

## Christmas is coming – in spite of everything Schule macht Schule Newsletter, December 2021

Dear supporters and friends of the Medical Centre School in Jharkot, dear students, parents and teachers at the Muisches Gymnasium, This newsletter should reach you just before Christmas and perhaps it will convey a little of the joy that working for the Schule macht Schule project brings people, despite all adversities!!

Tsering Penpa, who is already attending college – supported by schoolsfaraway.org – wrote to us:

*While reading your message I missed my past days at Medical Centre winter school where we celebrated Christmas. It has been really great days celebrating with you and all the other volunteers. We enjoyed a lot and those letters which were sent by our pen friends and god parents felt really exciting while opening those. Best moments ever!*

Life is mostly back to normal in Nepal again – although nobody knows for how long. In any case: our children are at the winter school and are all healthy, as are our colleagues. Since a lot of time has passed since the last newsletter there's a great deal to report – enjoy!



*Christmas at the winter school 10 years ago. Tsering Penpa is the boy with his face turned upwards – almost at the edge on the right*

1. Lockdown follows lockdown follows lockdown	1
2. Adventure for volunteers in Nepal	2
3. Warming body and soul: "Muse" bags	2
4. An almost complete separation and new space...	3
5. ... and a new teacher	3
6. Welcome to our new young students	4
7. More time	4
8. Please and thank you: Season's Greetings!!	5
Appendix: Letters from outside – Tsering Lhamo and Dolma	5

*Back to the in-house hairdresser after 10 months' lockdown*



### 1. Lockdown follows lockdown follows lockdown

Back in February we were happy to have the children back with us at last, after ten months of lockdown and improvised online teaching, which unfortunately not everyone could access. Then in April there was a two-week holiday back home with the parents and in mid-April lessons resumed in the mountains – Delta, the "Indian variant" spread rapidly through Nepal – and at the beginning of May the schools shut once more. Schools in the mountain provinces were not able to open again until 8 August 2021.

There are currently between 150 and 300 confirmed new cases every day in Nepal.; the numbers cannot be compared to those in Europe due to the low number of tests. However, the 4000 daily cases being confirmed at peak in October 2020 enables a reasonable comparison to be made with



Volunteers in summer 2019: Inge doing handcrafts with the children in the monastery courtyard, Jeroen during English lesson, talking to Bimala from the public school

today's situation. Nepal's borders are open to vaccinated tourists with a current PCR certificate. It remains to be seen how the country will fare with Omicron..

## 2. Adventure for volunteers in Nepal

*Living, working, playing in an almost familial project with kids for 6 weeks or more, high in the Himalayas? Exciting experiences and the chance to help shape futures? Many people, young and old, look for such adventures through commercial providers. At Schule macht Schule, nobody makes money from the volunteer: they give enough!*

When Covid made itself known, we had already assigned the volunteers for more than a year. The wonderful young people who were to take over from Sonja from Germany, were all prepared and almost packing their bags, when suddenly it was no longer possible for them to go. We cancelled the planned volunteers: after all, who would want to be responsible for someone falling ill with Covid so far from home?

Now we want to offer the opportunity to head to the project as a delegate of Schule macht Schule once again. With vaccinations and careful behaviour, it should be possible to sufficiently minimise the risks. We will finally be back at the project ourselves in April/May. Probably.

Perhaps you know someone who would be an option? We very much hope to be able to assign delegates again, in spite of the uncertain future. Mohan and Tsedol always tell us how much they value the work of the volunteers:

*Please try to find volunteers! Without them we have no one to impart the valuable education usually given by the guests, especially English speaking and listening. Our students get such skills mostly from the volunteers, and with them they are also developing confidence.*

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

## 3. Warming body and soul: "Muse" bags

For the most part, the children's family homes have neither running water nor showers. Thus, personal care is quite toilsome and the one shower at the boarding school in Jharkot appears a luxury. This is probably why nobody complained when our small solar panel was irreparably damaged in a blizzard, and everyone was content with cold water, or warmed up in a pot ...

Then the 7ai art group at the Musisches Gymnasium designed and produced great bags with their teacher Birgit Egger-Gassner and sold them, with half the proceeds going to Schule macht Schule: the well over 800 € that was raised means that a new solar panel is within reach. Thank you again, 7ai and Birgit!



