

Extraordinary ordinary days

Schule macht Schule Newsletter October 2018

Dear supporters and friends of the Medical Centre School in Jharkot, dear students and teachers at the Muisches Gymnasium,

Our boarding school mother and Tibetan teacher Tsedol looks after the children not just during term time, but in the holidays too. She had returned to her family at last during the summer holidays when she received the news that Lhakpa Wangmo was not doing well and sprang into action (Lhakpa is one of the girls who, having left the Jharkot school, is continuing her studies at Lekshed Tsal School near Pokhara):

Lhakpa Wangmo is at my home now. She had diarrhoea from last week. Last Friday their warden took her to a nearby doctor and she got medicine but it didn't work well. So I took leave for her for two days and brought her to my home. I told her that if she will not recover till today then tomorrow I can bring her to Pokhara hospital. But she is more better now. She will go to school tomorrow.

Our project in Nepal couldn't work without our fantastic staff on site – and *Schule macht Schule* couldn't run the project without your help!

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Wang ceremony at the Jharkot monastery

1) Your first *Schule macht Schule* newsletter? Or your last?

If you're a Gmail user, you'll have been fishing our newsletter out of your spam folder all this time. We had no idea. However, we've now solved the technical problem that was causing this. You can find previous newsletters you may have missed on our website [here >>](#).

You are receiving this newsletter because you have expressed an interest in *Schule macht Schule* or been involved with the project. If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, please let us know [via email >>](#) or use the "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of the newsletter. Otherwise we will assume you are happy to continue hearing from us 2-3 times a year.

2) New paths, new children and an unusual way of growing older

Penpa Lhamo and Lhakpa Tsering have completed their 6-year basic education in Jharkot (preschool and 5 years primary school) and, thanks to help from our donors, are now able to attend Lekshed Tsal School in Jampaling, 25 km from Pokhara. This boarding school run by an exile Tibetan organisation offers excellent education. Penpa and Lhakpa have joined Class 6 and in their first term have achieved first and second place in their class. We are very proud of their accomplishment! As with all our graduates, the pair will be supported not just financially, but tutors in Jharkot will also keep an eye on them and their contact with their sponsors will continue.

Wangyal (Angya) Gurung is fulfilling his heart's desire: the artistically-talented boy is now training to become a Thangka painter at the Tsering Art School in Kathmandu – the Polish organisation [schoolsforawy.org](#) has made this possible.

The places that came free with the departure of these students were filled straight away:

Tashi Palsang, a boy, and the girl **Tsering Yumi** from Phaylak, a village on the other side of Kali Gandaki, are both 5 or 6 years old. They are able to make occasional visits to their far-off homes with some of the other children from their village, who have been living and studying with us for a while now.

Pasang Mentok (6 or 7 years old) comes from Kagbeni, on the route to Tibet, from which the road diverts to Jharkot.

Tenzin Tarching from Tangya in Upper Mustang is 5 or 6 years old, a younger brother of Sonam Dhendup, who has been with us since May 2017. It was established that the preschool class at Jharkot was too challenging for him and so, in the morning he is collected in a Jeep and attends a Montessori-style kindergarten in the neighbouring village of Kinga. His dream job? Boxer!

Shanti (Tashi Lhamo) is an 8 or 9 year old girl from far-off Trisuli in the Dhading district (more than 137 km away...!). She is a half-orphan and like Pema Tsering she comes from the Tamang ethnic group (most of our children are Gurung). This is her first time attending school and she dreams of one day becoming a teacher.

Why are we not able to give the children's ages exactly? When someone is born over there, their year of birth is given as year "1". The Lhosar festival, the Tibetan New Year (which usually takes place in our February), adds another year to this "age". For everybody. So, someone born in January turns "2" in February. And by our counting is only two months old!



