



BENARES SCHOOLFUND FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER 2010

This time we wish to start our newsletter with thanking you, our sponsors, very much for your overwhelming support in 2009. Not only our loyal schoolsponsors, who for years have enabled education for an individual child; also friends, acquaintances and even unknown people who, on the occasion of a celebration, asked, as a present, donations for the Benares Schoolfund Foundation. Thank you so much, Flip and Baukje, Jos and Ben, Emmeke and Werner.

Individual donators, funds and foundations were generous, too [and too many to mention].

Specifically we would like to thank John and Anne, as they enable full support of the education in Ashray up to the school year 2013 / 2014.

And finally Peter, who took the opportunity of his nomination of Zeeland's Teacher of the Year 2009 to organize activities in behalf of our foundation.

THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS

Our favourable financial situation has given and still gives much room for extending our support in Varanasi.

Not by sending more individual students to school; that demands structural sponsorships, guaranteed for years.

However, we can offer our schools extra support for the next several years; we collect once-only gifts and spend them over time.

Last November/December we were with three of our boardmembers in Varanasi.

We had meetings, here with Ashray's staff:



We visited our schools,



saw our students and their parents



and visited new students at their homes.

We had picnics, attended performances of our children, organized a meeting on education, ate delicious meals at the schools or at our co-operators'.

We enjoyed the good atmosphere and the great collaboration.

All appreciated our presence and we, ourselves, left feeling very optimistic.

The projects run well to very well; where we thought there was room for improvement, it was discussed openly.

OUR PROJECTS

1. Jeevan school and hostel

Jeevan is an initiative of the Canadian organization Basic Human Needs. It offers basic education to almost 100 street children and a home to 25 of them.

We were impressed by this new project of our foundation, especially by the way Sheelu manages the school and hostel. Basic Human Needs couldn't have appointed a better manager: the project runs very smoothly.

Good food is still considered to be very important at Jeevan; a few times we had a delicious lunch at the Jeevan school.



Music and dance are also an essential part of Jeevan's school-program. We attended a lesson; it was great to see how inspiring the teacher was and how big the joy and dedication of the children.

It was the final rehearsal for a touching performance next day.

During the past year we have received interesting e-mails from one of Jeevan's volunteers full of information about the education and the children.

The school works hard on the quality of education: it pays attention to the content of the subjects, schoolbooks are selected carefully, a lot of educational materials are made by the teachers themselves and more and more Montessori-materials are purchased.

The school is developing a student control system and each Saturday the teachers evaluate the past week together with Sheelu.

The atmosphere at Jeevan is very good and harmonious and the children all seem to be very happy.



The older children in the hostel are also doing well; they attend private schools in the neighbourhood, as the own Jeevan school offers basic education only.

We went out for a picnic with the hostel children. Sheelu was very disappointed with - again, like years ago - finishing second in a track race, behind Marien, our president of the board.



Benares Schoolfund Foundation supported Jeevan this school year with 2.500 euro. Over the next four years this amount will be doubled.

Later in the newsletter we pay extra attention to Sheelu, the manager of this project.

2. Little Stars School

This ten-grade Hindi-medium school offers an education to more than 400 underprivileged children from Nagwa and a home to 25 orphan girls.

Little stars School (LSS) is very active. Not only is the school-building being renovated, also the education is being worked on. According to director Asha Pandey, these two things are connected: in order to be able to offer a highly qualified education up to grade 12 - that is the school's ambition - one needs well-trained teachers, who receive proper salaries; and one can get well-trained teachers only when the school is attractive and well-equipped.



Firstly, the school's hostel, which is home to 25 orphan girls, was renovated last year: a new dormitory with real bunk beds, a nice bathroom and a new kitchen.

The school has got new windows and doors, new toilets, permanent electricity through batteries and a new well.



A science lab has been realized, a computer room will follow soon. There are also plans for a new sewing room and a library. At the moment the main part of the roof is being covered and closed for extra classrooms.

On a nearby piece of land the future annexe will be built for the expansion up to grade 12.

