



Benares School Fund Foundation



In November 2018, four of our board members visited Varanasi. In the photograph, from left to right: Marien, Nienke, Karin and Conny among the students and their parents at Little Stars School. All the way on the right in the photo, beside Conny, is Asha Pandey, the school's director. Conny and Nienke continued their trip with a five-day visit to the Vatsalya School in Jaipur.



Conny and Nienke with the Vatsalya direction. From left to right: Kartikey, Saloni en Jaimala Gupta.

MONEY FROM INDIA ITSELF

Since 2014, all Indian companies and foreign companies operating in India are obliged, by law, to contribute 2% of their profits (of at least half a million euros) to charitable causes. This offers opportunities and we, as a foundation, are happy to see that money is finally becoming available from India itself. Up to now only the Jeevan School has benefited from this arrangement, which has helped to improve the school's financial basis considerably. We have drawn the attention of all our schools to this opportunity.



What we noticed

There are a lot of changes in India, fortunately. There is less litter in the streets, the roads are better, they have electric rickshaws, the power is out less often - which means fewer droning generators. But also: much more traffic and therefore, on balance, more pollution. The noise hasn't changed: it's huge, often deafening.

The middle class is clearly on the rise. Hip cafés and posh shopping malls are popping up everywhere. Many of life's necessities have become more expensive. Still, the situation of the poor seems to have improved as well. More houses are being renovated, public health is improving, and tuberculosis has been almost eradicated.

More parents are contributing to their children's education and they are prepared to pay for extras themselves. These are satisfying developments. Still, when visiting families, one can be shocked by how people live. The truly poor who don't have a regular income, find it very difficult to improve their situation.

There are also some changes in legislation. Since a few years, large companies are obliged to spend two per cent of their profits on charity. This may be a rather indirect way for the government to provide for its poorest citizens, but it is the law now, all the same. Orphans have to be adopted by Indians themselves as quickly as possible, which should make orphanages redundant.

These are just some of the things we noticed but they say a lot about today's India.

We are very pleased and proud that Hein de Kort, one of the best-known Dutch cartoonists, has designed a logo for us, as a gift. From now on, the two students he has drawn will shine on our newsletter and all other publications.



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A new feature this year: 'This is me', a series of interviews with students.

1



Kartikey and Connie Rao, director of the Asha Deep School visiting Udayan

VATSALYA SCHOOL

- > 120 students
- > Contribution BSF 20% of the budget of €40,000
- > Support since 2011

From Varanasi, Conny, our secretary, and Nienke, our youngest board member traveled to Jaipur for a short visit. The Benares School Fund supports the Vatsalya School there. It is located, together with its Udayan campus, in sandy Rajasthan.

These were Nienke's first impressions: 'Somewhat stiff from the long train journey I arrive at Jaimala and Hitesh Gupta's house by the end of the afternoon. They are the founders and directors of Vatsalya. The door swings open and I hear loud and joyful laughter: there is Jaimala! The house perfectly reflects her nature: it is warm, with a sense for detail, and in a certain way very un-Indian. We spend the rest of the day and evening in the cosy living room. I feel at home right away. When Hitesh joins us later, they even uncork a bottle of red wine. Conny and I share a large bed. Talk about board bonding!'



Jaimala and Conny

For Conny, who has known Jaimala for a very long time, this was a homecoming. For Nienke everything was new. Here is their report: We had five days to see and hear everything. That would be sufficient if they were regular days, but they weren't. One day it was the Annakoot festival (see below), another day was *Annual Function*, followed of course by a school day off.

Nevertheless, we managed to obtain a good impression of both school and organisation, not in the least by the many discussions we had as we went along: with Jaimala and Hitesh, with their son Kartikey - who manages campus and school since last year - and their

daughter-in-law Saloni, the teachers and the office staff.

Udayan

At Udayan, the campus, Kartikey proudly shows us his solar panels. Thanks to his technical training Udayan is running completely on solar energy. Many of the older boys benefit from his knowledge: he teaches a technical course that earns them a real diploma. This course is part of a programme of vocational training in which the children, in addition to their secondary school, learn skills that makes it easier for them to find jobs later. They can choose between carpeting, sewing, organic agriculture, block printing, and cooking. And solar energy, of course. We can't help but notice that there are very few children at the Udayan campus. It is not exactly filled to capacity. Only 24 children live there and during the week they are joined by 16 *day-boarders* from the school - poor children from neighbouring villages. There are a lot of changes in India, also in the treatment of orphans. The government prefers that they are adopted by Indians themselves. This means that Udayan's focus is slowly shifting to other forms of care. The *day-boarders* are a first start.

De Vatsalya School

Saturday morning is the only time when we can see the school in action. Facing the freezing cold (in the mornings the temperature is below zero) we are in time to hear the morning prayer and the Indian anthem sound out over the schoolyard from the little children's throats. It is shortly after Diwali and it is also the marriage season, so there are not so many students. Seeing the half full classrooms is somewhat disappointing to us, but making the round of the classes we see

that everywhere the students are working hard and disciplined.

We visited the new 'prep' class, where the little ones - level LKG and UKG (Kindergarten) are taught in English. This initiative is fully financed by an Indian man who lives in London. He facilitates English language education for these little ones up to class 12, and the entire school benefits from this in the long run. Something else worth mentioning are the Skype lessons from San Francisco. Via the digital boards in the new 'smart classes' the students take calculus and math classes from an American volunteer, with modern educational techniques. The teachers learn a lot from this as well.

Also special is that three very dedicated former students are teaching here as trainees: Rohit, Sanjay, and Devashish. They all spent their youth at Udayan.



SITA

Sita is 17 and in class 10, thanks to NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling). Her latest school result was 69.8%. Sita has lived at Udayan since she was four. Recently, she has started to learn sewing and block printing and she appears to be good at both. She is even better in karate, and this year she won gold at the national level at the championships karate kickboxing. She proudly shows us her medal when we visit her little house on campus where she lives with seven other girls. Vatsalya's vision is working: the unique combination of regular education and vocational training, together with much attention to sports, allows girls like Sita - hardly a star student - to flourish as talented block printer and self-confident karate champion.



The Teachers Team

When classes are finished, we meet with the five teachers and three trainees. Kartikey joins us to help with translation. The team is new and seems quite motivated. Over the past few years, Vatsalya has had quite some problems in finding the right staff.

Meena, the new, young school mistress is still a bit shy, but that may have to do with us being there.

The Sanskrit teacher stresses the school's holistic approach: not only the academic results count, but also passion, talent, and behaviour.

We discussed absenteeism and what they have done about it: actively approaching parents. We also talked about the big difference between the number of boys and girls (2:1). We stressed the importance of education for girls. The teachers are very well aware of this and give it their special attention in attracting new students.



