

Darjeeling Children's Trust Annual Report 2017

Charity Registration No. 1143109

Principal office address: 151 Abbey Road, Westbury-On-Trym, Bristol BS9 3QH

Trustees :

Pasang Wangdi, Sharan Patel, Hugh Heron, Katherine Carr, Clare Blakeway-Phillips, Marilyn Adams (Chairperson), Vik Patel, Andrew Carr, Nima Wangdi, Sunita Halai and Sonam Dorjee.

Governance and Management

The Darjeeling Children's Trust (DCT) was originally constituted by Trust Deed in early 2008. This document was amended in June 2011 to comply with a suggested amendment from the Charity Commission to allow full registration to proceed. The current Trust Deed is dated June 2011 and registration by the Charity Commission was confirmed on 27 July 2011.

New trustees are invited to join the Trust when either a vacancy arises due to the resignation of a current trustee or when a gap is identified in the skills available to trustees and which needs to be filled. The procedure followed is in accordance with advice published by the Charity Commission.

During 2017 Felicity Christensen resigned from the Board.

Objectives and Activities

The Trust seeks to advance the education and preserve and protect the good health of the children and young people of Darjeeling through the provision and improvement of education facilities, through improvements to their living conditions and through sponsorship.

In September 2012 trustees approved the Trust's second five year plan to cover the period 2013 – 2018 which provides detailed targets which are consistent with the Trust's aims and objectives. This plan sets the context against which suggested new projects are assessed. The plan states that Darjeeling Children's Trust will work with the local community to:

- Sponsor individual children to attend better schools;
- Help improve the physical fabric of schools where conditions have an adverse impact upon children's health and where this work would contribute to the quality of the educational experience, including by inviting supporters of the Trust to adopt individual school improvement projects;
- Fund a travelling library to visit at least 6 primary schools to encourage literacy, access to information and a love of reading and hold an annual story telling competition;
- Provide music teaching in primary schools and for all sponsored children and provide tuition for musically gifted children within these groups to enable them to enter music exams if desired;
- Fund and provide support for young people to undertake hospitality training and nursing training and provide vocational training in needlework at the Girls' Orphanage;

- Fund health improvement measures for girls and boys at a local orphanage;
- Support the rebuilding of a boys' and girls' orphanage to provide an improved living environment for the children and young people;
- Facilitate volunteering in Darjeeling as and when candidates with the appropriate skills and aptitudes present themselves.
- In addition Trustees will ensure a full range of management skills is available to ensure the long term sustainability of Darjeeling Children's Trust and that visits are made by UK Trustees twice a year to Darjeeling so far as is possible.

Achievements and Performance in 2017

2017 was dominated by the three month all out strike which took place in Darjeeling and the surrounding area and which started in June. This had enormous impact upon the lives of all the town's residents including its children and young people, as in addition to the closure of shops, offices and business premises and the transport system, all education and training establishments were shut. Whilst the sponsored children and young people supported by the Trust were unable to go to school or college, their parents were unable to work and earn money and many were therefore unable to feed their families.

By the end of the second month of the shut down reports were being made to the three trustees of Darjeeling Children's Trust: Major Pasang Wandri, Sonam Dorjee and Nima Wangdi, who live permanently in Darjeeling and oversee the work of the Trust on the ground, of sponsored children suffering hunger. A decision was taken to use some of the Trust's funds to provide some basic supplies such as rice and lentils. This was a one-off action.

A visit to Darjeeling was made by UK based trustee Hugh Heron during April 2017 but a planned visit by Marilyn Adams and by DCT treasurer Robert Adams was unable to take place. Whilst the communication networks into Darjeeling were cut for much of the period of the strike, intermittent contact with Darjeeling based trustees was maintained whenever possible.

