduced here.

These children often have a long history of abuse and rape. And yet at the hostel we see happy, joyful girls who look after each other and form a happy family together with Asha.

Sisters **Tarana** and **Tejal**, 7 and 8, in this photograph with Asha, are orphans too. After their father died they lived with his brother, an alcoholic who spent all his money on liquor. The girls had to work and were fed by other families in the village. Their mother was not capable of caring for them. The uncle fathered two children with their mother who both died of malnutrition. One day, the uncle hanged their mother when she asked him for clothing and food. Later, he ran off and left the children to fend for themselves.

Tarana and Tejal also came to Little Stars School through Childline, last August. We met with the girls. They must be severely traumatised but are now going to school and they seem happy and able to smile again.



All the girls at Shanti Niketan look well-groomed. Asha often receives clothing and food for them from people in India. The hostel is situated on one of the floors of the old school. It has been beautifully renovated by 'Uncle' Pierre. The girls have their own kitchen, bathroom, dormitory and a large living space. Shobhana is the only one with a room of her own, where she can study without being disturbed.



'Uncle Pierre' with the hostel girls at the Assi Ghat exhibition

Asha frequently takes the girls on an outing. During our visit we went to see the Bollywood film Prem Ratan Dhan Payo. We couldn't understand any of it, but the story was self-explanatory. It was a great spectacle and the outing was rounded off with ice cream and popcorn.

And did you know that as many as eight little girls can fit into one motorised rickshaw? <

The life stories of the girls mentioned above have been included in this newsletter by permission of Asha Pandey.

ASHRAY EDUCATION

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- > Primary school up to, incl. grade 5
- > 73 students, 5 teachers
- > Sewing class, 40 young women, 1 teacher.
- > Evening classes (up to grade 12 and incl. computer classes), 51 students, 4 teachers.
- > Dance and tabla classes, 31 students, 1 teacher
- > Budget € 13,500 , incl. lunch
- > Contr. BSF € 8,500
- > www.ashray.org

Ashray has decided to focus on education in the broadest sense of the word. Therefore the medical and social work have mostly been taken over by a new NGO. The Ashray clinic has been halved in size and capacity.

The back section of the large space is now used for **sewing lessons**. There are seven sewing machines. Ten young women take lessons in one group. They take turns in using the sewing machines, they make designs and take theory classes. There are four groups each day, making optimal use of the capacity. The students pay Rs.50 (€0,70) a month and, unlike before, they do not get a free sewing machine when they get their diplomas. The teacher's pay is based on the number of students and the number of lessons she gives. Sometimes the students get paid assignments and the proceeds are shared between them and the teacher. This makes the project cost-effective and more productive. Many young women wish to enrol.

This is one example of the more business-like approach taken by Rakesh Saraogi, Ashray's new general coordinator.



Another example is the **music and dance education**. In the past, the teacher more or less came at his own convenience and his lessons were improvised. Now he comes three times a week at regular hours, outside school hours. Rakesh has opened up the tabla and kathak classes to everyone in Nagwa, not just to the children of the Ashray School. Children from outside pay a small fee. Half of these proceeds is used for instrument maintenance and the other half goes to the teacher. It is the same model as with the sewing classes: more capacity but cost-effective, and a better motivated teacher. We like this approach.



Evening Classes

Every day between four and seven there is homework assistance, coaching and computer education at Ashray.



To enhance the quality of these services, Rakesh Saraogi has replaced two teachers. As far as we can tell he has done so in a respectful manner. The new teachers are young, enthusiastic and committed.



The computer class already had a new, young teacher since last year. There as well, the capacity has been extended and children from outside Ashray can attend the course too.

Rakesh Saraogi

We enjoyed an extensive lunch with Rakesh Saraogi. He likes to talk and does so a lot. He is quite intelligent, however, has his heart in the right place and he has good ideas for Ashray.

