

## A summer with highs and lows

*Schule macht Schule Newsletter September 2019*

Dear supporters and friends of the Medical Centre School in Jharkot, dear students, parents and teachers of the Musisches Gymnasiums,  
A workstation above the clouds: after six weeks, we're sitting in the aeroplane on our way from Kathmandu to Vienna, reflecting on our time in Nepal and starting to write this report for you. We got to know the new children, discussed developments and problems, and there were times of stress and joy – often at the same time.

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### 1) Collecting plants and preparing medicine ...

Although the children and their education are the top priority for us, the second remit of the project – the Traditional Medical Centre, the conservation and cultivation of traditional Tibetan medicine – is gaining significance.

We joined the party gathering medicinal plants twice. The children always pitch in. The older ones were proud to show us sacks full of blue flowers, or roots that turn pink as they dry (we didn't manage to grasp the Tibetan names of the plants!). The little children go along too, playing on the steep terrain and being given their first collecting instructions.

*Gathering medicinal herbs in Lhadup in the heights of Jharkot (above right),*

*Or high above the village at more than 4000m above sea level – it's really tiring (right)*





The cooks Deumaya and Sita had been up since 5am and had not only prepared a picnic for us with warm dishes (and coffee!) for 30 children and adults, but had also carried it all for us. It tasted fantastic.



*After eating the children have their energy for running around and dancing again!*



As usual, the next day the harvest of medicinal plants was washed and laid out to dry in the monastery courtyard. It was later crushed in a mortar and then ground up in a recently purchased electric grinder. On such occasions, anyone with some time to spare joins in: our Amchi (doctor of traditional Tibetan medicine) and his assistant Anjam; the cooks – including those from the monastery – and the monks; project leader Tsedol, the volunteers, the children ... there are sometimes 15, 20 people in the courtyard, working alongside each other until it grows dark, joking and laughing.

*Such wonderful dry weather is rare in summer – it's actually monsoon season...*

## 2) ... for a plethora of patients

For whom is so much medicine required? Amchi Tenzin Rigdol, who is also ordained a Buddhist monk, has been working with us for a good two years. The number of patients has increased nearly tenfold in this time (see section 7). They come from far away and no matter where you enquire of him in the region: everyone knows his name; everyone knows people he has helped.



Once a week, the Amchi and his new assistant Anjam and one of the older children make their way to a village to hold a surgery, taking with them a heavy load of regularly required medicines, blood pressure gauge and patient portfolios. The consultation with the Amchi is free of charge to all. The medicinal preparations are available at low prices – or free of charge to those who are particularly poor. Many patients pay generously – often in the form of fruit, eggs, and grain. All these offerings make their way to the project kitchen to benefit everybody.

*Above right: Waiting in the monastery courtyard: on busy days as many as 40 patients come to see the Amchi.*

*Below: Mobile surgery in the neighbouring village of Kinga. Tsering Yangdon manages the pharmacy; the Amchi takes a patient's pulses for the basis of his diagnosis.*





Anjam has joined the ranks due to the influx of patients: the Amchi would not manage this work alone. Anjam, an energetic young man from the Jampaling Tibetan refugee camp recently passed his school leaving exams at the SOS Hermann Gmeiner school in Pokhara and is now employed in the project.

Aside from his duties in preparing and issuing medicine, he is important as an interpreter. As well as his native Tibetan, he speaks excellent Nepali and English, which allows the Amchi to better communicate with western patients, or Nepalese-speakers from other regions. (Oh, and Anjam is like a big brother to the children. He sleeps in the boys' room, so that a supervisor is present at night too).



*Anjam proves himself as the in-house hairdresser – here Pema Tsering gets a stylish new haircut – and as a helper in the craft lesson...*

### 3) Little Bipal

Well, that went unexpectedly fast: in the last newsletter we introduced seven children who either didn't have sponsors yet, or whose sponsors could no longer support them. The three girls who were moving on to a new school or starting to train as Amchis are already taken care of! The young boys, Tsering Dawa and Karma Tarchin are now looking forward to the first letters from their sponsors too.

Dicky Dolkar and Choedup are still waiting for sponsors. And 8-year-old Bipal has joined them too. He is the child of a chambermaid from Kagbeni, who has three children to care for.



*... Dickiy Dolkar and Choedup would love to get sponsors soon too*



*Here is Bipal, the boy with the green jacket, still a little uncertain, though much more confident now.*

"Do you mind he is not Mustangi, but Nepali?" Tsedol asked us – meaning that he doesn't come from the mountains, but rather from the lowlands, is Hindu rather than Buddhist like the other children, his mother tongue is Nepali and is not Tibetan. No, we don't mind!

Due to his mother's job the young boy had to change school often and was most recently in Class 3 in a village school: the standard of education there was so low that when he came to the project school, he had to be observed to determine whether he could join Class 1 straightaway, or should have a few months of preschool first. We were there when Bipal's mother brought him to the boarding school and said goodbye – he cried bitterly. It wasn't long though, before some of the other boys took him under their wing and invited him to play. We have since heard that he has settled in well!

