



# Benares School Fund Foundation

THE NETHERLANDS



## GOODBYE JOEP

To our dismay, our board member Joep Baartmans-van den Boogaard passed away on Friday, 29 September 2017.

With her husband Jacques, Joep was a member of our board from the very start. Her wisdom and care have been invaluable to us. We are very grateful for having had the benefit of her dedication and contribution all these years.



We will miss her.

Benares School Fund,  
Marien van Staalén, chairman



## APRIL 2018: 15 YEARS OF BSF

WHAT WE FOCUSED ON AND WHAT WE ACHIEVED

**Our work in Varanasi started almost 15 years ago, supporting 23 underprivileged students. Since 2006 two very capable and involved local persons managed for us our so-called Individual Programme. Shortly after, we began sponsoring schools for the same target group.**

BSF selected schools with a motivated management that could be expected to optimally profit from our long-term financial support. That expectation was fulfilled: the schools have grown in every sense of the word.

The content of education in India is not our business, and it is far different from Dutch education anyway. We have however, from our perspective, tried to introduce certain elements to supplement and enliven the standard curriculum. For example, by financing computers and libraries. We have also stressed the importance of refresher courses for teachers, students' attendance, and arts education. This has proved to be successful. The children we support like going to school and are being taught by well-trained teachers.

At almost all our schools the parents are now expected to make a small contribution, mainly to involve them more in their children's education. The regular parents' evenings are well attended.

At **Ashray** BSF introduced evening classes with homework help, coaching, computer classes, and music lessons. As of this year the school has its own library.

**Little Stars School** is now a 12-class school, with subject rooms, a computer room, and a library.

We gave money to **Jeevan School**, which started under a thatched lean-to, to rent a couple of classrooms as the beginning of a real school. Later, a library and a computer room were added. School manager Kati has made Jeevan into a model school over the years.

With our support **Asha Deep School** was able to overcome a financially difficult time. Later - via BSF - additional help came from Singapore, making it possible to add arts education. Computers and desks were replaced. The Cool School, an extracurricular programme of sports, play, handiwork and - very important for the older students - life lessons, is off to a promising start. A unique initiative.

The **Vatsalya School** in Jaipur now provides smart classes, learning-in-the-field excursions and learning by playing; it is almost modern Western education.

Not only the quality of the education at the schools has improved but also their financial situation. More schools are now able to attract new sponsors and become financially stable. This means they are becoming less dependent on our foundation.

We are very well aware of the fact that we only provide funding. The work itself is done by the local people, and that's how it should be. BSF is extremely proud of its two managers, all the school directors, teachers, parents, and students who together have succeeded in bringing about these positive developments.

A lot of hard work has been done and they have results to show for it. <

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# ASHRAY SCHOOL

## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Primary school up to and including grade 5  
(+ music and computer classes, and homework assistance)
- > 85 students, 7 teachers
- > Budget € 16,300, incl. a glass of milk | Contribution BSF € 7,500
- > [www.ashray.org](http://www.ashray.org)

In the beautiful Ravidas Park across from Ashray we find all the schoolchildren and all teachers busy with the Saturday programme. The children - all dressed in their new school uniforms - play games, and the smaller they are, the wilder. Other children follow the yoga class led by Damyanthi, with great concentration.

Together with teachers Seema and Sangeeta we visit the beautiful new library in the school. To our surprise, board member Rakesh Saraogi walks in with a delicious 'eggless' chocolate cake that has *Welcome in Baranas (sic) Conny* written on it. The cake is cut with some display of ceremony and then eaten considerably less formally.



Then the two teachers bring us up to speed about the library and we get a very good impression of the state it is in and how it is being used.



The Ashray library's showpiece is the book about Jalila, written by the children themselves. We leafed through it in happy surprise: it is unbelievable how creative and original these students are.

The library is a sure hit! Nienke - who cycled halfway across the world with her friend Bálint to raise money for it - can be proud. We certainly are of her.

## Meeting

We had a long and fruitful meeting with Rakesh Saraogi and chairman Dr Amod Prakash. In the past year there had been a few misunderstandings, which now needed to be addressed. Our main complaint



Sangeeta reads to the children in the library; Conny, Marien and Rakesh Saraogi with the book about Jalila.

was the fact that we hadn't received a response to important emails. Only here it transpired that they had in fact been received and read. The most important point to discuss was our suggestion to appoint one of the teachers as head of the school. Not just to safeguard and raise the level of education, but also to provide us with a clear line of communication.

Ashray's board doesn't want to go along with this plan and sees more benefits in spreading responsibilities among all the teachers. A good example of this is that one of them, who was constantly late, is now charged with registering the arrival times of all the teachers.

Rakesh Saraogi and Dr Amod Prakash both plead for a small raise in salary for all the teachers.

In our board meeting of 27 January, we decided to honour this wish as a token of our appreciation for the work and commitment of the educational team.

Teacher Seema had been specifically charged this year to provide us, via email, with school reports and also financial surveys. However, essential emails have to be answered by Rakesh Saraogi personally and we voiced our concern with regard to this lack of contact.

## Teacher Training

Seema and Sangeeta have taken a computer course paid for by Ashray and all the teachers followed an intensive library training by Nienke. Ashray still doesn't have any regular teachers training, but there are now definite plans for next summer.

The school is really making great progress and the library was an important factor in this. Looking at the results, we concluded that our condition of an increase in quality has been met. Still, teacher training is important to us in whatever form and we keep pressing this point.



## Finances

As the NGO Ashray's main activity is now the school, expenses are administered differently from the time when Ashray also included the clinic and social work. Today, the costs of maintenance and general expenses fall under the educational budget. This is understandable, as it is common practice everywhere.