Together with Asha, Conny, our secretary, did a puja for inaugurating the place for the new well.



In the meantime, the variety of subjects is being improved, including the books and other schooling materials. The teachers are trained regularly and English is becoming a more prominent aspect during classes.

Although LSS is a Hindi-medium school (the teaching language is Hindi), it also holds great importance to the English language. That is why the higher grades, apart from their regular English lessons, are also taught some subjects in English.



The driving force behind all educational innovations and the renovation of the building is the experienced Dutch ex-teacher Pierre Satijn. The Dutch Benares Building Society provides the financial contribution.

On the 1st of December LSS paid attention to Aids/HIV, something hardly spoken about in India. Most of the children had never heard of it. The children walked through the streets holding banners; we joined them.

Prior to this parade, medical doctors informed the higher grades regarding Aids; the students showed keen interest.



Benares Schoolfund Foundation pays all schooling costs for 40 students in LSS. Each year our secretary sees these 40, with their parents (usually the mothers), during a special meeting. The school results are discussed and the school attendance.

LSS mentioned this yearly meeting in her newsletter of last January under the head 'Conny meets the mothers'.

We made a trip with the hostel girls to the waterfalls outside Varanasi. All of us enjoyed the beautiful, calm and spacious surroundings.

Benares Schoolfund Foundation supports Little Stars School up to the school year 2013/2014 with 10.000 euros per year, for 40 students, 2 teachers and 4 hostelgirls.



3. Ashray's schooling program

The Ashray Social Centre offers schooling and health care to the poorest of the poor.

At the end of March 2009 our foundation, and at the same time Ashray, has been surprised by the great news that, for the next 5 years, we would receive a yearly donation of 10.000 euro for the schooling program of Ashray. We could hardly believe it! With such a steady income Ashray may realize its ambition of high quality of education.

The Ashray Social Centre offers schooling during the whole day:

- in the morning primary schooling in the Ashray school (more than 90 students) from Kindergarten up to class 5.
- in the afternoon sewing classes and education to young girls and women
- in the evening homework aid, tutoring and computer classes.

During our visit we assessed - more thoroughly than before - the education, the building and the budget. We wanted the large donation to be spent in the best and most effective way.



The yearly budget of 10.000 euros will allow Ashray to appoint a few extra teachers; to organize more classes in the afternoon for grades 4 and 5 to ensure a smooth transition to secondary schooling; to appoint a music teacher for a couple of hours per week; to visit the park opposite Ashray for sports and games (the park asks entry fees); and to train the teachers yearly.



The teachers Sadhana, Damyanti and Vandana

The building is a point of concern: one can see that it was not built as a school. The rooms are too few and some are even too small to be a classroom. Ashray utilizes every inch of space. We talked a lot about the need for more classrooms, at least three. These rooms cannot be realized in the present building. Money for buying or building a small school is not available yet.

Next year an extra afternoon shift may offer a solution.

Also, Ashray is looking for the best type of education. Next year the teachers will be prepared for a new schooling system, the NIOS (National Indian Open School); this NIOS gives Ashray an official status as a primary school and provides certificates for a better transition to secondary schools.



One night, the Ashray children gave us an impressive performance; impressive as most of them never had sung or acted before, not to mention in front of an audience.

It was an unforgettable happening, for the children, for us, and for the hotel, that lent its roof terrace for this performance of almost 100 children and even provided some nice samosas afterwards.

With 2 busses, we went with all the Ashray children to the Shanti ashram outside of town.

The children enjoyed themselves with football, cricket, badminton and skipping, or merely with sitting and talking. Here, too, a nice lunch was prepared, which is a big job when preparing for so many people.

Benares Schoolfund Foundation will pay the full schooling costs of Ashray up to the schoolyear 2013/2014 (10.000 euros).

4. Our individual students

At the moment we have 44 students in our sponsor programme. It is with this programme that we started our work in Varanasi, almost seven years ago. We saw all the children again, and most of them are fine. They enjoy going to school. Their results range from poor to very good.



