



Rinchen Zangpo Society For Spiti Development

Educational Newsletter No. 18

December 2011

Three Stars For 2011



Outstanding students!! From L to R: Suresh Kumar Negi, Jampa Kelsang, and Chhuldim Giacho.

Three of our senior students achieved magnificently this year. Chhuldim Giacho and Jampa Kelsang have begun studies at the Indira Gandhi Medical College in Shimla. (Only one other student from the Rinchen Zangpo Society [a girl] has qualified to study medicine previously.) Chhuldim Giacho began his school life living at our former hostel in Yol, Kangra Valley. Jampa Kelsang is the first student from our own school, Munsel-ling, to go all the way to medical college. Suresh Kumar Negi, a previous scholarship winner, is studying Mechanical Engineering at the prestigious Dr Ambedkar Institute of Technology, Jalandhar, Punjab.

We continue to support these students although they have no individual sponsors. Please help us to help them. Hardly any Spiti people have qualified in the top professions up to now. They are vital so that Spiti people can be responsible for their own affairs and boost their community out of the poverty trap.



Students at Munsel-ling attending our Anniversary Celebration.

Construction And Equipment

Munsel-Ling has grown larger and larger and in a way is becoming a village on its own. Perhaps it already is. And still, the village is expanding. The main new building under construction at Munsel-ling this year is a laboratory block which will have separate Biology, Chemistry and Physics labs. Our old labs housed in the junior school building were simply too small. The new ones will be more practical 30 x 16 ft. Construction has now halted for winter. They will be finished next year. Still much needed but without funding so far are a new dining hall and a new library. At the moment we are still accommodating both in temporary rooms.



Science Lab

We thank TRAS (Trans-Himalayan Aid Society) for allocating money for new solar water heating units for the hostels at Munsel-ling. We look forward to purchasing and setting these up next year when the weather improves and the school is more easily accessible from the outside valley once more. Spiti's brilliant sunshine is ideal for solar water heating for seven or eight months of the year. The portable electric generator that Nadia and friends of Alliance Turquoise provided has proved invaluable in coping with the power cuts in the evenings. It enables the children in the hostels to get diligently on with their studies. All we need now is another similar generator to cover the rest of the school! Solar electricity generation would be preferable but the initial investment is so much higher.



Anniversary Celebrations

On August 1st Munsel-ling School celebrated its biggest annual function ever. A great number of honoured guests gathered from India and abroad. Chief Guest was Wangchuk Gyalpo, director of the Dehradun based NGO Soir IM, who has been a consistent help to us from the very beginning of the school. Guest of Honour was Ram Lal Markanda, our regional MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Shimla). They were flanked by Kachen Tashi Dorje, a tulku (reincarnated lama) from the Spiti village of Lari, Geshe Sonam Wangchuk, the highly respected abbot of Tabo monastery, who is now in his eighties,



Anniversary Celebrations: In attendance, Kachen Tashi Dorje, Geshe Sonam Wangchuk, Ram Lal Markanda (MLA), and performers from Munsel-ling and abroad.

and several abbots from different nunneries. Two foreign volunteer teachers completed the guest list, Jacky Bush from Ireland and Sheyli Johnstone from the USA. Prize giving and entertainments took place on our new permanent outdoor stage which incorporates three dressing rooms, as yet open to the skies. Mr. Markanda promised to find Rs 400,000/- from government funds to finish the roof. For the first time, all the children, including the youngest, participated in the dances, songs and plays. This year's school function was the best attended and most enjoyable that we have held.