The deficits are currently covered by 'various gifts'. When asked, Rakesh mentions 'some friends' - he has an extensive business network and many contacts in politics - and sometimes, he says, he plugs a few holes with his own money.



## The New School

Together with Rakesh Saraogi we visited the Ganges location, where he is starting up a new Ashray branch. In just one year, he has expanded the modest villa into a marvellous building with three floors and a large roof terrace. When finished, the school will have 15 classrooms and adequate sanitary and kitchen facilities. It is quite an achievement and we very much hope that this school will be a success.



We are surprised by how openly Rakesh discusses the teething troubles of his new school during our meeting, as he doesn't seem to be someone who gladly admits his mistakes.

Initially, 71 children had registered. After an admission test, 15 of them were admitted, while the other 56 children were to be placed in a lower group and subsequently didn't show up. Of the 15 admitted children, only five are currently in class, which is not a good base for further growth.

The main reason for this troublesome start, according to Rakesh, is that there are some - very bad - schools in the immediate vicinity that offer education for 100 rupees a month (€1.30). Rakesh charges 400 Rs per month for what eventually is to become good quality education and the families around here are not prepared to pay the difference.

Rakesh had two goals in mind with this investment: generate money for the NGO Ashray and provide the children from the school in Nagwa with good secondary education upward of class 6. If this new branch fails, this second goal will not be reached and the building will have to be made profitable in other ways.

Rakesh then presented us with the option of teaching the higher classes of the Ashray school in the new building, starting in the school



## FOR TOOS

**On 26 September 2017 we laid to rest our dear Toos Hooghwinkel, who reached the age of 89.**

For many years she accompanied us to Varanasi, her favourite place. 'Miss Toss', as she was called there, taught English at Ashray School. She was very much loved by the children and the teachers alike. When her advanced age no longer permitted her to come along, she herself wasn't the only one to regret this. Everyone we met in Varanasi asked about her, saying how much they missed her.



When the sad news of her death arrived, the children of Ashray said a prayer for Toos. Others lit candles for her in respectful memory.

Toos had a special place in the hearts of many. She leaves behind Toos' Grammar, a handwritten English grammar for the children of Varanasi.

year 2018-2019. This might help the new branch to overcome the difficult start. One of the advantages of this plan is that it would solve the chronic problem of lack of space in the Ashray building in Nagwa. A disadvantage, however, is that bus transport would have to be arranged.

Our secretary Conny visited Varanasi again in February to attend the wedding of Asha Pandey's daughter (LSS) and used the opportunity to discuss the plans again thoroughly with Rakesh Saraogi. The concerns we had as BSF board - about the input of the teachers and about consulting and informing the parents - were dispelled, also by the teachers themselves. To give the plans a chance, the BSF board has decided to support Ashray in covering the costs of transport for the next school year.

We also met with the teachers, and - after voicing the usual complaints about their low salary - all the women said that they loved working in the Ashray school. There has been much improvement, the library is a great new asset, classes are small and the team sees itself as a group of friends. When we asked them whether English Medium education for the youngest ones - an initiative of Rakesh Saraogi - was a realistic plan, Seema replied: "Let's start and see."

As promised in November last year, Conny took the higher classes of Ashray on a picnic during her second visit, something the teachers had been very keen on. It was a happy day out with a visit to the falls of Rajdari. The teachers prepared a lovely lunch on the spot which was successfully defended against free-ranging monkeys. <





# ASHA DEEP SCHOOL

## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Up to and including grade 8 + secondary education
- > 200 students, 18 teachers (3 part-time)  
+ 3 part-time arts teachers
- > Budget school €35,000, incl. school meal  
Budget secondary education €13,000
- > Contribution BSF €11,585, incl. secondary education
- > [www.asha-deep.com](http://www.asha-deep.com)



Forty new children enrolled this year, a few less infants and a few more late callings than in previous years. Especially during the rainy season, the school is hard to reach for the little ones from Nagwa. Director Connie Rao would therefore prefer to locate the infant school and class 1 in Nagwa itself.

At Asha Deep, as at many schools, **math** remains a source of concern. In order to improve math lessons Connie has started to teach class 4 herself, with the teacher present; the next stage then is that the teacher gives the lessons while Connie looks on at the back of the class. Next, she will be doing the same with classes 5 through 8, in the hope of raising the level of both students and teachers.



## Cool School

Asha Deep school has started its much longed-for extracurricular programme, for which we gave the school extra funds this year. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon we witness the start of the Cool School, the brilliantly chosen name of this new initiative. Supervised by a teacher, some 25 children play games on the banks of the River Ganges. There is much laughter and running and the children are having a great time.

An important element of the Cool School and one of the main reasons for us to support this programme are the life skills lessons. Lessons in character building, conflict management, sexuality, racism, respect for women, handling money, drug use, and similar subjects. These lessons are primarily intended for the older students and are invaluable for them in reaching adulthood.

MASTI K PATHSHALA				
DAYS	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
4:00	Lifeskills	Computer Lab	Lifeskills	Computer Lab
4:15	Library open	Beautyician	Library open	Library open
4:45	H-W help		H-W help	
4:45	Library open	Computer Lab	Library open	Computer Lab
5:00	Game	Music	Game	Circus
5:30		Circus skills	Craft	
5:45	Clean-up	Clean-up	Clean-up	Clean-up
6:00	Sharing time	Sharing time	Sharing time	Sharing time

The Cool School's schedule

We attend one of these lessons. A group of 17 older students follow the life skills lesson, given by an excellent young teacher who has them eating out of her hand. After her introduction a fairly good video demonstrating social skills is shown on the laptop.

Connie Rao describes the programme as a 'safe and fun option for playing and learning during evening hours'. She says that the Cool School is in general well attended by 33 children on average, but we feel that this number is (too) low.