Rakesh has adapted the roster of the school's 73 students: instead of three 60 minute class-



Marien, Conny, Karin and Rakesh Saraogi



es, they now have four 50-minute ones. This means that the various subjects are treated more frequently during the week and that the lessons are now more efficient. After all, an attention span of one full hour is a little too much for the average primary school student.

The three of us paid separate, unannounced visits to the school and we were all pleasantly surprised by the positive working atmosphere, the discipline, quiet and concentration. A huge improvement indeed!

Our only criticism concerns the lack of structural refresher courses for the teachers, a must for every self-respecting school. The five teachers proudly call the school a five-star school, but in our view that fifth star still has to be earned by optimising the educational level.

Currently, the school provides primary education up to grade 5, but there are definite plans to add grade 6. An Indian sponsor was found for this, which is quite remarkable.

Ideally, Rakesh would have the school grow with the number of students, but the building simply isn't large enough. In the future, Ashray will have to look for accommodation elsewhere. <



Sadhana, school coordinator

travelling tales

A journey to India

WIE ZIJN WIJ?
Wij zijn Nienke en Bálint, een Nederlands-Hongaars koppel dat op een groot avontuur gaat: op de fiets naar India. De reis zal beginnen in Tricht in februari 2016 en we hopen in India te arriveren in december 2016, na meer dan 10.000 kilometer gefietst te hebben.

HOE KUN JIJ HELPEN?
Je kunt een donatie overmaken naar het Benares School Fonds onder vermelding van 'Travelling Tales'. Kleine donaties zijn onmisbaar om de kasten met boeken op te vullen, terwijl de grotere donaties gebruikt zullen worden om de bibliotheek in te richten en het onderwijsmateriaal te vernieuwen. Je kunt op onze website een persoonlijk bericht achterlaten voor de toekomstige lezers van Ashray School. Wij zullen dit in Hindi vertalen en in de kist van één van de boeken schrijven.

WAAROM DOEN WE DIT?
We fietsen naar India om geld op te halen voor de realisatie van een bibliotheek en de vernieuwing van het onderwijsmateriaal in Ashray School, in de klopperwijk van Varanasi. Ashray School biedt onderwijs aan ongeveer 80 kinderen uit zeer arme families, en wordt al voor meer dan 10 jaar ondersteund door het Benares School Fonds. Nienke heeft in 2012 voor een half jaar in Ashray School gewerkt, en heeft sindsdien een hechte band onderhouden met de leerlingen en leraren.

BENARES SCHOOL FONDS
www.benareschool.nl
Bank: NL97 RABO 0194 3913 53

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BICYCLING TO VARANASI

In 2012, Nienke de Graaf worked as a volunteer at the Ashray School for six months and during this time both the school and India have won her heart. On 21 February, together with her Hungarian friend Bálint, she started on a sponsor bicycle ride all the way to Varanasi: some 10,000 kilometres. They hope to reach their destination in December.



Nienke and Bálint

With their journey Nienke and Bálint hope to raise funds for our foundation and especially for the Ashray School. After discussing this with Rakesh, it was decided to spend the money on a library and on educational material.

If you would like to sponsor Nienke and Bálint or read their blog, please visit:

www.thetravellingtales.wordpress.com

or follow them on:

www.facebook.com/thetravellingtales.

Our board member Karin van Duijnhoven, who is a graphic designer, has helped Nienke and Bálint with a nice-looking flyer.

Shortly before she left, we asked Nienke to join our board, to which she responded with a whole-hearted and enthusiastic 'Yes'.



INDIVIDUAL SPONSOR PROGRAMME

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 55 students, spread over multiple schools in the city
- > Budget € 15,325 all-in



The individual programme, in which students are supported one-on-one by a sponsor in the Netherlands, is our longest running activity.

Every year, it is a joy to meet with our students and their parents again. By now we know almost all the children by name. We have seen the first group grow up: the little girls there are now almost women and the boys seem like real men with their low voices and budding moustaches. Wherever we go we hear 'Hi Conny, Ma'am' and the parents give us a friendly nod, sometimes ask a question or serve us a cup of chai.