Right, from top:
Tashi Pasang
(someone else's hands ...)
Tsering Yumi
Pasang Mentok

Far left:
Youngest child Tenzin Tarchin
Left:
Shanti is furthest from home



3) A mountain doctor makes a splash at our "clinic"

Right from the start there has always been an Amchi (a doctor of traditional Tibetan medicine) in the project, who treated the children, inhabitants of the valley and hikers with gentle, natural medicines either free of charge or in exchange for a donation.

Since Amchi Tenzin Rigdol took on this role in April 2017, people have been descending upon our little surgery, the "clinic" in great numbers. The Amchi has been seeing up to 600 patients every month and when he takes the bus to Pokhara and gets out at Jomsom, there's a long queue of patients waiting for him and he has to delay continuing his journey.

Amchi Tenzin Rigdol makes most of the medicines himself. The project children love gathering medicinal plants with him – they climb to 4500m above sea level while doing so – and helping him make the compounds, cleaning, drying, grinding the ingredients. And when the Amchi holds a clinic in a tent in neighbouring villages, the oldest children take turns in being his helper – a very special honour.

Photo above right:
Everyone helps gather medicinal plants, the carers, children, volunteers, the Amchi – seen here on the way to a high altitude find-spot.

Right below:
Clinic in Chongur. Amchi Tenzin Rigdol taking a pulse, with Tashi Dolma and Pasang Choe-don assisting. More patients wait outside the tent.



4) Crash course in education for teaching in a mountain village

Imagine that you want to go to Jharkot and work in our project for three months. After completing your final school exams, you're looking for adventure, have little experience with children and you're only familiar with lessons from a student's perspective. Or you've long held a job, with even relevant experience – but only in an Austrian context with well-equipped schools and a functioning administration (no, really!). And then in Jharkot you're met with a situation that you hadn't imagined, with wonderful aspects and unexpected pitfalls. Since 2009 we've sent 40 volunteers off into the wild like this. They have achieved marvellous things and have returned full of enthusiasm, stories and insights. Nonetheless:

Three of them, Rita, Carina and Carina, teachers from kindergarten, primary school and secondary school, thought: this can work better – and put their heads together. They created a crash course about the joys and problems that come working under these conditions, how those problems can be faced and where composure is called for. They are now preparing our volunteers for the very concrete educational challenges in short workshops. Six of their successors have already profited from this course!

Since the beginning of the year there has also been a "handover protocol" for better continuity from volunteer to volunteer – this also enriches the quality of support and teaching for the children. Thank you, Rita, Carina and Carina!



Photos above: the children painting 1 and 10 stones for maths lessons – and profiting from the educational materials taken to Nepal



The children make friends quickly – here with last minute volunteer Marianna!!

5) Wanted – found – and once again: Volunteers wanted

In June we found out that our volunteer for the summer months had dropped out. What now? Via a special edition of our newsletter we found dynamic replacements: July and August were covered by Felix from Salzburg and Marianna from Poland. The pair decided to take on the adventure in just a few days and already have their successful tenure behind them. Now we're trying again:

Wanted:

- There's an opportunity for one or two people to work at our winter school in Pokhara in December and January: spending one or two months with the project kids, living with them, teaching, working, playing. There are exciting experiences to be had, as well as the chance to help shape the children's futures.
- Experience with children and young people are advantageous, English at Matura (B2) level is required.
- *Schule macht Schule* naturally does not require any money for placing and supervising the volunteers.
- If you're interested, please email team@schule-macht-schule.at and introduce yourself. We'll reply straight away!

Help us to guarantee the English lessons for the winter. Please share this message with as many people as possible, those who might be interested, or might know someone else who's up to the task. We're hoping to be able to complete the chain of volunteers in this way, despite time being short.

After her return, Naomi, our volunteer in April and May 2018, wrote to us:

"It feels very strange for this adventure to now be over. I enjoyed it so much and it was great how much freedom I was given and all the things I was able to experience with the children in this family-like relationship..."

Naomi now runs our Facebook page www.facebook.com/schulemachtschule. And as an addendum to this newsletter, you can read a little about her everyday life in Jharkot...