The work carried out by the Trust has therefore been significantly impacted upon during the year and the following report should be read within that context.

a) Improvements to schools

A request for significant funding was received from Mahatma Gandhi School for safety and security measures to stabilise the steep bank overlooking the school playground and to secure the area with erection of a steel mesh fence. This was discussed with the local community leaders and agreed in principle in April but work had to be held in abeyance due to the strike and was only completed in early December.

Stationery provision to schools

The numbers of children on the school rolls of the majority of schools previously supported by provision of stationery has been falling, sometimes to single figures. A decision was therefore taken in 2017 to stop the scheme for the year and to review need during trustee visits in spring 2018.

b) Travelling Library and Music teaching in schools

Both these activities took place both before the strike and afterwards once schools re-opened. However, the number of children in the schools visited by these two projects is falling and consequently a review of both activities will be carried out in spring 2018.

Additional teaching resources were provided for the music project in April 2017.

d) Vocational training

DCT has continued to provide financial support to young people undertaking vocational training courses, including paying for course fees, books, uniforms and where appropriate for travel and hostel accommodation.

Six young people (five young women and one young man) were accepted for DCT sponsorship on the hospitality training course at the Food and Craft Institute, a government college in Darjeeling, in summer 2017. However, the start of their course was interrupted by the strike and they were only able to begin their studies in November 2017. The college remained open longer than usual in to the winter period and studies will recommence earlier than usual in spring 2018.

The young people will remain at college until mid 2018 after which they will do their practical training in hotel placements arranged by their tutor. Subject to their successful completion of the course in summer 2018 and the 6 months' work placement, they will each gain a nationally recognised Diploma. All come from poor families and without support would be unable to do the course

Experience has demonstrated that this training provides a successful way into employment by young people who previously were unable to gain work. A number of the graduates from the course now work in Middle East countries and their skills continue to be in high demand both in India and abroad. Experience is showing that they are using their incomes to support their families in Darjeeling in various ways.

Two young women are now sponsored through the Trust to undertake nurse training. One of the young women has completed her final year of study on a three and a half year nursing course in Silguri and has used her skills on a six month placement in community health as required by her course. She is now free to seek employment anywhere she wishes. The second nurse trainee is in her third year of study at the main Government hospital in Darjeeling.

Trustees decided in 2015 to try and broaden the vocational training opportunities available to girls with fewer educational qualifications. In the knowledge that there is great demand for beauticians and also that this is a job that can be done from home with very little initial capital outlay, an arrangement was made for training to be provided at a local salon for three young women. The scheme was initiated in 2015 when three young women completed the course and a further three young women were enrolled on the course at a local salon in late 2017. The start of their course was delayed due to the strike and their training is on-going.

All three came from low income families and none had a job before starting their training.

The training in needlework skills with an experienced teacher continued at the Girls' Orphanage before and after the strike. Eight senior girls attend regularly and they have developed a range of needlework skills which are being extended to include both manual and machine knitting. The girls have continued to enjoy the course and the quality of their work has improved. The skills which they

are learning will allow them to return to work at home and earn an income if they eventually return to their home villages.

e) Health improvements at the orphanages

Support for the children and young people continued throughout the year although the numbers in residence reduced during the strike.

Funding for health improvement measures initially concentrated on the Girls' Orphanage in view of their more apparent needs due to the cramped nature of their site and consequent crowded living conditions which have an adverse impact upon their health. Early measures concentrated upon provision of goods such as combs, medicated soap and towels. This expanded over time to include water deliveries to allow better personal hygiene but as water is now provided by another donor, the deliveries funded by DCT have stopped. In addition, the girls also benefit from visits from a qualified nurse paid for by the Trust who advises them, provides health education and has an overview of their health. She also advises the Trust of specific needs, such as for medication, as they arise. During 2017, her role was supported by a young woman who had previously been sponsored by DCT to undertake paramedic training. Her appointment has allowed regular weekly health checks to take place and she also helps the younger girls to wash properly once a week. Continuing these checks are especially important for new arrivals and as girls return from their home villages when they may present with problems such as scabies. Any problems are now identified and addressed rapidly and with greater effect.