Conny inspects the books with Surendra

The annual meeting with our students takes place on the flat roof of Manish Bhatia's house. Manish and Surendra Srivastava are in charge of the programme.

One by one the children come forward, with their father, mother, older brother or sister.



Our students at the Malviya School

Most of them are doing just fine and we are done quickly, but sometimes a problem has to be solved or a child needs to be cautioned that it's not doing its best or is missing classes too often.

We will focus more on **attendance** from now on. Unlike in the Netherlands, where children are only absent from school when they are ill, the children here by no means reach the goal of 100% attendance. Either they are ill themselves, or their mother is, in which case they have to take care of the other children, or their father, and then they have to work to make some money. A family wedding can easily mean one week absence from school. And then there are the numerous religious festivals that often mean official days off.

The 55 students who are currently in the sponsor programme are distributed across 19 schools. It is a lot of work for Manish Bhatia to monitor all of them. He combines the monthly

payments of the school fees with collecting the attendance lists.

We have made clear that students who are cautioned twice for being absent too often will be removed from the sponsor programme. We absolutely insist that the sponsors' money goes to diligent students who are eager to learn.

The individual programme is labour-intensive and expensive. We commit ourselves to paying all the educational costs, including school fees, for an underprivileged child during the entire study programme. We also monitor the students' health and provide food aid where necessary. This is good, and effective, but these commitments render our foundation financially vulnerable when school fees or food prices go up. This year we exceeded the budget for the individual sponsor programme by almost 20 per cent. The school fees for these pupils have virtually doubled over the past three years.



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We have taken a close look at the individual programme, with our board members, and have decided to **make a few changes**. In order to involve the parents more in the education of their children we have decided to make them pay a small monthly contribution. We expect parents to stimulate their children more because otherwise their contribution would be a waste of money. It is a not uncommon phenomenon for things that are provided for free to be undervalued. We will help those parents for whom the contribution would really cause a problem.

We heard that people need food aid less urgently now than before. That is why the supply of dal has been stopped for most families as per 1 February 2016. Dal is an essential bulk food, but our primary goal is education, not combating poverty. Or, rather: our core task is combating poverty through education. There are other organisations that provide direct relief aid and we will inform them of our decision. But rest assured: we will make an exception for the most vulnerable families and next year we will take a careful look at any adverse effects of this decision.

Surendra and Manish, our dedicated colleagues 'in the field', will once more screen the income of the families in the programme. This screening serves two purposes: it prevents



Karin takes a photograph of all the children

any problems that may be caused by the intended changes and it provides the opportunity to ask the parents to pay some of the school costs themselves, if possible.

We continue to provide fine-tuned education: Hindi medium for the average student, English for the best students. For some students we reserve the option of vocational training. And our special fund for healthcare and emergencies remains in place. <

LITTLE DRESSES FROM WOUW

Every year, Conny and Marien van Staalen bring a large bag full of clothes from their neighbour in their hometown Wouw in the Netherlands. This neighbour and a group of her friends meet every week to knit and sew pretty dresses from leftover fabrics and wool, which are then brought to India. These dresses are very popular with the Jeevan hostel girls. Sometimes you run into one of them in the street, wearing one of the dresses from Wouw. Very nice!



JEEVAN SCHOOL

5



- > Up to and including grade 8, from grade 9 Open School
- > 120 students, 15 teachers
- > Budget € 35,000, incl. school meal
- > www.basichumanneeds.org

Math Market at Jeevan: in front of the hostel market stalls have been placed, manned by teachers and BSF board members.