## ANKIT'S STORY

Six weeks after the start of the new school year, Ankit was enrolled in class 6. However, an entry test showed that he was still way below that level. Connie therefore decided to put him in class 4, to which he reluctantly agreed.

Already after a few weeks it became clear that even class 4 was beyond his abilities. He frequently didn't show up, didn't make his homework, wasn't paying attention in class and in general was quite clueless about most things. A most unusual step was taken by putting Ankit back to class 2; partly to give him the idea that he was able to do at least some things, partly in the hope that he would work hard to demonstrate that he was at least fit for class 3.

Nothing much changed, however. Ankit was late for class most days, his clothes were dirty, his growing hair uncombed. And he was still not doing his best. Connie realised that more should be done. She decided to keep him in school every day until his homework was finished. At first, he would run off immediately after school and later Connie, with great difficulty, was able to hold him in her office until she was ready to help him with his homework. And guess what? He turned out to be smart and quick-witted!

One day he came up to Connie when school was out. 'Ma'am', he said, 'I won't run away' and they shook hands; now they were friends. Ankit continued making his homework every day under

Connie's supervision, and he finished it quickly as soon as he realised that he could then participate in the new after-school programme of the Cool School. From then on Ankit came to school every day, staying until 5.30 pm.

One day, his teacher told Ankit to go and get a haircut, as his hair had been hanging in front of his eyes for weeks now. Knowing that his family wouldn't give him the money for this, Connie offered to cut his hair herself. Seeing his startled look, she assured him she was quite good at this, and that he would look handsome afterwards. When his hair was cut, she gave him a small bottle of shampoo - his hair was clearly never washed - but he didn't know what it was and asked her how to use it. The next day he came to school with his hair washed, a sparkle in his eye and a big smile on his face.

After six years of schooling, for the first time in his life, Ankit scored a B in his school report. Connie couldn't decide whether to cry or laugh. His next report showed only B's. Ankit has discovered that learning is fun and that he can do it.



The great distance between where the students live and the school doesn't help either. Especially the little ones don't come back after just one hour at home and in the wintertime, when it gets dark early, the bigger girls also stay at home. This is why Connie would prefer to have the Cool School also in Nagwa.

We feel that the programme needs more time to mature and have therefore happily extended it with one year. After that, we will decide about its future and financing.

### Former Students

At Asha Deep we speak with five former students who went on to pursue their education at other schools, after class 8. We get the same impression as last year: nostalgic memories of the wonderful years with Connie ma'am, and stories of a sometimes difficult transition to regular Indian education. These children come to Asha Deep every day for help with their homework, so the ties with the school remain in place.

At such meetings we also learn of other things: for example, clever Neha, 15 years old, class 10, helps at home every morning from 5 to 8 and then goes to school. Of these five former students her English is the best; the other four seem a bit shy.

Connie Rao sends the children on to other schools after class 8. She is not always happy with the results, and the costs are high, but there is no alternative until the school can offer 12-class education itself. Connie proudly mentions that several former students have gone on to university and are doing quite well there.

### Summer Activities

The Asha Deep School is also open in summer. The children then work on various projects in preparation of the new school year. This year, the projects included writing poetry or an essay, making something with a small engine and even making a mini Hindi-English dictionary. These projects are also contests. The winners receive coloured pencils, which



Connie and former students Suman, Sunita and Neha

is quite special as most children don't even have regular pencils at home.

At the beginning of the school year, there was a General Knowledge contest, a fun way to learn things about geography, physics, history, or any other subject.

### Hours of peace

Connie regrets that having chosen for intensive homework coaching directly after school and having the Cool School one hour later, she hardly has any quiet time anymore. Her 'hours of peace are finished', as she wrote in her own words.

### The Financial Situation

The Asha Deep School frequently lacks the funds to pay for everyday activities. To Connie's surprise and great relief, the recently acquired FCRA status may be the solution, as it allows income from abroad and makes it easier to approach sponsors.

We have been supporting Asha Deep for almost seven years now and as yet the school deserves our full support in its further development. Our other projects, which we have been supporting for much longer, show that it takes many years to attain a higher quality and increased financial stability. <







# LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

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## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 45 teachers (several part-time)
- > Budget € 50,000, no meals | Contribution BSF € 22,000
- > [www.littlestarsschool.org](http://www.littlestarsschool.org)

The two large buildings give volunteer Pierre Satijn a lot to do, as repairs and maintenance never end. New classrooms have to be done up after two years, or the outside needs proper care again.

LSS now has an array of solar panels on the roof of the old building, which has resulted in a substantially lower electricity bill. Pierre lives in Varanasi more than half the year. He is very needed there, but also enjoys it a lot.

Upon entering the old building, we are surprised by a full-scale mural of one of the hostel girls. These artworks can be seen all over town, with no less than eight of them in the airport's departure hall. The American artist Augustina Droze chose girls from LSS as models for her portraits. The girls went to the airport to see them and couldn't believe their eyes.



LSS' old building looks better every year. Many parts have a fresh coat of paint and have been refurbished. The staircase with the marks of thousands of small hands on the walls has been fixed up as well; with washable paint, of course.

## Government Regulations

A few months ago, the school was alarmed by the news that the Indian government would be supervising NGOs more strictly. What did this mean for LSS?

For starters, the hostel was inspected. After many bribes (unavoidable, unfortunately) and some structural adjustments the hostel passed inspection. The hostel, which is actually a shelter home, had to be



*An ugly wall was transformed into a real artwork.*

sufficiently separated from the school and the girls' safety had to be safeguarded by registering all the people who enter the building.