This activity by the Trust was expanded to include deliveries of medicated soap and towels to the 60 boys in the Boys' Orphanage. Even though the boys' living environment improved immeasurably when they moved into their new dormitory accommodation in November 2014, the Trust is continuing to provide soap and towels on an as needed basis. In addition, visits are now being made to the boys' orphanage by the nurse and nurse assistant and health checks are being carried out regularly.

The resources provided by the Trust continue to make a significant difference to the children and young people's health and well-being, especially since problems are more quickly addressed as they arise. It is hoped that when all 100 children have new accommodation and adequate water supplies are more readily available, the improvement in living conditions will result in fewer health problems and the support which DCT provides can then be reviewed.

f) Supporting redevelopment of the orphanages

There was a disappointing abeyance of construction work on the redevelopment project throughout the whole of 2017. This was because the registration held by the Kripasaran Buddhist Mission under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which is required by the Indian government to allow foreign donations to be received, was allowed to lapse by the Mission. This has now been resolved and work is recommencing in early 2018.

g) Child Sponsorship

A total of 61 children were being sponsored through the Trust at the end of 2017 with a further three young people being sponsored into college or vocational training. These three will receive no further sponsorship once they have completed their courses.

This has been a difficult year for all the sponsored children and young people, all of whom have had their education significantly interrupted by the strike. Whilst this situation may be something that is more easily retrievable for the younger children, it potentially has more serious consequences for the older students. Those facing major exams at years 10 and 12 will require extra tuition and arrangements were put in place in December 2017 for the remaining sponsored children who are in years 7-9 to receive extra tuition for three hours daily in January-February 2018.

The main challenge facing the Trust is ensuring the continuity of funding for each child, although reserves are sufficient to match any shortfall generated in this way.

The scheme is of significant benefit to the children who are now in better education. They appear to have a developing self-confidence and the majority are making good progress in their studies. It is however a difficult process for the children to adapt to a more rigorous education system and some take longer than others to do so. Experience has shown however that once these children settle down they generally do well at school.

Although Trustees seek to ensure that families are completely supportive of the process and are settled in Darjeeling, there can be no guarantee of each child continuing in the scheme. Such an event represents a lost opportunity to another child and a waste of resources to the Trust. Nevertheless, such incidents are infrequent and do not invalidate the programme in any way. There was one such withdrawal in 2017.

h) Fund raising

Donations, fund raising events and sponsorship are the three largest sources of income for the Trust. Whilst the total amount derived from gift aid and interest is not large it is significant when expenditure is considered. The challenge for the Trust in the next few years will be to maintain the level of income under these three heads to ensure that funds are available for core activities whilst also increasing the amount available for Phase 2 of the orphanage redevelopment.

Trust running costs are the smallest area of expenditure. The major component of this is the cost of the annual independent examination (the audit). Remaining costs relate largely to fees charged by electronic cash transfers and by Just Giving. None of this expenditure relates to the payment of personal expenses for Trustees and the Trust remains fortunate that all trustees are willing to cover all such costs themselves. It should also be noted that the total running costs remain significantly lower than the amount of income from Gift Aid.

In the current difficult economic climate, DCT is grateful to its supporters for all the monies donated and for the funds which individuals have raised through sponsored events. The annual Darjeeling Cup Golf Day was again significant in raising over £6000.

i) Policy on reserves and other financial issues

The Trust's policy on reserves is to maintain a minimum cash balance of £7500, a figure which will be periodically reviewed. None of the funds held by the Trust are in deficit.

The Trust does not act as the Custodian Trustee for any assets.

Recommendation: The report be adopted as a fair and true account of the Darjeeling Children's Trust's activities in 2017

Approved: 3rd March 2018

Marilyn Adams

Chairperson

Darjeeling Children's Trust