Both the children and the 'shopkeepers' were given Monopoly money, and over the next two hours they were exposed to the free market



economy. Conny was selling fruit and vegetables, while teacher Bhola and Marien operated a snack/chai shop, realising a turnover of 48,000(!) rupees: completely sold out. The children had shopping lists, but also some money to spend freely. Speaking English was mandatory! Afterwards they had to add up their expenses. Some of the children really made a poor showing and desperately needed our help. It was great fun and most instructive, also because of the fantastic preparation by school

principal Kati Richter and her team: purchasing merchandise, setting up stalls, organising 'money', and much more. It was a typical Jeevan happening, very playful and instructive. And happily rummaging about in all this was 'der Johann', Kati's blonde-haired little boy...

Next to the hostel the owner has constructed a new school building with four spacious

continue on next page >>



classrooms and a flat roof. Since January, this is the school's new accommodation. Jeevan financed part of the building costs and now doesn't have to pay rent. It is a good arrangement.

Kati

Kati is bringing all sorts of educational innovations to the school. She is a miraculous woman, devoting her life to the most problematic children of Varanasi, from the slums of Samne Ghat. Her drive comes partly from her will to establish a model school here to demonstrate that such a thing is possible in India.



Kati is critical of India, and rightly so, looking at the fate of her target group. Her attitude is balanced by **Sheelu Kujur**, Jeevan's manager. He is a mild-mannered man and a successful, positive Indian who can be a role model for the students.

Finally, there's **Jess Morwood**, and **Dan Ship**, the school's Canadian founders. Together with their adopted Indian son Shivam they feel very much at home in their second motherland.



The little ones just love Jess

The costs at Jeevan run higher than at most other schools. This is mainly caused by the cost of rent and the relatively high salaries that Kati pays her employees: teachers, the cook, the handyman and all other full-timers are all paid the same wages, and she doesn't stint on school meals either.

Every week, Kati gives refresher courses. We attended one about dyslexia that was perhaps

slightly too theoretical for this team of teachers, who all grew up in the Indian educational system. But still: everyone listens attentively and the teachers take the information with them to their classes.



On Friday afternoon, **arts** are on the programme: music, dance, drama and drawing. The music lessons are given by Jess, a jazz singer herself, who teaches the children the rudiments of the ukulele. She has also bought a couple of recorders, mainly because they are cheap and not because she particularly likes the sound of them.

Last summer, we were sent pictures of the 'free expression week' at the end of the school year. The children learned about all kinds of materials and techniques. At Jeevan they are very good at organising this type of activity.

We remain highly enthusiastic about Jeevan's results. It is a wonderful school with a very difficult population. <



SPECIAL NEWS FLASH

Maya and Umar, the two oldest students, are now attending the prestigious Sunbeam Academy, thanks to a scholarship from a local businessman. They had to do some adjusting among all those students from higher classes, but now they are doing well. Looking shipshape in their uniforms, their hair neatly combed, they proudly go to their new school in the morning.



The school is optimistic about the future. Everywhere where Jess, Dan and Kati have contacts the fundraising is gaining momentum: in Canada, Germany, Taiwan, Ireland, Australia and the United States. In two years' time this should lead to a financially stable situation as well as certainty about the new project in Sarnath: their own hostel and school.



A Song for India

BENEFITCONCERT
VOOR SCHOOLKINDEREN IN VARANASI



Een boeiende happening met Amerikaanse ballads, Nederlandse luisterliedjes en Indiase klanken, aangevuld met ontroerende en spannende verhalen over het leven in de sloppenwijken van Varanasi, India.