The Library

Right next to the school is a brand-new small building: the library with adjoining computer room, donated by a local Service Club. Like the school itself it is painted a cheerfully bright yellow. The library could do with a bit of extra care. There were too few quality children's books, especially for the youngest ones. And there wasn't much of a system in place.

Nienke told the staff about her library fund and that the school can apply for library material every year; not just books, but anything that comes with a good library.

By the way, Nienke seriously impressed everyone in Jaipur when it became known that she and her friend Bálint had ridden their bicycles across half the world to raise funds for a school library in Varanasi.

Quite a few of the young people seemed envious that such a thing was possible for European girls. It would be unthinkable for Indian girls.

Annakoot

We celebrated the Annakoot festival, with 56 dishes, symbolising the seven days that the Krishna Divinity was busy saving the world, during which he had to forego his eight daily



Sweets Annakoot

Structural support Vatsalya School

We show the fixed amounts. Additionally, during the years many extra's have been given to each school, like schoolbooks, computers, furniture, libraries and labs.

2011/12	€ 3,000
2012/13	€ 4,000
2013/14	€ 5,000
2014/15	€ 5,000
2015/16	€ 6,650
2016/17	€ 6,650
2017/18	€ 7,500
2018/19	€ 8,000



Nienke presenting awards

meals. It was a very festive and tasteful event, and we sampled all 56 dishes!

Annual Function

The day before the big *Annual Function* of the school, Jaimala realises she forgot to order a banner. She happily accepts our offer to paint one ourselves. We spend the afternoon, the evening and the next morning on the floor of the terrace, painting till our knees and backs feel stiff. But we are proud of the result, and so is Jaimala. The *Annual Function* is one big event of creative and playful performances and award ceremonies; for special achievements at school but also for cleaning and for helpful, respectful, and optimistic behaviour. For sure, a holistic approach!

The function has a grand finale: a karate demonstration. Several children have won gold medals at the national level. The finale is impressive: stacks of three tiles are set on fire and three children split them with their bare hand. Spectacular!

On the day we are scheduled to leave we have one *final meeting*. We need to discuss two more things:

1. Refresher courses for the teachers
2. The vocational training

ad 1. Kartikey reports that he speaks with the teachers for twenty minutes every Friday. This seems rather short to us, and more suitable for ongoing affairs. Our concern is how to increase the quality of the teachers through systematic meetings about educational methods and content. Jaimala feels that the Skype lessons from San Francisco can be regarded as training.

Also, there appears to be an NGO that gives free training. She admits that there is still a lot of ground to cover. The teachers have already proven that growth is possible, but the overall level is still not high enough.

SOME DATA

- This year, the school has 120 students.
- Every month, the form teacher reports on a number of children, so that after one quarter all children are reported on.
- The teachers earn Rs 10,000 (€133) a month; the trainees (who teach in addition to their own studies) earn Rs 5,000.
- Vatsalya is working on registration of the school up to and including class 10 (currently up to class 8).
- Examinations were held in class 5 and class 8. Of class 5, on a scale from A (highest) to E (lowest), seven students obtained a C, three a B. Class 8 had one student with a D, five with a C, five with a B, and one with an A.
- Only 10 to 15% of the parents visit parents' evenings or are willing to participate in the school management committee.
- As of this year, parents pay school fees: Rs 1700 (€22,50) per year in the lowest forms, up to Rs 3500 (€45) for the highest forms. About half of the parents actually pays.
- Every month an educational trip is organized.

Kartikey: 'Just like the rest of the staff here at Vatsalya, the teachers are evaluated on a monthly basis. The result of this assessment determines if and how much their salary increases.'

ad 2: Kartikey wants not only the school to grow, but the vocational trainings as well. These are mandatory for all Udayan students from the age of 14. Apart from the solar energy course none of the other trainings result in a diploma. This must change, if this unique possibility of vocational training is to be attractive to other students, from outside, as well. Among other things, sufficient internships must be available for the students to conclude their course at Udayan. This issue is of particular interest!

'We had a wonderful and instructive time', Nienke wrote in her report. <



2



ASHA DEEP SCHOOL

- > 190 students + 33 students high school
- > Contribution BSF 16,5% of the full budget of €58,000
- > Support since 2012

As usual, our first impression of the Asha Deep School in Varanasi is a mixed one: overcrowded and small classrooms with low desks that barely all fit in. Of necessity the teacher often sits in the door opening.

Appearances are not a priority with Connie Rao. But as soon as you talk with her you are impressed with the vision, love, and ideas behind this façade.

When school is out, we meet with the teachers.



Two things strike us: many of the teachers have been working at Asha Deep for many years and their experiences are both positive, and identical. All teachers mention the leeway given them by director Connie Rao and assistant director Siddharth Singh in designing their own lessons: not strictly according to the rules but more focused on understanding and imagination than on facts. It makes school much more fun for the students and they also obtain excellent scores when transferring to other schools.

The teachers emphasise that at Asha Deep the focus is on grasping the material. They proudly relate how the children dare to ask questions, are curious and wish to really understand the material. On this school there is attention for the individual child. Teachers know about the home situation of each child.

SEEKING NEW SPONSORS!

Our finances are doing well. We have the luxury of a few large sponsors and many smaller ones. For many of these, we know in advance when the funding will stop.

Our largest sponsor will stop in two years' time, having supported us for ten years. During those ten years our schools have improved in quality and we would like to continue to help our schools provide quality improvement after 2020. To do this, we need new sponsors.

The teachers say that Asha Deep is more than just a school; it is a place where the teachers compensate for the lack of warmth and interest from mostly illiterate parents. Connie Rao herself is particularly good at this: she puts an arm around a child, shows interest, gives off warmth.

We talked with Connie about her *Cool School*, the after-school programme of sports, play, and life lessons. It didn't go off to a good start, especially due to lack of good teachers and a coordinator. Only a short while ago, a collective of students from the Benaras Hindu University in Varanasi started giving informa-

tion about issues such as sexuality and menstruation. This was a fortunate coincidence. Connie enlisted them for her programme, so that part of the Cool School is now up and running.

We suggested to add sports to the weekly arts lessons on Wednesday afternoons (dance, music, drawing, crafts and, since recently, tabla), which are part of the school curriculum.

Teaching

With his cello, Marien gave a *music-biology-science class* to the children of the highest form. The group is assertive, smart, and lively, but when he asks the student to sing a note just played, they make rather a mess of it. Fellow board member Karin, who is taking pictures, also gives it a go, but in vain. Well, not everyone is born with an ear for music...



Conny gave a lesson about the Netherlands to class 7 and Nienke told class 5 about life in Gujarat.



Conny's group listened with attention and interest to the comparison in figures between the Netherlands and India (size, population density, average age, average temperatures) and to her explanation about the water management systems in the Netherlands.



For her Master's degree South Asian Studies, Nienke had just completed an internship in the state of Gujarat, where she studied the impact

of seasonal migration from the countryside to the city on women who stayed behind to take care of the children, the elderly, and the animals.