Some of them changed schools, from English-medium to Hindi-medium, as instruction in English appeared to be too difficult for them. It becomes more and more clear that Hindi-medium schools form a better match with the background of our children, as most parents are illiterate and speak only Hindi.

Taking care of 44 students is quite a job for our two local co-operators: it means handling the admission of the students, purchasing their books and uniform, paying the monthly fees; but also supervising and helping the children, noticing and solving problems, and checking their results regularly.

And all that on top of their regular jobs in Ashray as an administrator and as a computer teacher. Quite a lot. That forced us to increase the fee they receive for all their work on behalf of our foundation.

At the same time we realize that we should avoid adding too many students in our programme, and as such overloading our programme and increasing the work load even more.

It was a good decision, last year, to select only students from grade 5 of Ashray's school for individual sponsorships for their secondary schooling. These children and their families are known already, also the family's income and the motivation, two of the main criteria for being selected.

From now on only schools near Nagwa and Ashray will be chosen for the secondary schooling of the Ashray students; it will make the job of our co-operators easier and a small increase of students in the programme possible.

We've also decided to send only those children to English-medium schools, whom we may expect to complete school up to grade 12 without any problem, and to send all others to Hindi-medium schools, thus keeping the expenses under control.

In order to share the responsibility for the schooling of the children with their parents, we will ask the parents a yearly contribution of 300 rupees, from next school year on.



CONFERENCE ABOUT EDUCATION

"What?! A meeting with twenty people, and dinner afterwards? Agreed the day before yesterday?..."

The Haifa hotel manager grabs his thin hair. It's ten minutes before the start of our conference, the room is a chaos. But then the Indian skill to improvise beats the panic: a quarter of an hour later we can begin.



Our foundation supports three schools who help the poorest of the poor: Ashray School, Little Stars School and Jeevan School. For a good 200 children, thanks to the help of our sponsors, schooling comes within reach. It is time to invite the boards of direction of these three schools to share their vision on education.

Absence is a problem on Indian schools. Besides family duties and celebrations there are also direct motives not to go to school. Sheelu Kujur: "A child doesn't show up for two reasons: Either they did not do their homework, or they are scared for a test." Therefore his Jeevan School is testing unexpectedly, and with success. Sheelu: "A good teacher asks a question when he knows the pupil can give the answer."

Shachi Prakash (Ashray) explains the transition of her school to the NIOS program (National Indian Open School). Asha Pandey's Little Stars School is building an annexe, and combines this extension with deepening the curriculum and schooling the teachers. All those present discern the cultural difference between the schools and the home situations of the children. The parents can't read or write, and do not speak English. Therefore extra lessons in Hindi and English are required.

But even more important are the social-psychological problems. Some children are a victim of their parents' alcoholism, or are sexually abused. It is of the utmost importance that the teachers recognise the signals of these problems, and know what they have to do. Sheelu: "One sentence of a teacher can change the life of a child." The schools agree, that a psychologist will train the teachers in these matters.

During dinner, a wedding party passes behind the hotel. We look downwards from the kitchen window and see, in a deafening noise, the dancers and the carriers of fluorescent tubes preceding the bride and groom. Next to us the cooks are working with huge flames. We are in India.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2009

INCOME

School sponsors	16.319
Donation for education Ashray	10.000
Funds and foundations	11.500
Donations (incidental)	17.867
From reserve funds	4.050
Interest	1.025
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Total income	60.761

EXPENSES

Little Stars School	10.000
Tuition for individually sponsored children	7.130
Counselling, meals and health care, tutoring and homework aid	3.983
Education Ashray	10.000
School meals Ashray school	2.633
Medicine and daal for the poorest families	2.500
Jeevan School	3.000
Education Udayan, Jaipur	600
Administration costs	788
(newsletter, postage, bank costs, Chamber of Commerce)	
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Total expenses	53.729

NB:

- From the reserve funds our project Jeevan school and hostel will receive an extra yearly donation of 2.500 euros up to the schoolyear 2013/2014.
- The foundation has built up a buffer of 27.500 euro in the past to guarantee, in case of losing sponsors, a continuous education for the children at all times.
- Charity organisations are advised to keep a buffer that is one-and-a-half times their year's turnover. As of April 2009, we will increase our buffer by 2.500 euros.
- For 2010 we estimate our income and expenses on 41.880 euros. You can find our detailed budget on the website.