JESS MORWOOD ZANG
BJ BAARTMANS SINGER-SONGWRITER
KAILASH ENSEMBLE
LENNEKE VAN STAALEN INDIASE VIOL
HEIKO DIJKER TABLA
MARIEN VAN STAALEN CELLO

CONCERTS: 9 JUNI 18.00 UUR IN DE MAARTENSDIJK, SUNDERLUYCKENSTEN
OPZAKEN 12 JUNI 19.00 UUR IN DE TOONZAAL, NEDERLANDSE KUNSTEN
VRIJDAG 17 JUNI 19.00 UUR IN DE HOFNAR, NEDERLANDSE KUNSTEN
DINSdag 18 JUNI 19.00 UUR IN DE HOFNAR, NEDERLANDSE KUNSTEN
VOOR INFORMATIE OVER DE KAARTVERKOOP KLIK OP:
WWW.BENARESCHOOL.FUND.NL
WWW.BENARESCHOOL.FUND.NL

Benefit concerts

To raise additional funds, Jess will be doing a concert tour of Europe this summer. In June she will be in the Netherlands: on 9 June at the Orangery of market garden Eyckenstein in Maartensdijk, on 12 June at De Toonzaal in Den Bosch, on 17 June at De Hofnar in Valkenswaard and on 18 June at a house concert in Haarlem. For more information about the program and how to obtain tickets, please visit: www.benaresschool.nl/en/news/



VATSALYA'S UDAYAN SCHOOL

- > Up to and including grade 8, 172 students, 10 teachers
- > Budget € 40,000, incl. lunch
- > Contribution BSF € 6,650
- > www.vatsalya.org

6

NGO Vatsalya's school in Jaipur is right next to the Udaya children's village, which accommodates 61 children. In addition to these, children from neighbouring villages also attend the school of Vatsalya.

Children's Village Udayan

In her newsletter of June 2015, **Jaimala Gupta**, co-founder and co-leader of Vatsalya, together with her husband Hitesh, wrote enthusiastically about a huge positive change taking place in Indian society: people are more willing to adopt orphans, regardless of their background, caste or gender.

This is the result of a new government policy: that children belong in families, not in institutions.

In response to this encouraging development the word 'orphan' is no longer mentioned in Vatsalya's mission statement. However, the tragic reality is that millions of Indian children are being neglected and even dumped by their

extremely poor families, or are forced into child labour or prostitution.

Vatsalya remains committed to this vulnerable group and there is now more room to do so. Last year, Vatsalya took in 21 of such children. All in all there are now 61 children living in the Udayan children's village.

Udayan School

Vatsalya made **education** its priority and raised the bar, in 2015. There has been much improvement: a whole new team of young teachers was hired, new educational systems and methods were introduced and there is now a fully equipped room for audio-visual practical training. The official government curriculum is given outside of the classrooms for at least 30 per cent, i.e. the so-called 'education in the field' in places such as the zoo, a bank, shopping mall, hospital, post office, fire station or airport.

Every Saturday, the teachers do refresher courses, to which Jaimala and Hitesh also contribute. They share their experience, challenges, failures and how they cope with them and also their vision on education with the teachers.

All children above the age of 14 are given a basic **vocational training**. Not all of the villagers are happy with this. Some have other, better things in mind for their children than learning a craft such as baking, sewing, cooking or woodworking, but Jaimala sticks with this educational concept. It significantly increases the students' chances of getting a job, while the most intelligent students still receive all the attention they need; see also the sidebar.

Vatsalya is working hard to convince both parents and children of the value and usefulness of her system, as it involves an all-round training as a basis for anything the children may want to do in the future.

The school has 172 students, 124 boys and 48 girls.



Vatsalya's school is an expensive one. Here in Rajasthan the salaries are higher than in Uttar Pradesh, where Varanasi is situated. The NGO Vatsalya has a fairly large organisation, causing quite high overhead expenses, but they are doing a tremendous job. Also, the cost of overhead does not weigh on the budget of the financially vulnerable Udayan.



Karate project, sponsored by people from the USA

Many of Vatsalya's projects are supported in some form or other, either by the government or by businesses. The weak spot within the organisation is Udayan, both the village and the school, as they are completely dependent on regular donations. And these are decreasing, while costs are rising. In general, people do not favour sponsoring salaries and other regular costs but rather support individual, concrete projects with quick, tangible results. Vatsalya is constantly working hard at raising extra funds. <



Conny was a guest at the wedding of Jaimala and Hitesh Gupta's son Kartikey in February 2015.