The students listened with great interest and although they could not point out Gujarat on the map, a lively discussion developed about what drives people to move to the city and how this results in the feminisation of agriculture.

Asha Deep's finances are gradually being sorted out. 'So far, we are on much firmer financial ground this year', Connie Rao writes.

Connie has so far always managed to find individual sponsors for the secondary education following class 8. Therefore, this major expenditure does not affect the regular budget. To reduce these high costs, Connie has decided to have the students of classes 9 and 10 study via NIOS (Open School) this year and then send them to a regular school for classes 11 and 12. For these former students, studying via NIOS means: three hours of

classes at a *coaching centre*, two hours of extra lessons at Asha Deep, and two hours of self-study, every day.

A few times each year, Connie sends out a comprehensive news mail. She not only reports on nice events, but also on the sudden illness of one of the children or an unfortunate family situation when a father dies or a mother falls seriously ill. She discusses these things with warmth and empathy and expresses genuine concern.

Asha Deep provides a protective environment for the children of the poor Nagwa neighbourhood and Connie Rao is sufficiently rooted in Indian society to have a feeling of what education is most effective with her students.

Deputy head Siddharth Singh explains that facts and knowledge are available everywhere on the Internet these days and that children should learn how to obtain and master that knowledge. 'At Asha Deep, school is about learning how to learn.' <



Shiv Kumar

14 years old, Asha Deep School, class 8

Shiv lives with his father, mother, and four brothers in a slum nearby Ravidas Park. He is the second youngest. The family rents a two-room house on the stinking Assi, the open sewer of the Nagwa neighbourhood. They have no electricity, no running water. Shiv's father takes tourists in a row boat for trips on the Ganges river.

What is special about your school and what are you good at?

That Connie ma'am has a school for the poorest children. And I am good at science and English. I wish to learn good English because my father has always told us that it comes in handy and is very important. I want to become a software engineer.

Who is your best friend and what would he say about you if he were asked to describe you?

I have two best friends: Vinay and Arjun. We have been friends since we were toddlers. They would say that I am their best friend and that we have a lot of fun together.

If you could be an animal, what animal would that be and why?

I'd like to be a dog, so I can guard our house.

What do you think is really daft?

I think it's very bad that the municipality doesn't manage things well, such as the land and the water. There is too much trash in the streets that can make you ill. Once I was cleaning up some rubbish with friends, but we were chased off.

And what is your biggest dream?

To make this neighbourhood better. We don't have proper water supply and there are no bathrooms or toilets in the houses.

Do you have a hobby? What do you do when you're not at school?

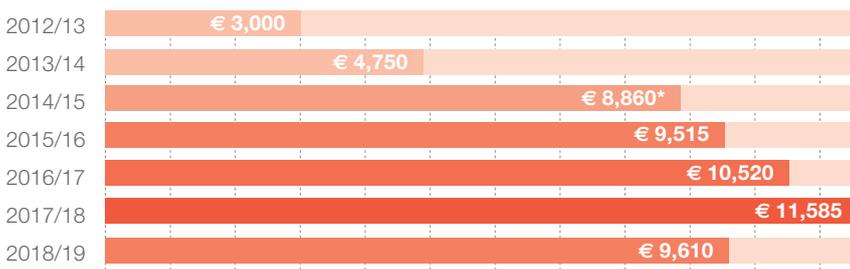
I play cricket. On Sunday mornings me and my friends play matches at a university field. I also watch cricket on TV at a friend's place. We don't have a TV at home. And I have to help out at home: clean the rooms and wash my own clothes and those of my little brother.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS

- the annual spectacular show at Assi Ghat, Asha Deep's version of the *Annual Function*, which unfortunately always takes place when we're not there;
- the combined birthday party for all students in December (many of them do not know their birthdate) with a huge bonfire, singing and dancing, and cake for everyone;
- the long wished-for school trip in November. In two coaches, 140 students and 13 teachers visited an organic farm outside the town. They had lunch there, learned about harvesting, irrigation, biogas, and worm cultivation for better soil. To conclude, they visited the dairy farm with over a hundred cows and calves;
- the completion of the digital database. Connie: 'Asha Deep has finally gone digital!' We now know that the school has exactly 95 boys and 95 girls and that attendance is at 80 per cent.



Structural support Asha Deep School



* In the schoolyear 2014/15 a five year support starts by a group of Dutch women in Singapore.





THIS IS ME

Khushi Kumari

10 years old
Ashray School, class 5

Khushi lives with her father, mother, and two younger brothers near the school. We meet her in the park across from the Ashray School on Saturday morning, the school's day for sports. She's a cheerful girl.

What do you like about your school and what are you good at?
I like being able to learn. I like learning. My favourite subject is Hindi. Also, I'm a good dancer and actor.

Who is your best friend and what would she say about you if she were asked to describe you?
Tisa. We are in the same class. She would say that we are always together and that we have a lot of fun.

If you could be an animal, what animal would that be and why?
I would like to be a peacock, because they dance so beautifully in the rain.

What do you think is really daft?
I don't like being alone.

And what is your biggest dream?
My dream is to become a teacher of Hindi.

Do you have a hobby? What do you do when you're not at school?
Just talk, or play hide-and-seek with my friends, watch TV, and help my mother with cleaning and washing.

photo: Khushi (r) with her friend Tisa



ASHRAY SCHOOL

- > 95 students
- > Contribution BSF 39,2% of the budget of €19,100
- > Support since 2006

Rakesh Saraogi, board member of the NGO Ashray and manager of the school welcomes us most heartily, together with chairman Amod Prakash. Such meetings mostly consist of exchanging niceties and it takes a while before one can get to the point.

But once we did, we learned quite a lot.

- every Saturday, teacher Sadhana leads *teachers training*;
- every Monday, there is *adult education*.

Well, those are two things that had been on our wish list for many years! We are especially enthusiastic about the adult education: ten women, all mothers of students, who learn to read and write and are proud that soon they will be able to help the children with their homework.



Sadhana with the illiterate mothers

The brand-new branch has become fully functional this year. The civil servants who had to approve the permits were impressed, according to Rakesh. Their only criticism concerned the furniture. Rakesh explained that the funds were now depleted but that new tables and chairs would be bought next year. Rakesh Saraogi is optimistic about attracting students from the surroundings of the new school. We'll have to wait and see what the number of actual registrations will be next year.

The Kindergarten classes, consisting of 45 children, have remained in the old building and the classes 1 through 6 (50 students) are now in the new building. In the morning, a school bus makes two trips from Nagwa to

the new school, first with the older children, then with the younger ones. In the afternoon the order is reversed. This way, the higher classes have 90 minutes longer in school.

Plans

Ashray has two ambitious plans:

1. Expand the school to include all classes up to 12, with all the associated accreditations.
2. Organically switch to *English Medium* education.