The 7ai group with their two bag designs chosen for sale



When school started again in August, the covers had to be washed – in the ice cold stream. The children helped and had fun!

#### 4. An almost complete separation and new space...

Our project school worked closely with the public school in Jharkot from 2014 to 2020, with our teaching staff and volunteers giving lessons at the public school. In spite of numerous approaches and meetings, including with representatives from the village community, and school and local authorities, more went wrong than right. Our extremely reliable employees were overworked and the arrangement was detrimental to our children's performance and enjoyment in learning. This is why in December 2020 we agreed upon a fundamental dissolution of the collaboration: our children are still nominally students at the public school and take the trimester exams there, however they are taught separately.

We are now looking to develop ideas for occasional joint projects with the public school – there are new teachers there, with whom we hope new approaches may be possible.

In recent years our successful Amchi's ordination, store of medicinal herbs and production medicinal products has required more and more space. Our one proper teaching room in the monastery was therefore given over to the clinic. No problem all the time we were going to the public school for lessons ... but things were tight for the now "separated" school. Tsedol and Mohan have been able to rent an empty building in the village, a traditional clay building with five small rooms. Equipped with insulating mats, seat cushions, whiteboard and posters, there's now a welcoming new learning environment, just a few minutes' walk from the monastery, boarding school and kitchen – important for the lunch break!



*The rented building and the children during the first term exam, in one of the friendly classrooms*

#### 5. ... and a new teacher

The separation from the public school also meant that we needed our own teacher for Nepali lessons. So Tsedol and Pasang Lhamo have now been joined by Tsering Choedon. She is the older sister of our student Lhakpa Wangmo (Lhakpa graduated from the project school and will take her A Levels at the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School in eighteen months).

Tsering Choedon (Chhato) has settled into the team well. She introduces herself in this letter:

*Hello, Namaste!*

*Please let me take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new teacher of Shree Jharkot Traditional Medical Centre and School. My name is Tsering Chhato Gurung and I am 23 years old. I am a permanent resident of Jharkot village. I had completed class 10 from Dhaulagiri Secondary Boarding school in Jomsom and +2 [Anm.: Matura] from HIM's, which is located in Kathmandu.*

*Lastly, thank you so much that I can work with these wonderful students and teachers.*

*Sincerely, Tsering Chhato Gurung*



*The big kids are allowed to collect medicinal herbs with the Amchi – often at heights of more than 4000m above sea level. It's pretty hard work and you work up an appetite.*



## 6. Welcome to our new young students

The long Covid-related closure between March 2020 and January 2021 meant that we were not able to accept any new children. In April 2021 Sonam Dhendup, Tenzin Tsewang and Tsering Wangmo moved on to the Lekshed Tsal School. This is now the established route: 5 years at the project school, 2 years there and then onward to the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School, until A Levels if possible. Our team keeps in touch with the children and Schule macht Schule and the godparents cover the school and accommodation costs.

Finally, also this year in April, five new children were enrolled into the project. They are:

**Lhakpa Dolma, \*2014**, comes from the Dolpa region, which has barely opened up. She is talented in all subjects and a little genius at learning by heart. She has very young parents and being away from home for the first time was not easy. She doesn't like romping around in the courtyard during her free time, preferring instead to go back to her room to gossip and play "girl games" with her friend **Dawa Lhazom, \*2013**, from Kagbeni. For example, they use leaves to create the floor-plans for a house, kitchen, rooms ... and they lose themselves in mother-child roleplaying games. Dawa Lhazom does well at school too, although she speaks softly and prefers to just nod. She can now happily be drawn out of her shell by Sita, the cook, though.

Little **Tsering Gonpo** from Phaylak, \* 2015, is a lively, smart boy. He wants to be involved in everything, even the Carrom game, the rules of which are still too difficult for him. He is completely independent and enthusiastic about personal hygiene, even washing and drying his socks every day without being asked. Although he is in the UKG class (preschool), he joins Class 1 for Tibetan lessons and is the best of the group. His friend **Dawa Tenzin, \*2012**, comes from the Dolpa region like Lhakpa Dolma. His first taste of school is in Class 1 with us and he isn't finding learning very easy. He likes to have fun with Tsering Gonpo and in their free time the pair often ask for the sack of Lego and lose themselves in building ...