### 4) Sisters by decree

How do you solve the problem of taking care of many young children, who are still very dependent, when you don't have enough staff? Five UKG children (UKG=Upper Kindergarten) are now part of the boarding school family!

Well, boarding school manager Tsedol has provided the little ones with "sisters": each of the very young children is looked after by an older girl on the quite dangerous route to school. The sisters take care of their "siblings" when they are unhappy or perhaps can't find their jackets. They help them write their letters and with their studies. And beds are shared too.

*Shanti accompanies her little "brother" Karma Tarchin back to the boarding school – he has no lessons in the afternoons*





## 5) Outstanding problem: the bumpy partnership with the public school

There was a key problem we wanted to tackle on this trip – which we've only been able to solve to a certain degree. Since the end of 2014 there's been an arrangement between the public school and the Medical Centre School in Jharkot: the village children and project children are taught together, with the cooperation on equal terms to everyone's benefit.

Well, with the joint lessons it became more and more the case that two-thirds of the teaching was done by the project staff, because the public side did not provide enough teachers, or put them on leave, or transferred them without providing a replacement. Since 2015 the headmaster has changed 4 times and there have been 17 changes of teachers (in just four posts!). The equal terms were gradually eroded too: decisions were not made collegially, but rather dictated. And the project children's educational achievements began to suffer.

Time to hit the emergency brake!

In two meetings with the Gaunpalika (District Governor), his top school official and our Nepalese project team, we wanted to achieve a radical change in the situation. Our aim was to obtain a licence for our own public school. We have not managed that (yet). At the insistence of the Gaunpalika and with the promise of his greatest possible support, we have arranged a trial period of six months in which important steps towards a high quality joint school must be taken – focusing in particular on the deployment of qualified and engaged teaching staff on the state side, better governance and a more fruitful cooperation. If that doesn't work, then the dissolution of the cooperation will become a possibility.

(A big thank you here to *Basanta Subedi*, friend and adviser to the project from Pokhara, who helped us with the negotiations.)



*Above: The school committee from Jharkot discusses the situation  
Below: The negotiating team smiles – time will tell whether they should.*

## 6) Assignments for the adventurous: opening for volunteers!



The fact that the project children (despite the situation described) are not just able to write English, but also have the courage to speak and express themselves in the language is thanks to our delegates (volunteers). For more than ten years now – and almost without fail – one or two delegates have been responsible for the English lessons. They also play with the children and according to their personal taste, do sports with them, art and craft, painting, or put on little theatre productions...

Inge (61, from Germany) and Jeroen (19, from Salzburg) are currently in Jharkot. They will be replaced by Klara and Arianna, two graduates of the Musisches Gymnasium, and Sonja will take on their duties in the winter school. She

*Inge and Jeroen in Class 2. They have divided the children in order to be able to teach them according to their particular abilities. The respective academic levels of the government and project children are too different to let them do one and the same programme.*



could do with a good partner to join her in January and February. From mid-April both posts are available again – a chance for people who want to spend at least six weeks in a familial project high up in the Himalayas, where they will live, work and play with children, have adventures and be a part of shaping these children's futures.

Experience in working with children and young people is an advantage, English at Matura (B2) level / A-Level standard is required. Schule macht Schule of course does not require money for the placement and support of the volunteers.

Please share this information with anyone who may be interested – or who might know someone who would be!

Interested parties should email [team@schule-macht-schule.at](mailto:team@schule-macht-schule.at) to briefly introduce themselves. We'll reply right away!

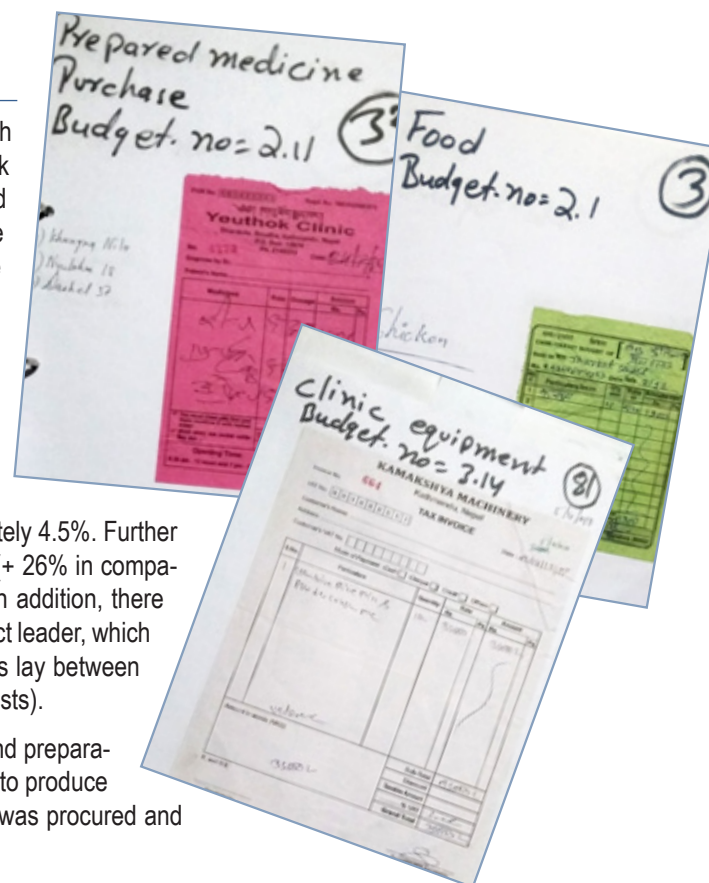
*The delegates are in demand during free time too – whichever activities they take with them.*