In this, the first year, the Kindergarten children will start doing this, followed by class 1 next year and then the classes 2 to 12. This means that in 13 years' time the school will be providing all education in English.

The school hopes that the present teachers will improve their English over the coming years, so that eventually they will be able to teach in that language. With future appointments of teachers, proficiency in English will be a prerequisite.

When handing out the last school reports, Rakesh Saraogi spoke with all the parents in order to learn more about the backgrounds of the students. It provided him with good insight into the problems of the families. Based on these conversations he has instructed the teachers to pay specific attention to each child individually.

Teachers training

On Saturday we attend the weekly *teachers training*, given by Sadhana, a former teacher with the school. It's amazing how Sadhana has developed. In the morning she works at another school where she gains many new ideas. In the afternoon she is in charge of the afternoon classes and the *coaching*. She is active and communicative and looks ten years younger than she is - while proudly showing a photograph of her four-year-old grandson.



The content of her training is basic, with tips (in English) such as: *be on time, write clearly, be properly seated* (for the female teachers) and be aware of the fact that you are a model to the children. Sadhana looks critically, but with humour, at the teacher who is twenty minutes late and the whole group laughs. She then explains what educational methods can be used to stimulate the youngest children so they will understand the material better. For teaching a lesson about the alphabet, Sadhana comes with alternatives for the good old repeat-after-me method: why not make a game of it or practice the letters with drawings and creativity? She emphasises that the teachers should think playfully, be one with the children's world.

There is no debate here about facts versus understanding in education, but at least something is happening. We are satisfied that something BSF has been asking for many years is now being realised in such a simple manner.

Nienke's Library Fund

There is still a nice sum left from the money that Nienke and her boyfriend Bálint raised for a library at Ashray with their bicycle trip last year. They want this sum to benefit all our schools. Each year, the schools can apply for books and other relevant material. Nienke has invited teachers from all the schools to a *meeting* about her plans.

Nienke:
'Eight teachers from the four schools were at the library meeting to discuss their library-

based education. This meeting served to learn about each other's libraries and exchange experiences. I was well prepared but still a little nervous about how things would go. Fortunately, all the teachers were enthusiastic and assertive. The meeting was held in the library of Asha Deep, a good occasion for the teachers of the other schools to see it.

It was obvious that all the teachers were very proud of their own libraries and had much to say about them, but found it difficult to discuss points for improvement or difficult issues. I stressed the fact that if there would be no points for improvement, a library fund would not be necessary and that it therefore was important to be self-critical.'

Nienke would like to hold these meetings every year in order to realise true library-based education.

On the last day of our visit we see the new *Ashray branch* in full swing and once again we are favourably impressed. Rakesh makes



every effort to convince Nienke of his great plans for the library – this brilliant businessman knows exactly with whom to be on good terms. In our concluding discussion, Conny summarises a few points of concern and explains that our foundation in general has to be careful in making promises. But we also tell them how positive we feel about the developments at Ashray. We say goodbye with mutual expressions of respect and goodwill. <

Nienke interviewed teacher Seema:

TEACHER SEEMA



How did you start working here?

In 2008 I finished my study, when Sangram and Father asked me to start teaching. I was not interested in teaching, but then there was a vacancy in Ashray and Shachi ma'm proposed me. She selected me. In 2010 I started teaching there in July. I like the school because the school belongs to Father Francis. I want to continue his work. I teach all subjects but mostly English. When I was young myself, I wanted to be a business woman; I heard that after MBA you earn a lot of money, and I wanted to support my family and uplift them from poverty.

What is most difficult about being a teacher?

You need lots of energy, and you have to continue learning every day in order to guide the children properly. For me teaching math is very difficult, because I'm weak in that. Another difficulty is that with teaching you cannot support your family financially.

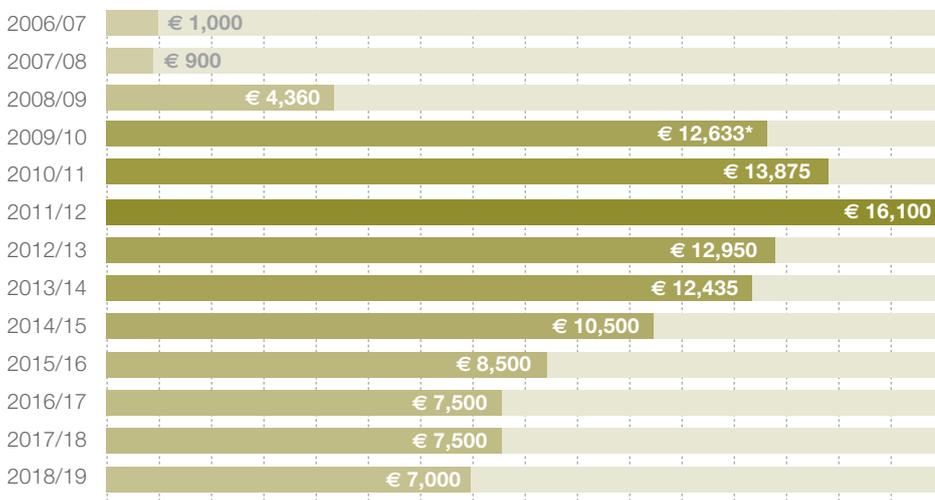
What do you still want to improve?

I want to do a BEd (Bachelor of Education). When I learn more teaching methods I can improve the learning of the children. I don't like to use the same method all the time. With the BEd I also want to get a higher salary to support my family.

What motivates you to do this work?

What motivates me is that I always learn in this profession. I like visiting other schools and get training, learning about education and how it's being done. I learn so many things from the children. They teach me that in every situation you have to laugh. If I'm sad and I start teaching, they make me happy. Their comments, their way of thinking, it makes me happy. The questions they ask challenge me, and I always have to learn new things to tell them. When I went to school as a girl, I was studying in a Hindi Medium school. There were 186 girls in one class. My teacher never supported me to go ahead, never encouraged or advised me. This I will not do with my students. I focus on all my students, I focus on their individual abilities and needs.

Structural support Ashray School



* In the schoolyear 2009/10 a five year support starts by a new sponsor.



4



JEEVAN SCHOOL

- > 150 students
- > Contribution BSF 25,5% of the budget of €37,500
- > Support since 2008

The most important development at Jeevan is a financial one. The school and hostel are supported by an Austrian-Indian company (35,000 euro a year).

This company is 'a global professional services provider offering research, analytics, and data management services'. Everyone familiar with the jargon will know what they do. What matters to us is that this company falls under the new 2%-regulation: Indian companies that make more than half a million euros profit a year, are obliged to spend 2% of their profit on *charity*. This means that suddenly BSF is no longer Jeevan's main sponsor.



Marien talking with a student

This is not only good for Jeevan, but also for BSF: our main sponsor stops in two years' time, so we can gradually reduce our support in the assurance that Jeevan will be fine.

