

Newsletter Children of Sikkim - September 2015

End for our funding of SHA

In December of last year we sent you the latest news from Sikkim. In our Newsletter we told you that James Ambat from Building Blocks India was very positive about the course of affairs at SHA. Unfortunately, James later changed his mind about this. First by phone and later by email he informed us in April/May of this year that it was not possible for him to keep abreast of the way the money was spent and the way things were handled at the school from a distance (he works from Bangalore in the South of India). He is not sufficiently sure that he can check if the money that we - via Building Blocks - put at the disposal of SHA is always spent in the correct way. Because of this, he has decided he no longer wants to be involved with SHA. James' decision also means that the Foundation Children of Sikkim can no longer support SHA. As mentioned in earlier Newsletters (which can be found on our website) we need an NGO in India to be able to (legally) transfer money to the school. Without the support of Building Blocks, it is impossible for us to continue financing SHA. We will not be looking for another NGO in India. On the one hand because we know from experience that it is (almost) impossible to find an NGO that is willing (and able) to do this. There are no NGOs that are big enough active in the Sikkim region and it also has become clear to us that we need on site supervision for a project such as this. On the other hand, we don't think it would be fair to try and put a school with a management that is not fully trusted by one NGO under the care of another NGO. In spite of James' doubts, we think we can assume that the children in general have been well taken care of. Until 2011 there were almost continuously Western volunteers present at the SHA and until 2013 Jannie, Magi and/or Mieke annually visited the school. The past two years Arnab was working at SHA as a teacher and he followed an education at Teach for India: "A nationwide movement of outstanding college graduates and professionals working towards eliminating educational inequity in India." (You can find more information about Arnab in a posting on the website: "New Teachers: Arnab and Deblina"; http://www.sikkim.nl/nieuws/archief_2013). SHA will remain open until the end of this academic year (until the end of November) and the Foundation will continue to finance the school until that moment (via Building Blocks). The head of the school has been informed of our decision. It saddens us to have to close the school that we have managed to keep open for almost 13 years and where many children have received an education which gave them better chances for the future. On the other hand we are also a little proud that we have managed, in spite of all the difficulties, to keep the school open for so long.

The Future: Our Other Projects

As you know, the foundation tries to reach its mission - enabling children from the poorest families in the Indian province of Sikkim to follow a good education - also in other ways. The foundation has funded since its establishment not only SHA, but also the secondary school career of promising students as well as university studies for a number of boys and girls. The foundation has a lot of money in its accounts (more than € 130,000 at the end of 2014). We want to spend this money in a good way and in accordance with the foundation's mission. Until now, secondary education was only financed by the Foundation if we could find a sponsor willing to fully subsidize the costs of the education. The Board has now decided to also use the common means of the Foundation (including money we reserved for the purchase of the land and a new school building for SHA) to allow a number of children to attend a good secondary school and to continue on to university. These are partly (promising) students who are still attending SHA and partly students who are already

attending a (good) high school. In any case, they are all children that Jannie, Magi and Mieke know personally from their visits to Sikkim.

We already have good experiences with this:

Two former students from DCPA (the school with which our entire project started and which resulted in SHA) have graduated with the help of our sponsors.

Enjay Lepcha (picture) has studied *Horticulture* in DheraDun, including a Master's Degree. After her study she returned to Dzongu and now she works as a teacher. She is optimistic about being able to find a job in her field in the longer run.



Sangdup Lepcha has studied *Accountancy* in Calcutta and Bombay. He now works for the Sikkim Government. He visits villages in Dzongu where he has to check whether government money is spent the right way. He has been doing this since 2013 (when this was his graduation project). He is also busy establishing a 'homestay' (a kind of Bed & Breakfast) in Lingthem (Dzongu) for which he applied for government grants.



After his graduation from Dr Grahams, *Samjyor* has already been studying for two years in Delhi. He studies *Political Science* at Deshbandu College (part of Delhi University). Only one year left and he will have his Bachelor's Degree. After that, he would like to start with a *Master's in Social Work*. In addition to his academic career, Samjyor is active in the NGO Leaders for Tomorrow. If you would like to know more about this NGO, please read the news posting we put on our website earlier this year: "Leaders for Tomorrow": http://www.sikkim.nl/nieuws/archief_2015.

Kursongit attended the Tribal School and just started her second year in Calcutta, Scottish Church College. She is doing her Bachelor's Degree in English. She plans on doing a Master's Degree in *Mass Communication* when she is finished.

New students

This year the following students from Dr. Grahams passed their exams (ISC Exam, Class 12): Rha Tsering (80.25 %), Laymit (67.25 %), Nimphuti (67.5 %) and Pemkit (65.5 %). They all have started studying at university in July of this year and tell us enthusiastic stories via WhatsApp.



Rha Tsering has been admitted to the St. Xavier College (Calcutta University), one of the top three colleges in India. He is studying *Commerce*. Rha told us that with his study he will eventually be able to work in 'Management' or 'Financial Fields'. And that is a good thing, because when we asked him in the past what he would like to be when he grew up, his answer was always: "Rich". Quite remarkable for a boy who grew up in a village - or more a collection of little huts - in the mountains of Dzongu, a five hours' walk from the nearest 'town'.



Laymit is studying English (in combination with *Education, Journalism & Mass Communication* in Namchi, Sikkim (Namchi Government College, Sikkim University). She is also following a one year computer course and is very enthusiastic:

"Yesterday i had few classes and after that for nearly 2 hours we had class about cyber crime awareness and it was really interesting and helpful...today i had 1 class and since its plantation day we cleaned surrounding and planted so many plants around the college campus. This is what i did in college today."