## 7) No small matter: project accounts 2018

Every quarter our team in Nepal sends us meticulous cost breakdowns in which everything from salaries to pencils and eggs are precisely listed. We check this information for plausibility and when on site we look at random bills and discuss cost development with the project leaders Mohan and Tsedol – the same was the case this year. The comparison of 2018 with the year before looks like this:

The **total expenses** for the project in Jharkot rose from 3,251,610 NPR (Nepalese rupees) in 2017 to **4.215.206 NPR** in 2018, roughly 34,000 Euros, an increase of 30%. Nearly half of this was balanced by the increased revenue from the Amchi clinic – leaving an increased expenditure for Schule macht Schule of 16%.



- The increase in **consumer prices** in Nepal accounted for approximately 4.5%. Further reasons for the increased expenditure: increased **personnel costs** (+ 26% in comparison with 2017) – in 2018 we significantly increased the low wages. In addition, there was a re-definition of Tsedol's responsibilities and her promotion to project leader, which came with an appropriate financial reward (the net monthly income thus lay between 65 and 180 €, plus food and lodging, as well as travel and healthcare costs).
- The **Amchi clinic** acquired a substantial supply of medicinal plants and preparations, which either can't be found in our region or which are not possible to produce with our available means. The machine for pulverising the dried plants was procured and an electronic balance was purchased.
- In comparison to 2016 – before Amchi Tenzin Rigdol came along – the total expenditure for the clinic is 3.5 times higher, while the income is 7 times higher. The number of patients treated has increased tenfold.
- Rent for the **winter school quarters** was 21% higher.



Good news: the **financial contribution** of the project to the overall costs rose **9% in 2017 to 19% in 2018!**

How did that happen? The children and staff kept their food costs low by using produce from the vegetable garden they tend together. Our Amchi's work also filled the project's coffers, while the food donations from the children's parents also helped.

Those are the cost developments for the main project in Jharkot. In 2018 Schule macht Schule also enabled the **further education or vocational training** of nine children who had "outgrown" Jharkot. For these children an additional 641,158 NPR as required – about 5000 Euros.

*Above: Each individual expense is meticulously documented.*

*Left:  
The results of gathering the medicinal plants in Lhadup affect our annual balance sheet – and not just financially...*

## Please and thank you

It is not only our loyal supporters and sponsors to whom we are deeply grateful. Our sincere thanks also go to our faithful partners from **Förderverein Freundeskreis Jharkot-Projekt e.V.** in Steinheim and to **Lotte von Süßkind Stiftung**. **These contributions and donations mean** that Schule macht Schule is able to manage the ever-increasing duties and responsibilities of the project.

And as always to our readers too: on behalf of the children and all those involved in the project, we say a heartfelt thank you for your interest and support. Please make use of our donation account if you believe our work to be meaningful and worthwhile. For example, a monthly standing order of 10 Euro would be a significant help!

Kind regards



Christina Klaffinger



Wolf Pichlmüller

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## Addendum: Ngawang Tsering – a success story

If you want to avoid the gruelling journey out of the mountains and back to Pokhara on bumpy roads, blocked or damaged by landslides, then you can spend the night in Jomsom at 2700m above sea level. The next morning you just need to hope that – before 10 am – the clouds are on your side and small aircraft can fly. After that comes the gusty wind that makes flying in the Kali Gandaki valley too dangerous.

So, we checked into our usual little hotel in the evening and booked our flight. Then came a call from our former student Ngawang Tsering: he was in the neighbouring village of Marpha and wanted to come and visit us. An hour later, he arrived, having travelled the dusty roads on his motorbike, and happily accepted the invitation to dine with us.

Together we reminisced ... when we first came to Jharkot in 2008 Ngawang Tsering was 9 years old, a bright and charming young boy from the village of Phaylak, who could wrap you around his little finger. He had a talent for drawing and painting and when his friend Sonam Wangdu began his training as a Tanka painter in Kathmandu in 2012 – supported by our Polish partner Schoolsforaway.org – the 14 year-old followed in his footsteps one year later.

He is now 20 years old, has completed his training and is earning a living as a painter and restorer. For the past three months he has been working in Marpha, where he and a team of six artists are producing the wall paintings for the temple in nearby Chairö, restoring the old cult image. There's no question, Ngawang Tsering has found his place!



*We taught for the first time in Nepal in 2008. Nine-year-old Ngawang immersed himself in copying an image of the Buddha in Jharkot's Gompa.*



*In 2013, at the start of his training as a Tanka painter, Ngawang showed us the sketchbook in which he practised the traditional painting according to strict rules.*



*Ngawang Tsering this summer at Chairö temple, with the statue of Padmasambhava, which he has restored.*