The teachers at Jeevan receive a reasonable salary, on average Rs 10,000 a month (€125). If they do well and there is enough budget, they are given an annual raise of 5%.

We attended the annual *math market*. The children go shopping there with toy money, buying stuff from well-stocked 'stores'. It is a very imaginative way to practice arithmetic.



Dan managing the bank during the 'math market'

Concert

Together with Jess and Dan (the founders of Jeevan and, like Marien, professional musicians) Marien gave a short concert in the playground.



Teacher Bhola behind the cello: now and as a small boy in 1996

TEACHER BHOLA

In 1996, Conny and Marien taught for three months at the Deva Public School, and this started off our work as a foundation. Bhola was then in class 3 as one of Conny's students. She remembers him as a good student and now Bhola has been a teacher himself for many years already, at Jeevan.

Marien:

At Jeevan - where everything is always perfectly organized - we rehearse our performance. In the garden a 200% Indian stage in candy bar colours has been built and beautiful disco lights blink on and off. So far, so good. The sound system pumps out very loud basses. The speakers, built by one of the students, have room for improvement. The amplification makes my cello sound as if I coated my bow with concrete. We decide to call the sound 'crunchy' and go on with our rehearsal. At nightfall the disco lights shine on just about everything except the stage. In great haste a blinding strip of led lights is installed high up on a pole, fortunately in matching disco colours. The concert, or rather an improvised chaos, is great fun and the children are dancing and singing along. Party time!

Teaching

As at Asha Deep School, Marien also taught his *music-biology-science class* to the children in the highest class, with Dan translating. An experience that bears repeating: by teaching at the school yourself you get a direct impression of the level of the students, of their personalities and their command of English. Oddly enough, the Jeevan students make a much weaker impression than the class at Asha Deep. Also, the differences between the students are huge: two of the boys are lively and participate very well, whereas some of the girls are not responding at all. Marien suspects that they hardly speak a word of English, but when Dan asks them in Hindi to name a few sounds from nature, there is still no response. This is a somewhat disappointing result; especially at this school command of English and a good grasp of the material are considered to be of paramount importance.

Structural support Jeevan School

2008/09	€ 1,500
2009/10	€ 3,000
2010/11	€ 6,800*
2011/12	€ 11,400**
2012/13	€ 10,050
2013/14	€ 10,050
2014/15	€ 10,050
2015/16	€ 9,050
2016/17	€ 9,050
2017/18	€ 9,550
2018/19	€ 9,550

* 2010/11: extra support for renting classrooms, ** 2011/12: start 10 year support by big sponsor

The difference between Jeevan and all the other schools is evident in how the students respond to visitors in the classroom. Everywhere else the children promptly jump to attention as soon as they see a glimpse of a foreign visitor. Not so at Jeevan. Here, the students don't even look up and continue their work quietly and with concentration. Such discipline! It's great, although it does feel a bit unnatural with these originally undisciplined children.



Jeevan provides excellent education. In terms of content and methods it is quite different from the Indian system. This requires much discipline from both teachers and students, a discipline that head teacher Kati sometimes needs to enforce. This takes nothing away from our immense admiration for her energy, commitment, and involvement.

Kati Richter is a kind of wonder woman. She is the head of the Jeevan school, studies psycholo-

gy in Germany, and has recently translated an English children's book about undesirable sexual behaviour in Hindi.



In the near future she will be conducting a study about *Inductive Thinking Training*: would it be possible to increase children's intelligence by training them to develop their thinking skills?

And she educates her son Johann in two worlds: the Schwarzwald (Black Forest) in Germany and Jeevan in India. <

DIWALI FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

On Diwali night, a large boat with the kids of **Jeevan** picked us up at the new jetty on Assi Ghat. The trip on the Ganges took us along the ribbon of ghats, which was all fireworks that night. It was a lovely way to meet up again with Kati, who had just returned from Germany, and Jess, who had arrived that same day from Canada. We enjoyed sandwiches and cokes. If you're worried about the loudness of the fireworks on New Year's Eve in the Netherlands, come to India... You ain't heard nothing yet!



THIS IS ME

Bharat Kumar

13 years old, Jeevan School, class 6

Bharat has been living at the Jeevan Hostel for nine years now, sharing a room with eight other boys. His family lives in the nearby slum. Jeevan takes in children from that neighbourhood who are being neglected at home and would never finish school if they didn't have a place at the hostel.

What do you like about your school and what are you good at?
Being able to play outside with my friends during breaks. We have a very large playground. I am good at English, and I find it easy to learn.

Who is your best friend and what would he say about you if he were asked to describe you?
Sameer is my best friend and he will tell you that I fight with everyone. We play and fight with each other a lot too, but as friends, just for fun.

If you could be an animal, what animal would that be and why?
An eagle, so I could fly high up into the sky. From up there I would be able to see everything on the ground very clearly. And then I would scoop down and catch something, a friend or a rabbit.

What do you think is really daft?
I don't like it when people curse.

And what is your biggest dream?
One day I will be a pilot.

Do you have a hobby? What do you do when you're not at school?
In my free time I like to sleep. I also play football and hockey with my friends. We also have to help out in the hostel: cleaning the bathroom, washing our own clothes and helping in the kitchen. Everyone has their chores.





INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMME

- > 26 students
- > Contribution BSF 100% of the budget of €9,075
- > Since the start of the foundation in 2003

This programme is winding down; in the future we will be sponsoring more children individually at our own schools. That's why the group is getting smaller and smaller. This year there are 26 students, next year only 19. But this is how it should be.

Each time again, we have forgotten which street to take to the home of Manish Bhatia. So we call him and soon we are climbing the stairs to the large roof terrace of his house. Every year, a group of students and their parents await us there. It all feels so familiar.

We do regret however that in a few years' time our collaboration with Surendra and Manish will come to an end. Our contact with them has always been warm and good. Their hearts are really in education and we can trust them completely.

We know their families and dine with them every year. We bring them presents and they in turn give us something when we leave.

For many years, Conny would discuss the financial side of things with accountant Surendra, and when board member Theo came along, he would check all the receipts. This time, Nienke was there and she was happy to learn all about it.



Under the watchful eye of Conny she acquitted herself of her task quite seriously.



Together with Surendra and Manish we visited two of the schools of this group of students: *Gopi Radha School* and *Malviya School*. Our own students were our guides.