THE PLUS CLASS

The school management has selected a number of students who are not only very bright but also industrious and ambitious. They are called '**the Young Scientists**'. They are provided with broader teaching material, get more difficult assignments and more homework. This extra training is intended to optimally address and develop their capacities. These are children that may go on to university.





DIVYA JYOTI

Last summer, the **Shanty Foundation** in Bergen op Zoom in the Netherlands ended its activities. Their remaining funds were transferred to us, as our target group in India is almost identical to theirs. Shanty did ask us to take over their ongoing obligations: supporting Divya Jyoti, care centre and workplace for the **mentally handicapped**.

Divya Jyoti has been helping some 25 young mentally handicapped, since 1997. The or-

ganisation consists of a small staff of six people and has a budget of € 12,500.

We know Divya Jyoti well and we have great sympathy for the work of husband-and-wife Nathan and Sheela. With much knowledge, dedication and love they provide a very special type of care in Varanasi. Recently, they finally acquired a new, proper location that was especially built for them: a beautiful, spacious and fresh building.

The handicapped youngsters, who used to be completely dependent upon their parents and family, are now earning an income by making and selling handicraft products. This means that they can contribute something to their families and at the same time it gives them a feeling of self-worth.

Besides work there is a lot of singing and dancing, as well as exercises and simple educational games. The atmosphere is light and happy. Sheela and Nathan and their staff are dynamos.

The students make beautiful postcards to sell, and also bags and candles. Every year we buy a whole set of cards that we use to thank Dutch sponsors for their donations. Thanks to the efforts of Indian volunteers the candles are also sold at schools in Varanasi, and at the university.

On 3 December we were there for **the International Day of the Handicapped**. Divya Jyoti's students, together with the children of the Jeevan School, presented a merry and moving performance. <



Conny with Nathan, Sheela and Irma, whose son has given the new building in loan.



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

LOTS OF EXTRA DONATIONS!

DJ OLIVER HELDENS

This year was a top year, in terms of the donations we received. The fact that another foundation ended its activities and gave us their remaining funds, was of course a unique windfall, and a token of confidence.



And that a well-known DJ would share his success with our foundation, was also unexpected. His contribution was not a one-time thing, as we know by now. DJ Oliver Heldens pays for the education of four boys and starting next year he will contribute to higher salaries for the teachers at Little Stars School for two years.

Thanks to the gift by the **Shanty Foundation** we were finally able to raise our general reserve to a more acceptable level, which is a comfortable feeling.

So thank you very much, Shanty Foundation and Oliver Heldens!

THE SINGAPORE LADIES

Last year, we already told you about the group of Dutch women in Singapore who were so

successful in supporting the Asha Deep School and our foundation. Thanks to these ladies, 15 students can complete their school career. The money they raised will be spread out over a number of years.

The ladies had already supported several years of art education at Asha Deep. You can read more about them on our website www.benaresschool.nl (in the 2015 newsletter and under the heading 'News').

Most of the ladies have meanwhile moved to other parts of the world, but a small core group will remain active for the Asha Deep School. We cannot stress enough how grateful we are to them.



ROTARY ROOSENDAAL DONKENLAND

For a second time, the Rotary Roosendaal Donkenland has donated the revenues of its annual benefit concert to the Benares School Fund. They have even made the successful effort to apply for an extra grant.

Thanks to these funds a number of students in Varanasi can now finish their secondary school. We owe the Rotary a debt of gratitude.

A GIFT AS A PRESENT

Sometimes, friends or acquaintances have a celebration of some kind and instead of asking for personal gifts, they ask their guests to donate something to our foundation. This is a wonderful gesture that not only draws more attention to our foundation but also always brings a nice sum. In 2015, this occurred twice. Thank you so much, dear friends!