LSS' hostel is a government-approved institute. Children are reported to the police via the Child Line and the police then brings them to the hostel. It is not uncommon for this to happen twice a week. As it is a lot of work to arrange all the legal paperwork for these girls, director Asha Pandey has hired a special employee just for this.

Asha does not receive any financial compensation from the government for sheltering these girls, even though the government demands that she takes them in. There are times when Asha thinks of closing the shelter because of all the worries and work it entails, but she cares too much about the girls.

## Certificates

The Little Stars School is officially certified to provide education up to class 8. And although classes 9 to 12 have been functioning to everyone's satisfaction for years, they are not officially certified. The students follow classes at LSS but take their exams at a certified school.

Pending the announced inspection Asha has taken action to uphold the current curriculum. Applying for an official registration is very expensive - also because of bribes involved - and therefore Asha has applied for a licence for a coaching school, which means that there will be a home work and tutoring facility for the students of classes 9 to 12.





### ‘Conny’s sponsored children’

At LSS around 75 of the poorest students are sponsored by our foundation. Asha refers to this group as ‘Conny’s sponsored children’. They don’t have to pay for their books or school uniforms and pay only a small amount in examination fees. We meet with the students separately every year and one of the things we always discuss is absenteeism. As this was high, last year we included an obligation in our contract for the school to increase attendance to the national average of 75%. This has already helped.



Students Pari, Rupali and Shalu

Everything is looking good at Little Stars School. The large school with its 900 students and more than 40 teachers runs like clockwork. Regular classes, library visits, computer classes, dance lessons and sports; all are arranged timely and efficiently. Examination results are excellent.

The students receive sound Indian education. They are obviously proud of their school and the teachers, many of whom are very good. For next year, our foundation will have funds to raise their salaries. Asha hopes that this will help to make teachers stay longer. <

## TWENTY YEARS LITTLE STARS SCHOOL

**Last year the Little Stars School had its 20th anniversary. Twenty years ago, director Asha Pandey began teaching a handful of children at her parents’ house. In 1999 there were 70 of them, and all rooms were being used.**

In 2004, she realised the first proper school building, building its class by class with a steadily growing number of students. There were 250 of them at that time, and the school provided education up to and including class 10.

One year later, impressed by Asha and what she had accomplished, we began our collaboration with Little Stars School.

In 2007, Pierre Satijn visited the school to do volunteer work. He has since returned every year and has become an indispensable help to Asha. Without him, the new branch would never have been realised.

We witnessed the school’s further growth, step by step: the new building, 900 students, education up to class 12.

In all these years, the seven mantras of LSS have been:

- a school for the poor, not a poor school
- qualified teachers
- small groups
- a varied curriculum
- a focus on girls
- understanding, not learning by rote
- school should also be fun

Asha’s achievement is huge and she is as driven as she was twenty years ago.



## CHILDREN’S DAY

**Every year on 14 November, the schools in India celebrate Children’s Day. We were at Little Stars School on that day last year and again this year. It is a special festivity, by and for children.**

Scattered around the schoolyard are nicely decorated food stands. Each class has one. The children sell all kinds of snacks that they prepared themselves.

After the customary ceremony and speeches, sketches and dances, the stands are officially opened by the guests of honour. The idea is that one does this by giving a nice sum, as encouragement. Then, while still clutching your first snack, you are taken along to the next stand. Every class wants to sell you their snacks and of course you end up paying far too much. But who cares? The children are delighted with your generosity. And if you add a compliment by saying how nice it all tastes, their Children’s Day couldn’t be any better.



Conny’s favourite: ultra-sweet jalebi



# JEEVAN SCHOOL

## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Up to and including grade 10 + secondary education
- > 160 students, 12 teachers
- > Budget € 37,500, incl. school meal
- > Contribution BSF € 9,550
- > [www.basichumanneeds.org](http://www.basichumanneeds.org)

Jeevan School always holds surprises. This year it was a beautifully refurbished kitchen, painted in nice colours by Head Teacher Kati herself, and, on the roof, the new 'music room': a solid iron lean-to, shielding the children against sun or rain while they make music, or dance to their heart's desire. The large kitchen is not exclusively used for cooking. If necessary, it becomes an extra classroom. We attended the music lesson in it.



*The new kitchen and the library*

## The Education

Jeevan School presents us with the same familiar image every year: a breath-taking ambition to achieve perfection that contrasts almost grotesquely with the way of life in the slums from which these children come. We must say: what Kati achieves in terms of order and cleanliness - within the limits imposed by the population - is incredible. Her teaching materials, most of which she produces herself, are fantastic and her teaching methods are intelligent and thorough. The teachers are issued with an exact list of focus points and they make comments on feedback forms, so that the students' progress can be monitored more closely. We attend an hour of self-study; it is all simply excellent.

According to Kati, the level of education at Jeevan is getting better all the time, in parallel with the rising level of the teachers. The teachers stay with the school for a long time, which is a good sign.

## Finances

For the first time, the budget for the current school year is fully covered. Since recently, large Indian corporations are obliged to spend 2% of their profits on charity and Jeevan has succeeded in teaming up with one such company. It makes all the difference. And Kati says she sleeps the better for it.

## Sheelu

We had a meal at manager Sheelu's house, which is new and not quite finished. Sheelu is an 'old' Indian, an Adivasi, descendant of the original inhabitants who had already settled here when the Aryans occupied the land, some 4000 years ago. We already knew Sheelu from Deva Public School, where he was one of the younger teachers in the 1990s. He is a wonderful man: conservative but intelligent and with much sympathy for Jeevan's target group.

A few years ago, he successfully completed a law study, but he is too much involved with Jeevan to aspire to his own legal practice.