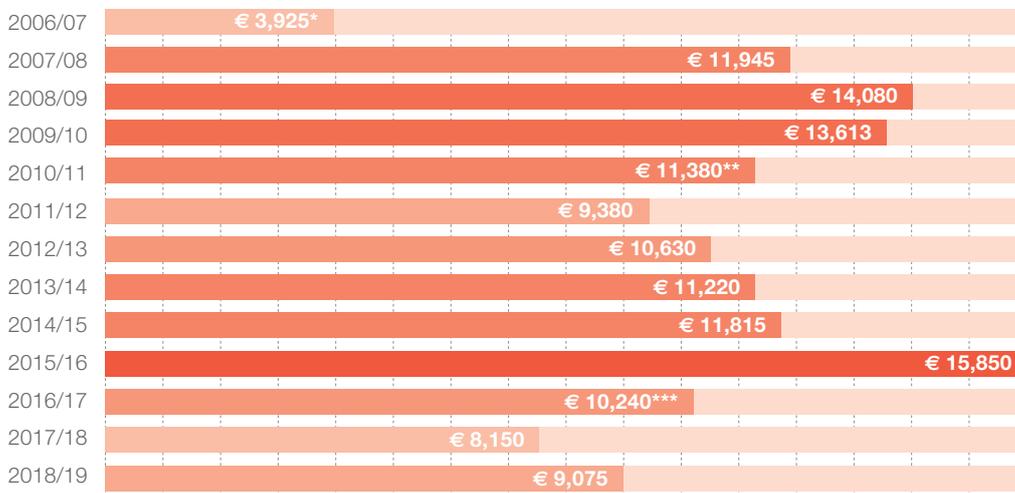
Gopi Radha especially impressed us: a fine building around an inner courtyard (no litter in sight, spotlessly clean), potted plants near the entrance, a likeable head of the school and nice, well-educated teachers, as far as we could tell. Many women staff members, including the head. From the sixth grade the school is a girls-only school.

The classrooms were really packed! Sometimes there were up to 90 students in one class. Still, the lessons were never chaotic. On the contrary: students were very quiet and worked hard and focused.

The meeting on Manish's roof terrace, like every year, is well attended. The students are doing well, most of them are in the higher classes and are almost done. We asked them about their plans for the future, but these are still far from firm. To be on the safe side, they all 'just' choose BCom (*Bachelor of Commerce*) and everything will be alright, they seem to think.

Three of the boys are training to become electricians, which is quite a bit more concrete. They have all become self-confident youngsters. That's what education can accomplish. These kids will do just fine! <

Structural support Individual programme



BSF pays all the costs of this programme, * part of the year, ** minus food support, *** stop new students



Nienke made a photo of 'photographer' Karin



Manorma Verma

17 years old, Individual programme
Gopi Radha School, class 11

Because her father has passed away and her mother works as a housekeeper, Manorma is living with her aunt, together with her younger sister. An older sister has also died.

What do you like about your school and what are you good at?
The teachers are very good. They encourage and help the students. I am good at Hindi and history.

Who is your best friend and what would she say about you if she were asked to describe you?
My best friend is Shikha and I guess she will tell you that we are very good friends and that I comfort her when she is sad.

If you could be an animal, what animal would that be and why?
A cow. They are peaceful animals. They ask for nothing, eat only grass, and give milk to the families who depend on it.

What do you think is really daft?
I find it very upsetting when people are aggressive.

And what is your biggest dream?
My biggest dream is to find a job as a social worker and that then I may become an independent woman and can take care of my mother so she can give up her demanding job.

Do you have a hobby? What do you do when you're not at school?
At my previous school, Asha Deep School, we had a lot of creative classes. I like that, I like the arts. In my spare time I help out with the housekeeping. I also do some things for people in the neighbourhood: helping an old woman fetch water at the pump, or walk somewhere with a blind neighbour.

photo: Manorma (r) in here classroom

CHHATH PUJA

Besides the *Annakoot* and *Diwali-festival* we were also present at the *Chhath Puja* during our visit this year. During this festival people worship the sun. It starts at sunset and reaches its peak at sunrise the following morning. Women in beautifully-coloured saris, standing up to their waists in the holy water of 'mother Ganga' wait until the sun comes up and they greet it with loud cheers and a dip in the water.

Karin made photos of this puja.



6



LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

- > 900 students
- > Contribution BSF 44,8% of the budget of €58,000
- > Support since 2005

Director Asha Pandey is proud of the exam results of her students: all 38 students of class 10 passed their exam with a score between 60 and 84%; all 28 students of class 12 passed their final exam, scoring between 56 and 76.81%. 22 of them now study at a university or college.

Globewise and Princeton

Important news is that the salaries could finally be raised this year with an average of 15%, thanks to the Globewise Foundation. Less positive news is that the *volunteer programme of Princeton University* will not be continued because of the severe air pollution. In the city the Air Pollution Index (API) has risen to 400 on a 500-point scale. When the air quality is good, the index is 50 or less.

For years, this programme sent young, brilliant future students to Varanasi to do volunteer work in various places. Three of our schools profited from the programme, including LSS. Its termination was quite a blow, especially for LSS. Every year again, the students were a great support for Asha. They maintained correct lists of student data,

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maintained contact with sponsors, helped with the annual report and interim newsletters, searched the Internet for new sponsors, and lots more. There will be sorely missed by Asha.

And also by us, as sponsor. If we had questions, they always responded immediately on behalf of Asha.

It is clear that Asha needs administrative support. According to her, such help is hard



PANDEY SIR

Asha's help and stay: Pandey sir, as everyone calls him, is a quiet, modest man. He appears silently everywhere and some time later he's gone again. This is due to his wide range of duties: from being Asha's office assistant to general handyman - for 11 years running.

He updates student lists, collects results, checks them, goes to the bank, buys food for the hostel, takes the hostel children to the hospital when necessary, and does many, many other things.

to find and even if you find someone, their salary demands are often too high. Still, we strongly urged her to reinforce the office.

We are always happy to see Asha again. Despite her busy work and her worries about the hostel girls she moves about calmly with natural authority. This is reflected in the atmosphere at LSS: quiet, informal but disciplined. Both teachers and students are obviously content.



Diwali

Our Diwali festival is quite special: after an impressive puja at Little Stars School, we went with Asha, Pierre, and the girls from the hostel to the Baba Kinaram ashram, an oasis of silence and peace in the middle of the crazy hustle and bustle of the city. The ashes of Asha's father are kept here. Diwali is the festival of light: thousands of oil lamps are placed on the ground in beautiful patterns and the children make a game of lighting as many of them as possible.

Rangoli Contest

Conny and Nienke are jury members at the annual Rangoli contest. Rangolis are floor decorations made from coloured powder. They are mandalas, which are made in every household and also in schools during the Diwali festival. At LSS each class has made one and Conny, Nienke, and the other jury members face the impossible task of choosing the most beautiful one. The children are terribly excited while watching us as we walk past all the artworks. There is hardly any consultation with the other jury members and it is not quite clear to us how the winning order is determined in the end. The children, though, are already quite pleased with this much attention being paid to their creations. <



HOSTEL



Since the Indian government has tightened the rules for child care, there has been a change at the hostel at Little Stars School: it is now officially a 'shelter home', a place where children who are in trouble can find a temporary place where they are safe. These children are not selected by director Asha herself, but are brought in by the police or by organisations such as CWC, Child Welfare Committee. Even more than before, the hostel has become a place where the harshness of life in India is revealed in all its ruthlessness.