Personnel

Tsering Dorje left his job as principal at Munsel-ling in order to gain work experience in the USA. After six months there he returns to the Rinchen Zangpo Society as head of accounts for the whole organisation but is enthusiastic to continue teaching his favourite subjects at the school, English, Maths and Indian History. Since his departure Vice-Principal Tsering Dikit has been acting principal. She is from Chicham and she was in the pioneering first



Our math and science teacher, Mr Ratnakar Remali.

batch of girls from Spiti ever to do college studies in Dharamsala -- this with the assistance of the Rinchen Zangpo Society. She has very ably served the society as a teacher and administrator ever since, gaining further qualifications on the way and standing as an example to inspire other Spiti girls to work in the wider community. For some time we have been seeking out a really well-qualified and experienced principal to head up Munsel-ling and its feeder school system. As things stand at the moment that has to be someone from outside Spiti. At the time of writing we are in negotiation with a Tibetan who has eighteen years of distinguished experience, several of them at headmaster level, in the highly regarded Tibetan exile school system in India. If we can recruit him it will be another significant step forward for our organization.

Last year we sent ten girls to Bangalore in south India (a five-day journey from Spiti). This was for Montessori basic teacher training. They have now returned to their home valley. Three work at Munsel-ling and seven at our various feeder schools in the valley, in the KG classes.

This year saw the appointment of a new music teacher from Tibet. Tenzin Kalden received his training from the reputed Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala, where he studied traditional Tibetan instruments as such as the dranyen (a string instrument) and flute but also the violin and guitar, as well as Tibetan dances and songs. He is teaching all these things to the students at Munsel-Ling. With his inventive arrangements of classic Spiti dance favourites he has raised the reputation of Munsel-ling's young performers to new heights of fame; they have been much in demand as performers at many official functions. Dr. Grant Stefanyshen of Winnipeg, Canada generously contributed towards the cost of new musical instruments.

Kelsang Dorje is a new science and maths teacher. A son of parents from Lahaul and Spiti, Kelsang is one of the few local teachers who teach the senior classes. We still rely mostly on outsiders to fill senior teaching posts but that is slowly changing. Other new appointments are of a Tibetan language teacher, a nun from the adjoining district of Kinnaur, some junior teachers from Manipur (in the north-east of India), who as usual have excellent English, plus Mr. A Wungshungmi, computer expert, also from Manipur. The experienced Mr. Ratnakar Remali, a science and math teacher from Andhra Pradesh also joins the team.



Munsel-ling's new music teacher, Tenzin Kalden.

Summer Visits

We were very grateful for the customary summer visits by three teams of medical students from University of British Columbia in Canada as well as two Australian dental hit squads led by Dr. Bob Levis and Dr. Joanne Richardson. The Canadians tackled health and sanitation issues including purification of the school's water supply. Using their by now excellently equipped dental clinic the Aussies sorted out the school children's teeth and then shifted their attention to the adults in the nearby villages. They pulled dozens of rotten teeth. Our young students with their own toothbrushes and with regular input from both Canadians and Australians on oral hygiene will hopefully grow healthier teeth.



Australian dental team at Munsel-ling: Dr Gary Wells and Bonnie Nixon giving treatments to our students.

July also brought the annual visit of Mrs. Kajoli Khanna from Delhi. In her slipstream arrived twenty arts students, who under Kajoli's supervision organized several creative workshops for the children, like dance, theatre and music. At the end of the week, all participants gave an inspiring demonstration of what they had learned during the workshops. The children always look forward to the arrival of Kajoli Khanna. With her creative mind and approach she encourages the children to discover and use their otherwise hidden talents and her generous supply of fizzy drinks as usual helped enormously. Recommended by Kajoli, the so-called Zero Waste Team from far-away Chennai, deep in tropical south India, visited the school a while later. They gave the children all kinds of instructions and advice on how to protect the earth and its environment. They showed films at school and held a workshop where the children turned many different sorts of garbage into art.

In September a duo from the NGO Sparke (Support Positive Alternative and Raising Kindness in Education) visited the school. The connection with us was made by Soir IM. The couple gave a talk on bullying and corporal punishment, which is a huge issue in schools all over India. They distributed a questionnaire among students and teachers in order to raise awareness about the problem and to find out to what extent this troublesome phenomenon occurs in Spiti.