## The School's Population

Not all children at Jeevan School come via Jess' Kindergarten. 40% come from the slums, 60% from the surrounding neighbourhoods. This last group is carefully selected. The school only takes those children who, besides being poor, have other problems as well: parents addicted to alcohol, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and so on. This extra selection makes the school's population even more extraordinary than that of, for example, Little Stars School where more or less poor children still live more or less normal lower-class Indian lives.

## Plans for the Future

Jeevan is going to apply for a certificate as study centre of the NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling). Another initiative for the future is pre-vocational training, a preparatory course in which young children are introduced to skills such as painting, carpentry, and sewing. BSF will monitor these plans.

## Math Market

Once again we attend Jeevan's Math Market. This time at Jess' school. It is one big colourful bustle of festivities. The little ones can hardly control themselves to not storm the stands with merchandise in one chaotic attack. Jess and her teachers have their hands full.

At Jeevan, very special children are taught in a very special way by very special and extremely dedicated people. It makes supporting this school all the more worth it. <



*Theo among the children of Jeevan*



# JESS'S SCHOOL

**At the location where Jeevan once started, the old small school building still stands. It isn't much more than a lean-to, but this is where Jess, one of Jeevan's founders, resides with her toddlers, fifty street urchins.**

They are children from the Samne Ghat slum and they live up to their reputation: during playtime, it feels like a great storm passes over us. But there was also some well-behaved and structured singing, and even some learning - learning and playing coincide here.

## The Slum

After the morning session we walk into the slum with Jess. We see poignant images of small plastic tents on the sandy banks of the Ganges River, between the huge floating sections of the former Bailey bridge. Jess knows everyone here. Her adopted son also comes from this slum.



We speak with Shivam's brother Suraj about life in the slum - 'the camp', as they call it. He lives there with his wife and child. The most important information that we learn from him is that the living conditions in the camp are degrading and that the total lack of personal initiative and solidarity blocks all attempts to improve things.

If any money is made - and some of these people do have a reasonable income - it is all spent on drink and food, in that order. Basic hygiene, health, better housing, and good education for the children are definitely not a priority. In the Netherlands, an army of social workers would be sent in, but this is India...

It looks like by choosing this target group Jeevan has taken a very heavy load upon its shoulders. Still, the Jeevan team remains motivated, treating the children with love and the parents with understanding.

## A Happy School

Jess' school is a happy school! The children have much fun and there are toys in abundance. The children, most of whom are undernourished, are given a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and fruit every day.

Their parents come from villages, where there are no jobs, to the big city to either find work or to beg. Most of them are addicted to alcohol. Even the youngest children go out to beg every day to pay for their parents' addiction.

Very early every morning two teachers go into the camp to assemble the children. Together they walk to school. There, breakfast awaits - the main attraction. Jeevan is aware of how important food is, not only for physical but also for mental and cerebral development.



Another important point is for the children to have fun. If no one encourages you to go to school you have to be very motivated yourself. That is why Jess and her team create a happy and fun environment. Every morning starts with singing together, at full blast. When asked what the most important thing is to give to these children, Jess replies: 'Food, education, love, security... It's such a hard question! The simple answer is: food. You can't provide education or give love to someone who is starving. But how can you love someone and not give them food and education? Therefore, my answer is: love, as soft as that may seem. Without love, no one can have a good life.'

Most parents do not appreciate the value of education as they never went to school themselves. However, they do appreciate the food and medical care Jeevan provides. Relations with the parents are quite amicable, says Jess. 'When they are sober', she adds. People frequently invite her into their tent, mostly nothing more than a plastic sheet on four sticks.

'I especially enjoy talking to the older women; they often greet me with a hug, tease me on account of my terrible Western clothes and then proceed to tell me all about their worries and pains.'



The children here are not very different from other children. They learn songs and rhymes, play games, and listen to stories. The main difference is that with Jess the children who develop slowly are allowed to stay longer before going to Jeevan's primary school.

In Jess' view education is equal to food, shelter, and love; they are all basic provisions to which everyone is entitled and that should be provided in a safe, friendly, and happy environment.

'How can you influence the world in a more positive way than by helping children to grow into kind, nice, hard-working, non-violent adults? My greatest hope is that the children will later propagate those same values. It is this hope that keeps me here.'

In spite of all the misery around her Jess feels blessed in doing the work she loves: playing all day, making music and singing with the children. 'Having a lot of fun.'





# INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMME

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## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Up to and including grade12
- > 28 students
- > Budget €9,450 | Contribution BSF 100%

In their hearts, our local colleagues Surendra Srivastava and Manish Bhatia find it rather regrettable that they will no longer be involved in the Individual Programme in a few years' time. Since 2006 they have been looking after this group of individual students on our behalf and have been doing so competently and with much love and dedication. Our mutual understanding is excellent.



In the spring of 2017, Nienke presented herself as the new board member at Manish's place. In the middle: Surendra (left) and Manish.

As we have written before, this programme is being gradually replaced by individual sponsoring through our own schools. It is a more efficient and less expensive approach. Surendra and Manish are currently still caring for 28 students but this number will fall rapidly over the next few years. The last students will be finished in 2023. Meanwhile the number of individually sponsored students monitored by our own schools is growing.

This year too, we met with parents and students on the roof of Manish's home. Less and less parents (the children are growing up) but almost all the children were there. It's amazing how some of them have grown and matured in the space of just one year.

Two former students also showed up, just to say hello.

The children are doing well and their results are often quite good. That is quite a change from the past when we placed all students in English Medium schools. Now we do this only with those children who are really up to it.

This gathering used to be primarily an opportunity to complain about something and ask for extra support; that aspect of it is now almost completely absent. Like last year, appreciation and gratitude prevail, sometimes in the shape of beautiful drawings and clever origami pieces.