The welcoming committee for Moritz Bernauer from the Musisches Gymnasium, his sister Carolina – who worked in Jharkot in 2017 – and two other „Musisches“ students, Ida and Sophie Schönamsgruber, who accompanied Moritz over there. (Moritz is currently at work alongside English teacher Angela Strasser from Oberwart.)



6) Ballad jukebox and other delights

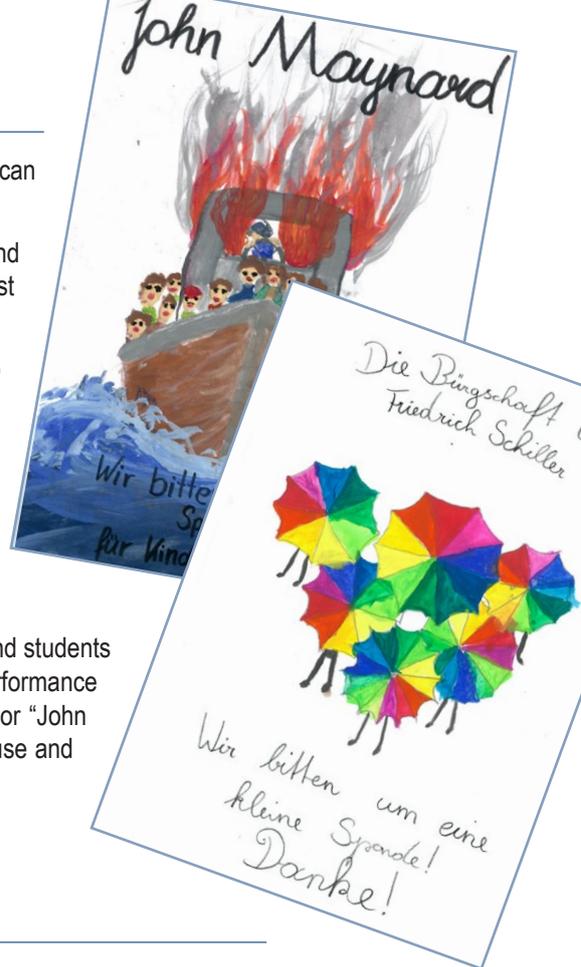
In addition to our wonderful volunteers, it is thanks to our donors that *Schule macht Schule* can give the project children a better start in life:

- **Sponsors** (school classes, teachers, families from the Muisches Gymnasium, and beyond: there's a sponsor family in South Tyrol and a sponsor from Scotland has just signed up too!)
- People who have been motivated to make occasional donations, or who have set up standing orders.
- **Biogena Naturprodukte GmbH**, who has stayed loyal to us for years, and the German **Verein Jharkot-Projekt e.V.** (see newsletter from August 2017: www.schule-macht-schule.at/jharkot/english/pdf/newsletter_2017-08.pdf)

And there are numerous wonderful surprises, such as **Class 2e's Ballad Jukebox**:

On consultation day at the school, the parents marvelled as they were met with posters and students in costume. As with a jukebox, the adults could put money into the slot and then select a performance of one of the ballads: "Der Handschuh", "Die Bürgschaft", "Der Erkönig", "Der Taucher" or "John Maynard". At the end of the day 2e and their headteacher were very proud of the applause and money earned for the project: a wonderful 171 Euros!

In addition, class 2e has decided to sponsor one of our new kids!



7) Money is not everything ...

There are times when we come up against the limit of our capabilities:

Children in the project, children beyond the project, volunteers, personnel in Nepal, the indescribable hassle of Nepalese bureaucracy, correspondence, sponsors, accounts, publicity work, monitoring... even with every scrap of commitment and enthusiasm the day still only has 24 hours.

Here's where we need urgent assistance at the moment:

- We need someone to take on management of memberships. *Schule macht Schule* currently has nominally 30 members. Keeping track of these and sending out membership renewal reminders...

This should be manageable with two to three hours per quarter. Which skills are required? Maintaining a spreadsheet on the computer, writing emails and keeping everything organised.