In late October, the police brought in a heavily pregnant girl of about 17. Her family had disowned her for having had a love affair with a boy and her in-laws won't have her either.

She gave birth to her healthy, full-term baby – a girl. The young mother is in shock. She walks around with the child, without showing any emotion; it's as if the fact that it's a girl has put an end to any natural motherly love in her. Breastfeeding is problematic as well and the baby needs extra nutrition. This image of a young, homeless girl walking around emotionless with her new-born child made a deep impression on us.



Fortunately, at the hostel some twenty help mothers are available whose joy in life it is to fuss over the baby and who are very kind to the young mother. She relaxes somewhat when the youngest girl at the hostel, Nidi, a cutie of about 4, gently strokes her hair. That evening, Asha reports that the mother has started breastfeeding her child.

Running the hostel is a lot of work for Asha and brings many worries with it. The arrival of new girls - often temporary and with multiple problems - disrupts the harmonious living together of the 25 girls who reside there permanently.



THIS IS ME

Roli Gupta

12 years old, Little Stars School, class 5

Roli has been at the Little Stars School's hostel for six years now, with 30 other girls. She is not an orphan or half orphan like the others. Her mother is an in-living housekeeper, her father is an alcoholic. As long as she is in school, Roli needs a home, which she has found with Asha. Roli is a clever girl.

What do you like about your school and what are you good at?

We have nice teachers and I like Manisha the best. Math is important, but I don't really enjoy it. I enjoy Hindi much more because I can then read books in Hindi. I like to read, especially funny stories.

Who is your best friend and what would she say about you if she were asked to describe you?

I have two best friends: Chandni at the hostel and Madhu at school. I think they would say that I'm good singer and that I'm funny.

If you could be an animal, what animal would that be and why?

A monkey, because they are fearless and funny as well. And they climb trees to fetch bananas and I love bananas so if I were monkey I could eat as many as I'd like.

What do you think is really daft?

I hate the monsoon, because it rains for days on end.

And what is your biggest dream?

I dream of living in Mumbai and becoming an actress. My great example is stand-up comedian Kapil Sharma.

Do you have a hobby? What do you do when you're not at school?

I'm a good runner. In my spare time I read magazines and comic books, and books about Gandhi. Also, I have to help out at the hostel.

Structural support Little Stars School

2005/06	€ 3,000
2006/07	€ 5,550
2007/08	€ 9,000
2008/09	€ 9,800
2009/10	€ 10,000
2010/11	€ 11,000
2011/12	€ 18,000*
2012/13	€ 18,000
2013/14	€ 19,000
2014/15	€ 23,000**
2015/16	€ 23,000
2016/17	€ 22,000
2017/18	€ 22,000
2018/19	€ 26,000***

* In 2011/12: start 10-years support by big sponsor, **incl. class 11 and 12, ***start donation Globewise





DIVYA JYOTI

Near Assi Ghat, in a nice, new building - on loan from a sponsor with Dutch and Indian roots - Nathan and Sheela have been running Divya Jyoti for twenty years now.



Our foundation, which focuses on education, supports this centre for multiple handicapped young adults because the clients here are given custom-made *vocational training*; they learn to do simple work. In 2015, the Shanty Foundation from Bergen op Zoom transferred its activities, including the financial support of Divya Jyoti, to us. It meant a considerable raise of our annual contribution to Divya Jyoti. The NGO produces and sells *handicraft* and this means that the handicapped people have a supervised day activity and also make some money. Besides the work there's also time for games, singing, and dancing in a warm, homely atmosphere.

Sheela:
 'One of my mother's sisters was mentally handicapped, so as a child I was familiar with the phenomenon. After my training as a social worker I went to work with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, where many people with either physical or mental disabilities were being looked after. I met Nathan in Kerala, where he worked with the same kind of

group. We married out of love, shared our ideals and decided to combine our strengths. There was no provision whatsoever for our target group in Varanasi, and that's why we started Divya Jyoti.'

Nathan:
 'I like people who are different. We have two sons. At first they kept their distance from our clients, but later began to play with them and now our eldest is saying: "Later, I will continue your work."
 Disabled people can make an important contribution to society, simply by being there. Their presence teaches other people how to relate to them and teaches their parents that a physical or mental handicap is not bad karma, but a twist of fate that is nobody's fault.'

In the bright, spacey room where the clients are, staff members and volunteers supervise all kinds of activities. A severely spastic boy surprises us by taking a mobile phone from his bag with his feet and scrolling through pictures by using his big toe. A girl is colouring with much concentration, the tip of her tongue sticking out in classic fashion.

Irma, a volunteer from early on:
 'The work that's being done here is so incredibly important. Divya Jyoti is having a hard time. Fundraising in India is very difficult, the government is making formal regulations all the time, the salaries should be raised in order to keep experienced staff members. But the activities must go on!'

> www.divyajyoticenter.com

FUNDS / DONATIONS

2018 was a good year. Our regular donors remained loyal, as they have been for many years. We received a few unexpected, large donations and Globewise Foundation confirmed that they were prepared to bear the costs of the desired salary increase at the Little Stars School. We can also benefit from the generosity of another, large foundation for a further two years - which we have already been

doing for eight years now! The termination of this sponsorship in 2021 means that we will have to take measures in order to prevent any large gaps in our support base. We will, of course, look for alternative funding. But we will also slightly reduce our support to those schools where this is feasible; we have asked these schools to compensate for part of the reduction in funding themselves.

HOW CAN YOU HELP OUR FOUNDATION?

As a school sponsor

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

As a (permanent) donor

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

Donations are tax-deductible

Benares Schoolfund Foundation has been classified by the Inland Revenue as an Institution Aiming for General Welfare (Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling). Donations are tax-deductible beyond a certain threshold. Donations by a written agreement with our foundation have no threshold and are fully deductible.

See www.belastingdienst.nl under **Periodieke giften**.

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

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

Rabobank IBAN

NL97 RABO 0194 3913 53
 BIC: RABONL2U



Board

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



FINANCIAL REPORT 2018

> all figures in euros

IN	
Contributions school sponsors / regular contributors	29,598,21
Other donations	18,037,62
Contributions funds/foundations	38,100,00
Interest	21,23

	85,757,06
Added to the earmarked reserve	- 9,380,00

TOTAL INCOME	76,377,06
OUT	
Vatsalya School	8,000,00
Asha Deep School	8,610,00
Earmarked donation One Percent Scheme UK	948,22
Extra donation for laptop	600,00
Ashray School	7,000,00
Extra donation for schoolbus transport	1,000,00
Extra donation for picnic	210,00
Jeevan School	9,550,00
Individual programme	9,575,00
Little Stars School	17,000,00
Earmarked donation for grade 11 and 12	5,000,00
Earmarked donation for salary increase	4,000,00
Other donations and costs	
Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	5,400,00
Learn for Life School	500,00
Expenses foundation	1,037,97

	78,431,19
Taken from the earmarked reserve	- 8,140,00

TOTAL OUT	70,291,19

Result financial year 2018 **6,085,87**

This amount has been added to the general reserves.