Weaving centre in Rangrik, Spiti.

JSS

Jan Shikshan Sansthan (Institutes of People's Education) is a scheme under the central government of India which provides vocational training to adults. Rinchen Zangpo Society is one of only two NGOs in Himachal Pradesh which have been awarded this scheme's annual grant. In Rangrik we have opened a weaving centre where fifteen

ladies from the village are learning shawl weaving. Nine handlooms have been donated to us by a professor from Rampur and his wife. Ten women will go on to Rampur in Kinnaur for three months intensive training. One person has already gone for a long apprenticeship in carpet weaving at the Soir IM carpet factory in Dehra Dun. Tibetan language classes will take place in winter to promote understanding of the language of our scriptures. (Spiti people speak a dialect of Tibetan.)

Hostels

We have made concentrated efforts to improve the lives of the children in the hostels at Munselling this year. Our staffing ratio is now one “sister” to every twenty children. We have relieved the sisters of their extra duties in the dining room and kitchen in order to ensure that they pay maximum attention to the children before and after school and in the lunch break. We have sought better educated ones so they can help with the children’s homework and attend better to the children’s personal hygiene, as well as keeping the hostels clean and tidy. For five months a Tibetan couple, Nyima Yangdrol and her husband, stayed with us and gave training and assistance in the hostels. They were hostel supervisors for thirty years at Mussoorie Home School, one of the flagship schools of the Tibetan exile community in India. We are very grateful for their experienced help.



Losar Celebrations: Spiti and Tibetan students performing folk dances.

The large washing machine that Benti Banach and friends helped us purchase has been a great help with the children’s clothes.

Sidbhari

Our students very much enjoyed celebrating Spiti losar (new year) on 23rd November (different from Tibetan losar!) at our Rakkar Road Hostel in the company of many guests and other Spiti students from the area. The VIP Chief Guest was Mrs Rinchen Khadro, highly successful director of the Tibetan Nuns Project. Her advice to our students was informed and very pertinent. She complimented our students on their dances and songs, praising them for their gentleness of movement and feeling. The children for the first time performed on the newly completed outdoor stage, which



Mrs Rinchen Khadro of the Tibetan Nun's Project, receiving a VIP pin at the Losar celebrations in Sidhbari.



Losar Celebrations: More varieties of dance.

we have been able to construct with the help of Mr and Mrs Mike and Pat Smith and friends from England. The students resident at the hostel attend various schools, government and private, in the area at senior secondary level. At the same time we hold after-hours coaching classes for these students. These are widely necessary in India to supplement school learning and thereby give students a fair chance of success in their exams. We have hired tutors who are teachers in some of the most renowned schools in the area to take these classes in our purpose built classrooms.

Other Sites

The number of our feeder schools (KG to primary level) in Spiti has now grown to seven! The existing five, two in Kaza and the ones in Losar, Kibber and Sangam were complemented by two new ones in Chicham and Kurik. We have three students cramming for college entrance tests in Chandigarh paid for out of our sponsorship funds. These two boys and one girl are living in a paying guest house. Another four girls have enrolled on nurse training courses in Delhi, joining the six already there. The expenses are mostly met through the amazing generosity of Dr Raina and friends.

New On The Internet

Our new website is almost finished, please stay tuned and stand by! Apologies for the period of absence. There were niggling changeover problems and as we send out this newsletter we're still cleaning up a few bugs. Still at the same address, www.rinchenzangpo.org. Many thanks to our old website administrator Rod Egglestone who played a blinder in getting us a website going as a complete amateur. Thanks to Dom Briggs and Earl Stefanyshen for our new set-up. Great photos, mostly from Earl. (The web developers would like to mention Geshe Graham Woodhouse who supervised our newsletter and web production from start to finish. - Ed.) If you have any interesting photos and news from your visit to Spiti &c. we will consider posting them on a special page in our website.



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