Would you like to contribute to the continued success of *Schule macht Schule*? Do you know someone else who might? Please email team@schule-macht-schule.at!

- We need someone who can dedicate themselves to the planned construction of the boarding school building in Jharkot. Somebody with a relevant professional background. There has been a plot of land since 2016, there is a concept for the building, there is good contact with "Architects Without Borders Nepal" (see newsletter from September 2016: www.schule-macht-schule.at/jharkot/english/pdf/newsletter_2016-09.pdf)

Since this big step forward, we have established that the current team cannot deal with this task in addition to the existing educational and organisational work. We need somebody to help!

If you're interested in taking up such a challenge, please get in touch for more information. Or pass this appeal for help to someone else who may be able to step in. Contact us via team@schule-macht-schule.at!



Success! (The monsoon is much heavier than 10 years ago. In summer the rain comes through the clay roofs, including at the school. The boys play "catch the drip" – their good mood is almost unbreakable...)

8) ... but it's ever so important: project accounts 2017

Every quarter our team in Nepal sends us meticulous cost reports in which every costs from salaries to pencils and eggs are precisely recorded. We check these records for plausibility and on our project visits every 18 months we do spot checks of the bills and discuss cost

trends with the local project managers. The comparison of 2016 and 2017 looks like this:

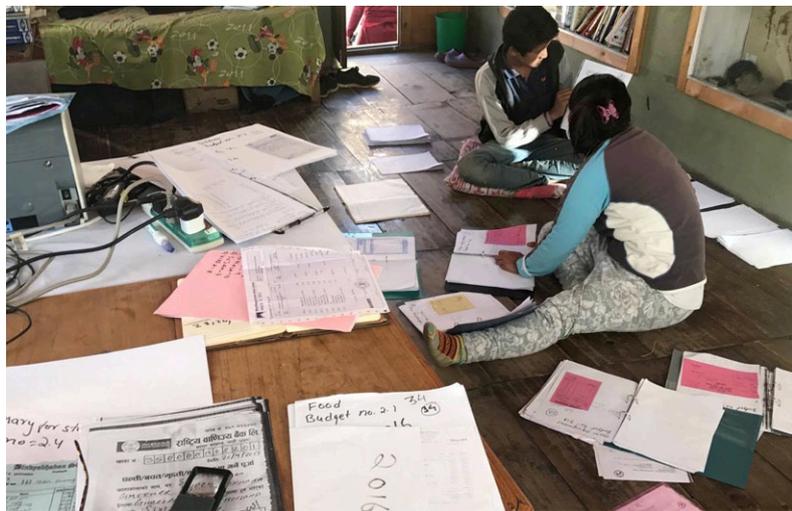
The costs for the project in Jharkot have risen from 3,037,314 NPR (Nepalese rupees) in 2016 to **3,251,610 NPR** for 2017, an increase of around 7%. A positive takeaway: the increase in consumer prices was 4.6%. The more expensive items in the gross amount for the project in 2017 include:

- Increased personnel costs (+15% compared to 2016 – due to a salary adjustment and the employment of a kitchen and laundry helper from May 2017)
- 200% increase in the costs for Nepalese auditing and taxes – we had to pay taxes for the first time as a result of legislative changes

On the plus side, the children and personnel remained healthy this year and so there were barely any healthcare costs – except for the dentist.

Particularly pleasing: the **project's own contribution** to the overall costs rose **from 6% in 2016 to 9% in 2017!** How did that happen? The kids and carers have kept food costs low with the vegetable garden they tend together and our Amchi's work has also been filling the project's coffers. In addition to this, there are also the donations of food from the parents.

Those are the costs for the main project at Jharkot. In 2017 *Schule macht Schule* also enabled seven children, who have "outgrown" Jharkot, to continue their educational or vocational training (there are now nine children on this path). A **further 499.762 NPR** was needed for these children.