"Here im fine and doing well and having fun with college life and made lots of new friends and Miss now a days we are having normal classes and in August 18 our college will be celebrating its foundation day and after few days my first sessional test will start."



Nimphuti was also planning on studying English and was admitted to the Tadung Government College in Gangtok, Sikkim's capital. In the meanwhile she has been selected for the (according to James) well known Karnataka Nursing College in Bangalore. She has also managed to acquire a scholarship, so she can follow the three year course to become a nurse now for almost free. It's far from home, but is said to come with a guaranteed job.

Pemkit has been admitted to a two year course to become a grade school teacher. She also follows classes in Gangtok.



Kinzingit has done her final exams (ISC) at the Tribal School and had the highest score of all students: 91 %. Unfortunately she has, in spite of her fantastic exam results, not been admitted to one of the better colleges of Calcutta University because her papers were not in order (this happens more often in Sikkim). Fortunately she has been admitted to the Asutosh College (also part of Calcutta University), where she is now studying English.

Current secondary school students

At this time Nedup, Rikchen, Hissay, Dichen and Karina are still attending Dr. Grahams.

Chung Chung, Topden, Lakpa, Hissay Doma and Tsering Dorjee are attending the Tribal School. The Tribal School offers free education to promising children from the 'scheduled tribes'. These children have had to take an entrance exam to be admitted. We would like to offer them the opportunity to go to university after they have graduated. The quality of education at this school is high; both Kursongit and Kinzingit went to this school as well. Pratiksha and Sapna are now attending a private girl's school which offers free education and two other girls, Nisa and Ranmaya, are also attending a good (free) secondary school, NJV.

To Dr. Grahams and beyond

We would like to offer a number of (good) students that are now attending SHA the opportunity to attend Dr. Grahams (or another good private school). The costs for Dr. Grahams amount to almost € 2,000 per year at the moment. The children still have six or more years to go. This means we have to take into account expenses in the amount of at least € 12,000 per child. For as far as possible (depending on ethnicity, e.g. 'scheduled tribe' or not) we will ask the children to do an entrance exam for the Tribal School where the education is of high quality (and free).

The costs for letting a child follow university education in India vary from well over € 2,000 to € 1,500 per year.

This means that we should count on the following costs per child that is now still attending SHA:

Secondary school:	€ 12,000
College (three years):	€ 6,000
Master's Degree (two years):	<u>€ 4,000 (optional)</u>
Total:	€ 18,000 to € 22,000

GS, head of the SHA, has upon our request and together with the staff designated a few students as 'promising'. He gave us the names of 14 students. These children are attending classes 3 to 6 (in the latter case of the government school). A number of these children (5 to 7) should be able to take an entrance exam for the Tribal School, but even if they will be admitted, it is immediately clear that the Foundation with its current means cannot keep supporting all these children (in addition to the children that are already attending a good secondary school). Who will help us to provide these children with a good education and therefore a future?

What to do now?

We have been informed a while ago (in May) of the decision of Building Blocks. We are only now informing you, because we wanted to think about how to continue and wanted to bring the bad news after we had formed a solid plan for the future. We also wanted it to be clear in how far our current sponsors could play a role in this. We hope we can count on your understanding in this matter.

Obviously, we would like to offer as many children as possible a future. We hope you share this wish and that you will continue to support us. We understand very well that many of you consider sponsoring the entire secondary school career and/or university studies of a child (much) too expensive. However, we are also very happy if you continue to contribute what you are contributing now. With the contributions of a few sponsors of € 20-€ 25 per month, we can also offer a child the possibility to attend school and/or a university. This way, a few sponsors together can 'adopt' a child and, if desired, be kept informed of the developments of the child.

Therefore, we ask you if you would be willing to continue supporting the Foundation, so we can take this into account when making further plans. We do not want to make promises to the children when it later appears to be impossible to keep them. If you would like to (partially) sponsor a child and possibly come into contact with it (something, experience taught us, which is only really possible when they start attending college), you can contact us for more information about the children we have in mind. The very promising Kinzangit is also still looking for a sponsor.

We do not need the help of a local NGO for the sponsoring of individual children. The money for the children at D Graham's is paid directly to the school by a Scottish charity, the 'UK Committee, Dr Graham's Homes'; we transfer the money for 'our' children to this charity. We transfer money directly to the students that are attending a college, on the basis of a budget which is provided by them. There are no restrictions on transferring money from abroad to individuals in India, as long as the amount is no more than 50,000 rupees (over € 650) per occasion.

Jannie and Mieke are planning to visit India in 2016 to visit as many studying children and secondary schools as possible.

Dzongu

Our school in Lingthem (Dzongu), the Mayel Lyang Academy, where we sponsor 20 children, will continue to exist. Four boys have passed their final exams (ISC Exam, Class 12) this year and Director Loden Lepcha is looking for a secondary education for them, college or a more practice oriented course. The four boys are Dawa, Sonam, Lhaden and Raggay. Next year, four students will take their Class 10 Exam and this year Solomit passed for this exam. Solomit has moved to another, better, school (the Hee Gyathang School in Lower Dzongu), since she would like to study Medicine and needs good grades in the exact courses for that. We are waiting to hear from Loden if and how we can help Solomit in the two years leading up to college. The younger children at the school are doing well.

Many thanks for your support for the children of Sikkim!

On behalf of the Board,
Jannie Langbroek, Magi Finlayson and Mieke Dudok van Heel

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