Of course, we are not here to be praised but it does one good when older pupils demonstrate their awareness of the possibilities we have opened up for them.

The following night we meet some of the girls again at teacher Nisha's wedding, dressed like enchanting fairies...

We also frequently meet our students in the street. They always greet us enthusiastically and stop for a chat. Most of them we have known for years. <

## CURRENTLY INDIVIDUALLY SPONSORED STUDENTS

- Our own individual programme (up to class 12) ..... 28
- Little Stars School (up to class 12) ..... 12
- Asha Deep School (after class 8) ..... 6
- Jeevan School (after class 10) ..... 1

## FUNCTIONS

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

**Functions are shows with acting, singing, and dancing, all performed by the students. They are a very important element in schools in India.**

Manish Bhatia invited Theo, Conny, and myself to attend the annual function of the **Harsevanand School**, the expensive school where Manish teaches. It is an enormous, brand-new complex of buildings miles out of town that can be reached via a small country road. Alongside it someone was chopping straw with a machine, spewing the stuff over anyone passing by. So, when we arrived our clothes, hair, and faces were covered in bits of straw. It did not deter the organisation from showing us to the seats of honour at this massive and spectacular show.

By comparison, **Ashray's** function was small-scale and sweet. Cute little children performed sketches, sang and danced,

encouraging us not to litter the streets, pollute the air or be corrupt - all things that seem to be endemic in India. I missed the kathak dance at the end because I had to - busy, busy, busy - do the sound check for a concert with Jess and Dan. That was also quite a celebration, with swinging Jeevan kids this time. The three of us earned ourselves a meal and 2000 rupees (almost 27 euros) - my rates seem to be going down fast lately... The proceeds of the concert went to Jeevan.

**Asha Deep School** sort of occupies the middle ground between Harsevanand and Ashray with its annual show. The school's magnificent location at the Ganges River provides the most beautiful backdrop.







## EDUCATION IN INDIA

**In the Netherlands, after primary school children go on to various secondary schools, depending on their intelligence and school results: vocational training (vmbo), lower (mavo) or higher (havo) general secondary education, or pre-university education (vwo).**

In India things are quite different. All children have two years of Kindergarten and then follow 12 years of secondary education. All students are given the same study material. Results vary, which is hardly surprising. Depending on the school results children are categorised as Division I (a result of 60% or higher), Division II (45-59%) or Division III (30-44%). In this system children cannot repeat a class. They always move up, if necessary to Division III. This is strongly reminiscent of the situation in Dutch country schools of a hundred years ago. At the time, classes were arranged in three rows: the good students, the average students, and the muddle-heads. It did encourage children to try and move up a category as no one wanted to be among the muddle-heads!

In India there are two examination moments: one at the end of class 10 and one at the end of class 12. Only good results in class 10 (division I or II) give access to class 11. The examination of class 10 is equivalent to our Dutch mavo or vmbo-t diploma. That of class 12 is equivalent to havo or vwo, depending on the percentage obtained.

There are English Medium schools, and schools where Hindi is the language of instruction. A growing number of schools provide English Medium education, which is almost a must in contemporary India.

### Learning by heart or understanding

in 1996, our chairman Marien described his teaching experience in India as follows:

*The students are very good at learning by heart and can grind out long segments of text but they seem to understand little of what they say or write. A lot of this has to do with their poor command of the English language. Even looking for an answer to a question in the text presents insurmountable problems. With no exception, all the children press their noses to the pages and start looking for the word that is part of the question. The clever ones then literally copy the sentence in question; the less clever ones decide to copy entire paragraph, just to be on the safe side! Not a single child will present the answer in his or her own words.*

*To any question the children therefore have only one possible answer, which is dictated by the teacher. All chapters of all subjects are concluded with questions. If you learn the only correct answer to them by heart, you will pass the examination.*

Marien didn't want to teach in that manner. He kept explaining things, correcting elocution and adding things that made the subject more interesting and more entertaining. He also devised his own questions, which required an understanding of the text if the students were to answer them.

Even today learning by heart prevails but there is a growing awareness of the importance of understanding the lesson material. This is reflected in the form of the tests: these are no longer exclusively testing combinations of questions and answers learned by heart, but also include multiple choice questions and an evaluation of textual understanding. It has improved education.

### Attendance

In the Netherlands children go to school every day; absenteeism is practically at zero per cent. In India this is not a given. Schools are satisfied with an average attendance of 75%. There is a profusion of religious festivals and official holidays and it is considered quite acceptable to be absent for a couple of days when, for example, there is a wedding in the family or one's mother is ill. Obviously, this affects school results. In our target group (the poorer children with mostly illiterate parents) only a few children obtain high results and they tend to be the ones who are almost always present.

Our foundation values the highest possible attendance and it is therefore a standard item on the agenda during our annual visits.

### Large Classes

Classes of 70 to 80 students are not uncommon in India. The average class size is 55. It isn't hard to imagine what teaching is like under these circumstances. Understandably, in the higher classes coaching (extra lessons after school) is a well-known phenomenon. Basically, no child can do without and coaching has become an integral part of the educational system of India.



Most of the schools we support are small and have small classes. Even at Little Stars School with 900 students the average class size does not exceed 35.

### Costs

Education in India is expensive. It is big business and private schools pop up everywhere as a lot of money is to be made from them.

A thousand euros in school fees per annum is quite common and of course only the rich can afford this.

At most of our schools the students pay only a small contribution, which mainly serves to keep the parents involved in their children's education. And if they can't afford even that, they don't have to pay anything. This is made possible by external financial support, like that of our Benares School Fund.

Only Little Stars School provides education up to class 12. The other schools send the children on to other, more expensive schools, often with the help of individual sponsors. The Benares School Fund helps some 40 to 50 children so that they can continue their education.