Quarterly accounts: boarding school manager Tsedol and Wangyal, who was a huge help in many ways before transferring to art school in April

Please and thank you

On behalf of the children and everyone involved in the project, we say a big thank you for your interest and support. If you would like to support our work, please use our donation account – and let your friends know too!

PS: There's a small collection of videos from Jharkot here: www.youtube.com/user/SchulemachtSchule/videos



Kind regards

Christina Klaffinger

Wolf Pichlmüller

www.schule-macht-schule.at  www.facebook.com/schulemachtschule

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Addendum: Snippets from two eventful months – Naomi reports

Here are a few extracts from Naomi's emails, who was in the project from mid-April to mid-June. She stole the hearts of the children and staff with her cheerful, can-do attitude.

[...]

Tsedol didn't teach today, as Mohan is due to come tomorrow and she needed to prepare some invoices for him. She asked me to take over her **lessons** as I had time available. It went really well – I gave the children tasks and simply did lessons with classes 4 and 5 together, as I had just introduced the "will" future tense to both of them.

They all joined in wonderfully and were driven to be on their best behaviour. It was only the project students though – I don't know why the village children weren't there today... it was the 3 from the class 5. [...]



Naomi in the scrum

In the afternoon I was then together with classes 3, 4 and 5, as well as the UKG [Upper Kinder Garten] and we did craft for a little **theatre piece** that we want to perform at the weekend and the children are determined to record. That means you'll probably see something of it.

[...]

Actors during a break in rehearsals



Last Thursday I unfortunately had **stomach ache**, so I went to the Amchi for treatment, when I had two hours off. It was very nice how spur of the moment it all was, although there are a lot of people around at the moment due to the Saka Dawa Festival and his surgery is always full. [...]

Today the headmaster didn't come in to school until 10:35am. And then Miss Hema spent the last hour grading, rather than teaching – I don't know to what extent that's reasonable or unreasonable.

[...]

Saka Dawa [the festival of the birth and enlightenment of Buddha] is certainly worth seeing! It's unbelievable how much is going on in Jharkot. I thought I knew many of the faces in Jharkot, but I keep meeting new people. [...]

Yesterday Tsedol and the older children wanted to hang a garland of **prayer flags** above the Muktinath temple and I was able to go with them. It was really surprising – I knew what we had in mind, but I didn't realise we would climb the whole mountain.

[...]

The traditional sand mandala at the Jharkot monastery for Saka Dawa. Made over the course of a week by the monks, it is ultimately poured into the river in a solemn ceremony – a symbol of impermanence.



My **visit at Phaylak** was exciting too! Learning more about the family backgrounds of the children was of course another perspective [Naomi accompanied children from Phaylak on their home visit].

I stayed with Tsering Yangdon's **family**. Her parents kept trying to communicate with me and it was all really laid-back. Tsering Mentok was there too – the pair are best friends and are such a great combo. Even before the visit they made such a sweet, trusting and honest impression. Mentok in particular always explains a great deal to me and always translates if the little ones don't understand me when they're playing.

Coming back to translation. I would say that even though the stay in Phaylak was brief, it was super practice for the girls, as they had to translate a lot for their families, who always wanted to know what I was saying and asking. I could see how keen they were to do it well for me and their family. It was really fun and wonderful to see the children in a very different environment

We also visited Tenzin and Yumi's families.



The hanging bridge on the way to Phaylak

On the roof of Tsering Yangdon's house ... down in the centre of the village by the house door ... and in the field with Tsering Yangdon's mother



I took a little **yak cheese** to Yangdon's family and bought us some Cola along the way and shared it out as I was really tired. At Yumi's aunt's shop I bought some hairclips for Tenzin, Mentok, Yangdon and Yumi for 50 rupees each (I figured a little treat wouldn't hurt). Oh yes, Mentok had forgotten her **toothbrush**, or simply not packed it, so I bought another for her and emphasised the importance of us all brushing our teeth together.

All in all, it was a wonderful two days! And then back to Saka Dawa – where the excitement continued...

Love and Namaste!!

Naomi

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