Balance per 31-12-2018

Current account: 8,110,71

Saving account: 108,036,86

40,000,00 of which is fixed reserve* and 31,376,14 is earmarked reserve

Remaining balance: 44,771,43

Earmarked reserve

In 2018 9,380,00 euros have been added to the earmarked reserve and 8,140,00 have been taken.

On balance 1,240,00 have been added.

* Information about our fixed reserve

In order to guarantee the continuity of our work our foundation has long been striving to have a higher fixed reserve. Our main aim is to improve quality. That is why we pledge financial support to our projects for more than one year. A sudden decrease in donations and yearly fluctuating revenues would make this risky and that's why we need a substantial fixed reserve. In 2017 we were able to increase the reserve to 40,000 euro.

OVERHEAD 2018: 1,2%

BUDGET 2019

> all figures in euros

IN	
Contributions school sponsors / regular contributors	22,953,00
Other donations	15,000,00
Contributions funds/foundations	27,000,00
From earmarked reserve	4,682,00
Interest	20,00

TOTAL INCOME	69,655,00
OUT	
Vatsalya School	7,500,00
Asha Deep School	7,285,00
Ashray School	7,000,00
Extra donation for transport to new branch	1,000,00
Jeevan School	8,000,00
Individual programme	6,625,00
Little Stars School	16,000,00
Earmarked donation for grade 11 and 12	5,000,00
Earmarked donation for salary increase	4,000,00
Other donations and costs	
Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	6,025,00
Expenses foundation	1,220,00

TOTAL OUT	69,655,00



SUPPORT FOR OUR PROJECTS

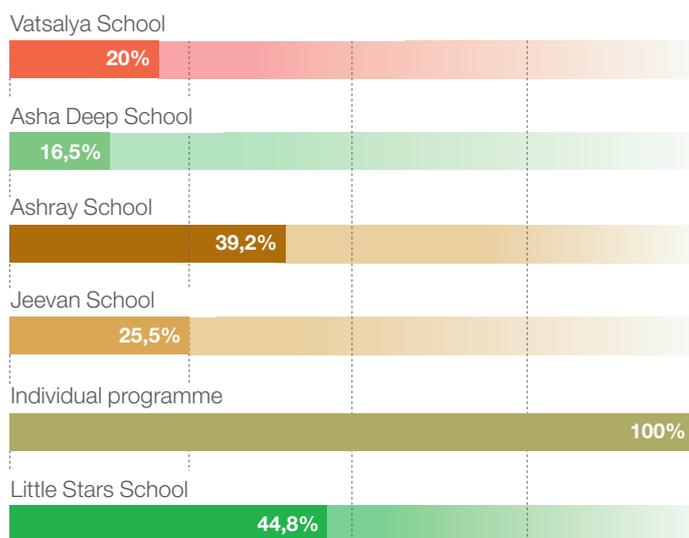
In our budget for 2019 you will see lower expenditure for a few of our projects.

- Through the **Asha Deep School** we are supporting seven students in secondary education. Two of these will take their finals this year. We will not yet replace them with new students but will wait to see whether there is sufficient funding to do so.
- The **Jeevan School** has been receiving extra amounts for some years specifically for the needs of traumatised children, and also for the library. These funds have now been used up. As Jeevan's financial situation has improved considerably, we believe that the school will be able to compensate for the reduced funding.
- In accordance with our planning, we are reducing the **Individual Programme** in its current form. We are increasingly replacing it by sponsorship for the poorest children in our own schools. Next year there will still be 17 students in this programme. Meanwhile, 21 pupils at our own schools now have an individual sponsor.

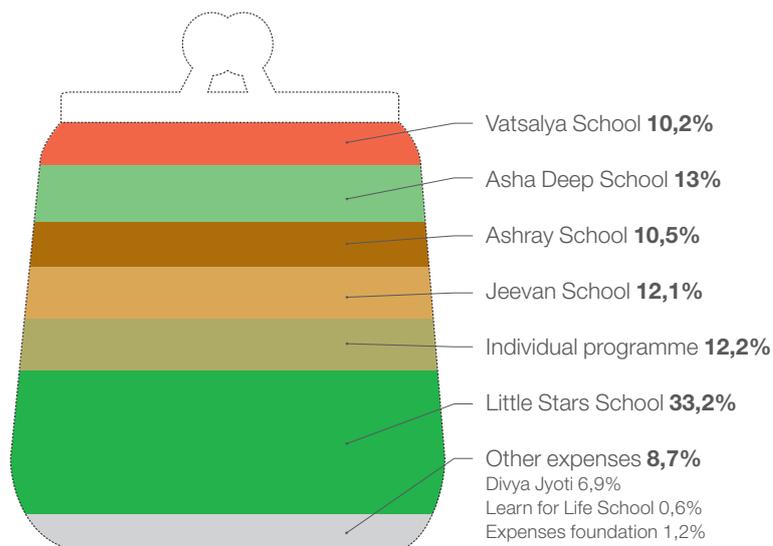


SOME FIGURES

Contribution BSF as percentage of the project budget



Expenses BSF spread over the projects



Colofon

Logo: © Hein de Kort/ComicHouse.nl
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www.benaresschool.nl

BASIC PROJECT INFO 01-01-2019

1. Vatsalya School

- > Up to and incl. grade 8
(+ after the age of 14, secondary education and/or vocational training)
- > 120 students, 8 teachers (3 trainees)
- > Budget € 40,000, incl. lunch
- > Contribution BSF € 8,000
- > www.vatsalya.org

2. Asha Deep School

- > Up to and including grade 8 + secondary education
- > 200 students, 18 teachers (3 part-time) + 3 part-time arts teachers
- > Budget school € 45,000, incl. school meal
- > Budget secondary education (33 students) € 13,000
- > Contribution BSF € 9,610, incl. secondary education
- > www.asha-deep.com

3. Ashray School

- > Primary school up to and including grade 6
(+ music and computer classes, and homework assistance)
- > 95 students, 7 teachers
- > Budget € 19,100, incl. a glass of milk
- > Contribution BSF € 7,500
- > www.ashray.org

4. Jeevan School

- > Up to and including grade 10 + secondary education
- > 150 students, 12 teachers
- > Budget € 37,500, incl. school meal
- > Contribution BSF € 9,550
- > www.jeevaneducation.org

5. Individual programme

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 26 students
- > Budget € 9,075
- > Contribution BSF 100%

6. Little Stars School

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 45 teachers (several part-time)
- > Budget € 54,000, no meals
- > Contribution BSF € 26,000
- > www.littlestarsschool.org



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