A SILENT REVOLUTIONARY

Sheelu Kujur dedicates himself to the nomad children of Jeevan School

It is December 1996. The old man comes walking from behind the school. His beard and coat are waving in the hot wind, his white face is sweating under the red cap. Sheelu, mentor at Deva Public School, bleached his skin with tooth paste and transformed himself with cotton and velvet into a convincing Father Christmas. This was our first acquaintance, thirteen years ago, with the youngest, but most inspiring teacher of Deva.



Sheel Chandra Kisor Kujur was born in 1973 in a village of 200 inhabitants in the north of India. His parents were farmers; the eldest of their three sons took over the farm. Sheelu is an Adivasi, and you can feel it. The Adivasi originate from the tribal groups that lived in India before the Indo-Aryan migration. The Adivasi are living isolated; English antropologists assign them a certain shyness in the contact with other groups, and it is exactly this shyness which is an essential characteristic of Sheelu. The tall, handsome young man seldom raises his voice, and is always very polite and benevolent. Modesty is his middle name. Yet he knows what he wants, and he realizes his dreams.

Sheelu studied at the Christnagar Seminary in Varanasi. He left the institution because he found the church too materialistic, and not devoted enough to the people who need help. Until 2003 he combined teaching at Deva with his law studies. After a practice of three years he was accepted as solicitor of criminal law to the court in Varanasi. In 2009 he cum laude got his degree of Master of Law at the Benares Hindu University with his thesis 'Status of the Police in India'.

Since the Canadian founders of Basic Human Needs moved to Bangalore, Sheelu is managing the Jeevan School and the hostel. He organizes the activities, teaches, helps the volunteers and maintains the external contacts. When you see his daily routine, you enjoy a fascinating experience.

Everything around Sheelu is very non-Indian quiet, very orderly and effective. At the same time he radiates warmth, love and genuine interest. So the vulnerable children of BHM trust that they can count on him, and that he cares for them; and conviction grows through the whole group. The kitchen service is quite naturally divided among the students and the volunteers. The games on picnic day transform flawlessly into lunch time; all of a sudden there is food and the children are lined up to wash their hands, with soap, before eating. This non-emphatic order is also a characteristic of the hostel. Furniture and utensils are restricted to a minimum; yet what is there, is clean and functioning.

Sheelu knows, that also the very poorest shall not live by bread alone. We witnessed lessons of tabla and kathak, and were impressed by the dedication and the talent these nomad chil-

dren showed in old Indian music and dance. So the love of arts goes hand in hand with a new feeling of structure for these students.

As a legal advisor, Sheelu is connected to the Ashray Social Centre. Apart from his consulting hours he organizes monthly information evenings in Nagwa, where heated discussions are held about the rights of women and girls. These meetings are important, but Sheelu's heart is with the children. When asked for his vision about the discrimination of the group he is working with, he answers softly but fiercely: "I want to change it!"

Sheelu Kujur, a silent revolutionary.

A big donation from the Rotary Donkenland in Roosendaal, which was aided by the profits of a concert on March 6, 2009, will be spend on furnishing a computer room, a chemistry and physics lab, and a library for Little Stars School.

The full amount is now 11.500 euro. The Rotary is still trying to get the amount increased by Rotary International.

HOW CAN YOU HELP OUR FOUNDATION?

- As a **school sponsor**: for 23 euro/month (or 275 euro/year) you can provide education, books, a uniform, a good meal, homework aid and tutoring for one child.
- As a **(permanent) donor**: all donations, whether one-off or a fixed amount per year, will benefit the children and their education.

Your donation may be tax-deductible. Please contact the treasurer of the BSF for more information.



Their future depends on your help!

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