

FRIENDS OF MANJUSHREE VIDYAPITH SCHOOL & ORPHANAGE

Newsletter No 11. December 2015



Dear Friends Tashi Delek!

During November 2015 I visited the orphanage and, as always, it was a heart-warming experience. The children really appreciate the time we spend with them. It is difficult to fully describe how much they need to know someone cares for them individually. Many of them visit our room at every opportunity to talk, to look at photographs, draw and paint, and for extra academic tuition.

Lama Thupten and the headmaster, Mr Amar, always provide very detailed accounts of how our donations have been spent and also

of total costs for Manjushree. They said we provide food for all the children for 24 days a month. The Indian army provides for the other six days with donations of rice, grains and dhal.



FMVSO is the only donor providing funds for Further Education.

These costs are quite high as there are now 25 Manjushree students in Further Education and 9 training to become monks.



possible, and provide ongoing career support and guidance. These 'graduates' are now themselves contributing to support of Manjushree.

Several more no longer require our financial support as they are now in employment or running their own businesses. 2 are married, one with a baby and the other with a baby due early in 2016. We could say 'job done' but we stay in contact with all these 'graduates', visit them whenever



The big news at Manjushree is the opening of the new '**Academic Block**'. This was funded mostly by Japanese donors and consequently designed to be earthquake proof: the tragedy in Nepal reminds us of the vulnerability of all peoples of the Himalayas. The new school building transforms conditions for the children. Until September this year they were taught in classrooms constructed from recycled pallets with a tin roof. There was no sound proofing between the classrooms and when it rained on that tin roof it became all but impossible to teach above the noise. The air is very cold at that altitude on cloudy days and with the draughty doors and windows and no heating in the old classrooms it was often warmer to hold classes out of doors.



Now the children have classrooms well-suited to gaining a good education. Teaching methods, however, are still book-based and delivered on a chalk board. The science laboratories are empty due to no funding for equipment. We intend to rectify this in 2016 by sending additional money to equip the labs: the children can then be motivated by interesting science experiments. FMVSO will also be encouraging uptake of modern teaching methods including the use of videos. The Army have recently donated 3 new computers together with software and antivirus protection. A dedicated computer room is provided in the new building and, as several of the teachers learned IT during their college courses, it will soon be possible to begin computer/IT education. At the moment the children almost totally lack exposure to computers, IT or the internet and this is a handicap for them when they leave Manjushree for college.

Education is still seen by FMVSO as one of the 2 main funding priorities.

The next need is recruitment of **teachers** for science, maths and English for the older children. Gradually schooling is being extended all the way from nursery to class 12. Currently it goes to class 9, added this year, with the intention to add classes 10-12 over the next 3 years. It is challenging to recruit teachers of sufficient quality to teach at this level; there is a shortage of good teachers of maths and science in India, just as in the West. Persuading them to move and live in the rigours of the Mon Valley at 10,000 feet in a culture alien to them is another issue. On top of these problems, a good science teacher in India earns about 100,000 rupees (£1,000) a month whereas teachers at Manjushree are paid one tenth of that amount.



Lama Thupten was unable to recruit teachers for the senior classes this year; he will try again in 2016. We do all we can by providing finance for new teachers' salaries and teaching the older children ourselves when we are at the orphanage.

The children look in good health. Their diet has



improved in recent years by addition of more protein from each of fish, meat and eggs at least once a month. They get vitamin and iron supplements and weekly visits from local doctors who informed me that

the main health problems resemble those in the west – coughs and colds, skin rashes and, this year, also an outbreak of chickenpox. There is a notable absence of the weight problems seen in so many children in the west.

Many of the children enjoy sports – football, cricket, volleyball and badminton. I joined the teacher's team for the annual cricket match of children against staff – it was a short innings!!



The children's spiritual health is also well cared for. Lama Thupten leads prayers for half an hour from 0545 as soon as they rise in the morning. Jambel the Bhoti (Tibetan Language) teacher leads prayers in the late afternoon – well timed to settle the children after games and before evening homework.

FMVSO's efforts to support the children and staff are effective and highly appreciated.

Lama Thupten and his staff said to me several times that FMVSO are different from other donors; others send money, which is appreciated, but FMVSO does so much more in the care we show for the children and the staff.

We are the only donors who contribute personal skills by teaching in class and by providing additional coaching and mentoring outside school hours. FMVSO trustees spend a lot more time than other donors giving hands on support at the orphanage.



Lama Thupten continues to call us the 'backbone' of Manjushree. He and all the family send their love, good wishes and thanks to all you good people who really are helping to improve the lives of the children of Manjushree

FMVSO trustees, Di, Grainne and Rory join me in wishing you peace, good health and happiness

David Brown

FMVSO Chairman

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All donations to FMVSO go direct to Manjushree. No expenses are deducted and our trips are entirely self-funded