The Indian government promotes the poorer students to continue studying after class 12 by reserving places for them at universities and by supplying grants.

A number of our former students have already obtained a university degree, and we are very proud of them. <



# VATSALYA SCHOOL

## Basic project info 01-01-2018

- > Up to and incl. grade 8 (+ secondary education and/or vocational training for the ± 40 Udayan kids)
- > 130 students, 9 teachers (3 part-time)
- > Budget € 40,000, incl. lunch | Contribution BSF € 8,000
- > [www.vatsalya.org](http://www.vatsalya.org)

The Vatsalya School has 130 students, 40 of whom are children from the adjacent Vatsalay children's village Udayan.

## Teachers

In last year's newsletter we reported how a fresh and enthusiastic team of new teachers started here. Still, after just one year, they've all been replaced by others. What is going on in Jaipur?



Vatsalya wants to attract the best teachers. These are mainly young people who have just finished their training. Beside their work at Vatsalya these teachers study for additional diplomas so they can apply for a government job as soon as possible. In practice this meant that teachers were frequently absent, that learning-in-the-field excursions had to be cancelled and student charts were not kept up to date.

It is one of the major problems for NGOs in Indian education: how to hold on to good teachers. Even though Vatsalya is paying its teachers handsomely - Rs 14,000 a month, quite a lot more than in Varanasi - the even much higher salary they can earn as civil servants remains tempting. A government job means lifelong job security and an old-age pension. And so, the new school year 2017- 2018 started with yet another new team of six full-timers and three part-timers.

Vatsalya now has a new selection criterion: applicants have to be at least 40 years of age, so they are less likely to opt for a government job. Younger teachers sign a commitment statement.

BSF is worried about all this, as continuity is important to good education. We have informed Vatsalya's board secretary Jaimala Gupta of our concerns and will be monitoring future developments critically.

## Personality Development

Extracurricular activities help children in developing their personality. Therefore, a music teacher and sports teacher have been appointed. The sports teacher, Sanjay, came to Vatsalya as a three-year-old orphan and spent his youth on the Udayan campus.

At Vatsalya success is not only measured in terms of school results. Winning a medal at a sports game, learning skills such as sewing and baking pizzas, creating and maintaining a vegetable garden count just as well.



The learning-in-the-field excursions also contribute to this. The students visit the airport, a planetarium, historical sites.

The school reports also keep track of personality development. The children receive grades for inventiveness and creativity, for honesty and working hard, for compassion and kindness.

This school year, two new initiatives started:

1. introduction of English Medium education, starting in Kindergarten;
2. transforming three classes into smart classes.

Kartikey Gupta, who took over from his mother Jaimala this year, gave us a positive interim report. Even though he remains concerned about the appeal of government jobs, he ends his report optimistically: 'Overall the school is functioning progressively.'

## Solar Energy

As an engineer, Kartikey is passionate about solar energy and he aims to make the Udayan children's village fully self-supporting in terms of energy. Together with his wife Saloni he took a course in Germany last summer, and now the campus has a high-tech installation: the pizzas are baked in a solar oven! The older boys have been infected by Kartikey's enthusiasm and are now studying solar technology under his supervision.

In the fall of 2018, our board secretary Conny will visit the school in Jaipur again. <



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



## BASIC PROJECT INFO 01-01-2018

### 1. Ashray School

- > Primary school up to and including grade 5 (+ music and computer classes, and homework assistance)
- > 85 students, 7 teachers
- > Budget € 16,300, incl. a glass of milk | Contribution BSF € 7,500
- > [www.ashray.org](http://www.ashray.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 € 35,000, incl. school meal
- > Budget secondary education € 13,000
- > Contribution BSF € 11,585, incl. secondary education
- > [www.asha-deep.com](http://www.asha-deep.com)

### 3. Little Stars School

- > Up to and including grade 12
- > 900 students, 45 teachers (several part-time)
- > Budget € 50,000, no meals | Contribution BSF € 22,000
- > [www.littlestarsschool.org](http://www.littlestarsschool.org)

### 4. Jeevan School

- > Up to and including grade 10 + secondary education
- > 160 students, 12 teachers
- > Budget € 37,500, incl. school meal | Contribution BSF € 9,550
- > [www.basichumanneeds.org](http://www.basichumanneeds.org)

### 5. Individual Programme

- > Up to and including grade 12, 28 students
- > Budget € 9,450 | Contribution BSF 100%

### 6. Vatsalya School

- > Up to and incl. grade 8 (+ secondary education and/or vocational training for the ± 40 Udayan kids)
- > 130 students, 9 teachers (3 part-time)
- > Budget € 40,000, incl. lunch | Contribution BSF € 8,000
- > [www.vatsalya.org](http://www.vatsalya.org)



## 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.

### 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](http://www.belastingdienst.nl) under **Periodieke giften**.

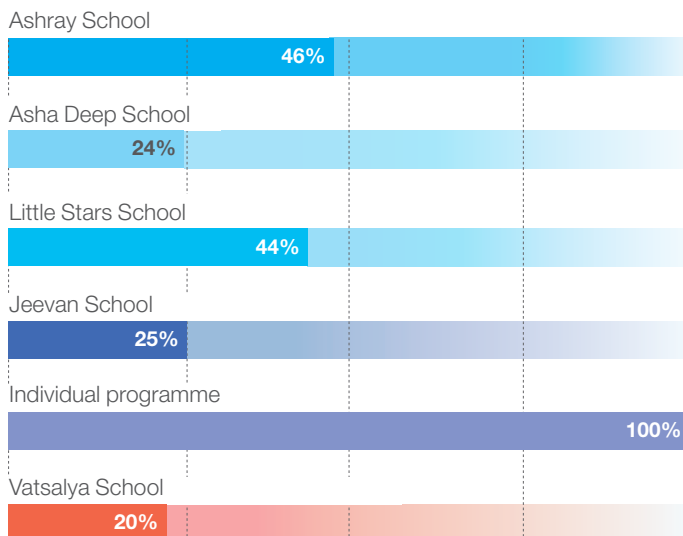
The secretariat can provide the necessary papers (license for donation).