Besides these unique efforts there is the usual flow of large and smaller annual donations by our sponsors and benefactors. They have made our foundation to what it is today: a financially healthy organisation that can pledge substantial long-term support to its projects. This means that schools can develop and improve, ensuring an optimal effect of our and your money.



BENEFIT CONCERT STEENBERGEN

On Sunday, 22 May 2016, the Autunno Ensemble, directed by Marien van Staalen, and violinist Amarins Wierdsma, will give a benefit concert for our foundation in the Hervormde Kerk in Steenberg. The concert starts at 16.00; admission is free.



FACTS & FIGURES



BENARES SCHOOL FUND FOUNDATION

BASIC PROJECT INFO 01-01-2016

Little Stars School

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 41 teachers (15 part-time)
- > Budget € 50,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF € 18,000 + € 5,000 for class 11 + 12
- > www.littlestarsschool.org
- > **Contribution BSF: 46%**

Education Ashray

- > Primary school up to and incl. grade 5
- > 73 students, 5 teachers
- > Sewing class, 40 young women, 1 teacher.
- > Evening classes (up to grade 12 and incl. computer classes), 51 students, 4 teachers.
- > Dance and tabla classes, 31 students, 1 teacher
- > Budget € 13,500, incl. a simple lunch
- > Contr. BSF € 8,500
- > www.ashray.org
- > **Contribution BSF: 63%**

Individual Sponsor Programme

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 55 students, spread over multiple schools in the city
- > Budget € 15,325 all-in
- > **Contribution BSF: 100%**

Vatsalya's Udayan School

- > Up to and including grade 8, 172 students, 10 teachers (15 part-time)
- > Budget € 40,000, incl. lunch
- > Contribution BSF € 6,650
- > www.vatsalya.org
- > **Contribution BSF: 16,6%**

Asha Deep School

- > Up to and including grade 8
- > 238 students, 18 teachers (5 part-time)
- > Budget € 36,000 incl. school meals + € 12,500 secondary education
- > Contribution BSF € 8,165 + € 1,625 secondary education
- > www.asha-deep.com
- > **Contribution BSF: 20,2%**

Jeevan School

- > Up to and including grade 8, from grade 9 Open School
- > 120 students, 15 teachers
- > Budget € 35,000, incl. school meal
- > www.basichumanneeds.org
- > **Contribution BSF: 28,7%**

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. And, if needed, medical care and food support for the family. With that amount you also contribute to the schools' educational materials, salaries and yearly teacher training.

As a (permanent) donor

All donations, whether one-off or a fixed amount per year, will benefit the children and their education.

Your donations are tax-deductable

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 vanaf 2014*. The secretariat can provide the necessary papers (license for donation).

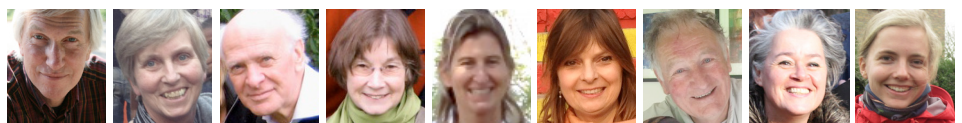
New sponsors are kindly requested to give their address to our secretariat, so we can enter them in our records.

CONTRIBUTION BSF AS PERCENTAGE OF THE SCHOOL'S BUDGET

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Little Stars School | 46% |
| Education Ashray | 63% |
| Individual Sponsor Programme | 100% |
| Vatsalya's Udayan School | 16,6% |
| Asha Deep School | 20,2% |
| Jeevan School | 28,7% |

EXPENSES BSF SPREAD OVER THE PROJECTS

| | | |
|------------------------------|----------|---------|
| Little Stars School | € 18,000 | € 5,000 |
| Education Ashray | € 8,500 | |
| Individual Sponsor Programme | € 15,325 | |
| Vatsalya's Udayan School | € 6,650 | |
| Asha Deep School | € 8,165 | 1,625 |
| Jeevan School | € 10,050 | |



Board: Marien van Staalén (president), Conny van Staalén-van Leeuwen (secretary/treasurer), Jacques Baartmans, Joep Baartmans-van den Boogaart, Jantine Unger, Alet Meurs, Theo van Pinxteren, Karin van Duijnhoven and Nienke de Graaf.