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

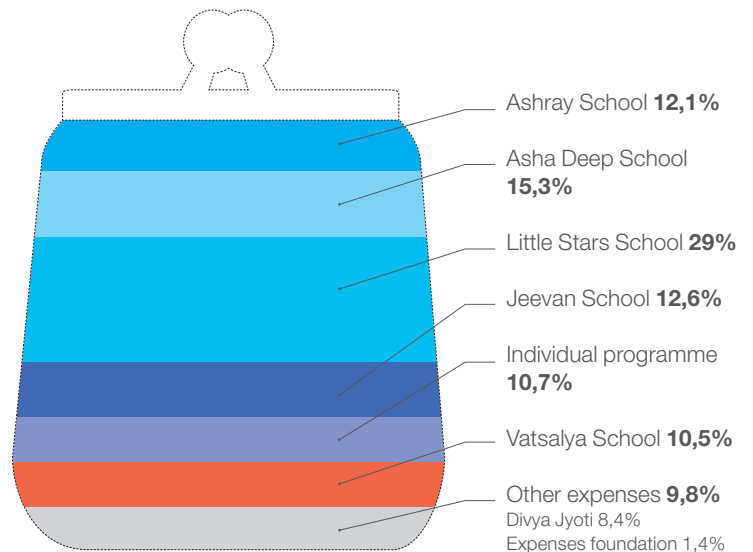
Rabobank IBAN: NL97 RABO 0194 3913 53 | BIC: RABONL2U

## SOME FIGURES

### Contribution BSF as percentage of the project budget



### Expenses BSF spread over the projects



## FINANCIAL REPORT 2017

> All figures in euros

### IN

Contributions school sponsors/regular contributors	22,649,39
Other donations	12,270,22
Contributions funds/foundations	28,000,00
For Travelling Tales (TT)	2,027,19
Interest	176,39

**65,123,19**

Added to the earmarked reserve  
(for library project TT) - 2,027,19

**TOTAL INCOME 63,096,00**

### OUT

<b>Little Stars School</b>	17,000,00
Earmarked donation for grade 11 and 12	5,000,00
<b>Individual programme</b>	8,150,00
<b>Asha Deep School</b>	9,585,00
Extra donation for after-school programme	2,000,00
<b>Ashray School</b>	7,500,00
<b>Vatsalya School</b>	8,000,00
<b>Jeevan School</b>	9,550,00
<b>Other donations and costs</b>	
Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	6,400,00
Books and materials for library Ashray	1,702,47
Expenses foundation	1,078,11

**75,965,58**

Taken from the earmarked reserve - 15,705,00

**TOTAL OUT 60,260,58**

**Result financial year 2017 2,835,42**

This amount has been added to the general reserves.

### Balance per 31-12-2017

Current account: 17,269,11  
Savings account: 91,515,63 40,000,00 of which is fixed reserve\* and 30,136,14 is earmarked reserve  
Remaining balance: 21,379,49

### Earmarked reserve

In 2017 2,027,19 euros have been added to the earmarked reserve and 15,705,00 have been taken.  
On balance 13,677,81 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.

## BUDGET 2018

> All figures in euros

### IN

Contributions school sponsors/regular contributors	20,000,00
Other donations	13,970,00
Contributions funds/foundations	29,000,00
From earmarked reserve	12,115,00
Interest	150,00

**TOTAL INCOME 75,235,00**

### OUT

<b>Little Stars School</b>	17,000,00
Earmarked donation for grade 11 and 12	5,000,00
Earmarked donation for salary increase	4,000,00
<b>Individual programme</b>	7,275,00
<b>Asha Deep School</b>	7,610,00
Extra donation for after-school programme	2,000,00
<b>Ashray School</b>	7,000,00
Extra donation for transport to new branch	1,000,00
<b>Vatsalya School</b>	8,000,00
<b>Jeevan School</b>	9,550,00
<b>Other donations and costs</b>	
Divya Jyoti (earmarked donations)	5,300,00
Expenses foundation	1,500,00

**TOTAL OUT 75,235,00**

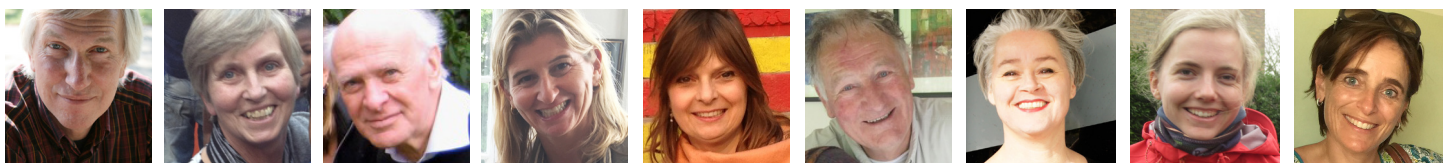
## ARE WE STILL LOOKING FOR NEW SPONSORS?

In view of our healthy looking finances, also this year, you may wonder whether Benares School Fund actually needs new sponsors.

Although we have the luxury of having a few big sponsors and a lot of smaller ones, with many of them we know beforehand when their support will end. And then there will be shortages, if we don't take action. So, we try to prevent these shortages and therefore we will always need new sponsors.



**OVERHEAD 2017: 1,4%**



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