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benares.school@xs4all.nl | www.facebook.com/benaresschoolfund | www.benaresschool.nl

FINANCIAL REPORT 2015

> all figures in euros

IN

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Contributions school sponsors/regular contributors | 20,871,46 |
| Contributions funds/foundations | 27,500,00 |
| Contribution Singapore (for individual students) | 22,371,00 |
| Contributions coaching school Aryan | 941,00 |
| Other donations (for solar energy LSS and for Divya Jyoti) | 29,822,02 |
| Shanty Foundation | 20,000,00 |
| Interest | 342,90 |

121,848,38

Added to the earmarked reserve

- 34,018,00

TOTAL INCOME

87,830,38

OUT

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Little Stars School | 18,000,00 |
| Extra funding for grade 11 and 12 | 5,000,00 |
| Individual sponsor programme | 11,875,00 |
| Medical care | 500,00 |
| Extra coaching | 500,00 |
| Food support (daal) | 1,400,00 |
| Administration and coaching | 1,575,00 |
| Education Ashray | 8,500,00 |
| Extra funding for school meals | 1,275,00 |
| Jeevan School | 10,050,00 |
| Vatsalya's Udayan School | 6,810,00 |
| Asha Deep School | 7,425,00 |
| For 6 students grade 9-12 | 2,090,00 |
| Other donations and costs | |
| Benares Building Fund (for solar energy) | 4,500,00 |
| Coaching school Aryan | 250,00 |
| Divya Jyoti (obligations Shanty Foundation) | 1,350,00 |
| Expenses foundation (extra costs for protection website) | 1,942,73 |

83,042,73

Taken from the earmarked reserve

- 6,454,60

TOTAL OUT

76,588,13

Result financial year 2015

11,242,25

This amount will be added to the general reserves.

Balance per 31-12-2015

Current account: 3,861,10
 Saving account: 100,007,45
 35,000,00 of which is general reserve and 48,430,00 is earmarked reserve
 Remaining balance: 20,438,55

Earmarked reserve:

In 2015 34,018,00 euros have been added to the earmarked reserve and 6,454,60 have been taken.

On balance 27,563,40 have been added.

Development organizations are advised to maintain a reserve of 1^{1/2} times the annual turnover.

BUDGET 2016

> all figures in euros

IN

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Contributions school sponsors / regular contributors | 19,865,00 |
| Contributions funds/foundations | 19,500,00 |
| Extra donation class 11/12 LSS | 5,000,00 |
| Other donations | 15,000,00 |
| From earmarked reserve | 13,255,00 |
| Interest | 450,00 |

TOTAL INCOME

73,070,00

OUT

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Little Stars School | 17,000,00 |
| Extra funding for grade 11 and 12 | 5,000,00 |
| Individual sponsor programme | 12,500,00 |
| Education Ashray | 6,500,00 |
| Jeevan School | 9,050,00 |
| Vatsalya's Udayan School | 6,650,00 |
| Asha Deep School | 9,470,00 |
| Other donations and costs | |
| Coaching school Aryan | 350,00 |
| Divya Jyoti | 5,400,00 |
| Expenses foundation | 1,500,00 |

TOTAL OUT

73,070,00

SPONSORS WANTED

Annual, long-term donations enable us to provide structural support to our projects. However, these donations do have an end date. We carefully keep track of when donations end and how much money is involved. With your support we have been able to realise many things and we hope to be able to continue doing so for many years to come.

Therefore we ask you kindly to introduce our foundation to your family, friends, colleagues and all those who may be interested.



OVERHEAD 2015: 2,5%