**Tsering Bhutik, \*2011**, is Dawa Lhazom's sister. She is the only new child to be joining Class 2. Tsering Bhutik is a peaceful child and is passionate about drawing. Before she came to us, she lived at a school run by nuns in Kathmandu. Her parents were concerned about her being in the cramped conditions there during the pandemic and took great effort to get a place for the girl in our school.

### Wanted: godparents, godsisters, godbrothers...

All the new students of recent years found godparents very quickly – we hope to manage that for these five children too. A "godparent" can be a family, an individual, a school class or group ... Godparents are intended to provide long-term financial support for the child and to keep a little personal contact with them. If you would like to know more, you can find out more [on our Website](#) or send us an [E-Mail](#).

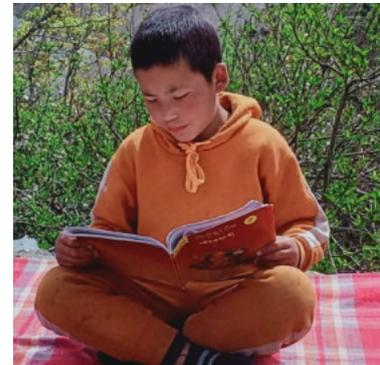
*Our first goodbye in 2008: all these children are pretty big now, but – as you'll see in the appendix – are still part of the project family.*



*Lhakpa Dolma, and below  
Tsering Gonpo*



*Dawa Lhazom, and below  
Dawa Tenzin*



*Tsering Bhutic,  
Dawa Lhazom's elder sister*

## 7. More time

Wolf and I went to Jharkot for the first time in 2008 and spent 3 months there with the children. Since then, management of the project has become a major part of our lives. And we now have more time to give it: I have stopped working as a teacher. We remain devoted to the Nepal project of course and are fully committed to our roles as part of the Verein *Schule macht Schule – Nepalprojekt des Musischen Gymnasiums* organisation.

You can reach us any time via email: [team@schule-macht-schule.at](mailto:team@schule-macht-schule.at) and since the autumn, Christina Minimayr has been available as a direct contact at the Musisches Gymnasium. Thank you, Chrissi!

## 8. Please and thank you: Season's Greetings!!

As always – and particularly at this time: we give you our deepest thanks on behalf of the children and everyone involved in the project, for your loyalty, for your interest and for your financial and non-material support. You make it possible, even in these more than challenging times, for a small community in Nepal to continue to live and slowly grow.

Big thanks also goes to Freundeskreis Jharkot-Projekt e.V. in Steinheim, Murr in Germany, for their trustworthy cooperation and their essential contribution to the project budget.

We wish you and your loved ones a contemplative, fulfilling and peaceful Christmas holiday, as well as health for this year and the next. Here's to a light on the horizon for us all.

The letters from Dolma and Lhamo Tsering are included here for you to read .... While you keep your fingers crossed that the letters and little godparent gifts, which are on their way through the post to Nepal, arrive safely and soon!



Christmas wishes for the godparents

*Wolf Pichlmüller*

Wolf Pichlmüller

*Christina Klaffinger*

Christina Klaffinger

## Appendix: Letters from outside – Tsering Lhamo and Dolma

16-year-old **Tsering Lhamo** from Phaylak joined the preschool class in May 2010, when she was only just 5 years old. She was a lively, inquisitive child, whose eyes sparkled with mischief. In April 2017, she was one of the first to move on to the Lekshed Tsal School. Together with her friends, she founded the excellent reputation our children have at this school – they are all very readily given places there. In April 2019 she graduated to the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School, where she is once more a highly appreciated student – she tells us:

*It's me Tsering Lhamo. It's been long time I haven't contacted you...*

*How are you doing there?? We are fit and fine here... After lockdown, our school has already started months ago and from January 16 we will have our second term exam. I think that will be physically and I hope it goes well. We will put all our efforts and study hard, but the most important thing is that we have to study for our SEE board exam and get a good grade so that it will be easy for us to choose which stream will be okay to go through...*

*I have become schools girl captain this year. Its my second time being leader. It's a great opportunity being a captain in high school and I will do my best...*

*Stay safe and take care^pl feel very lucky to be part of our project family...*

*Warm regards*

*Yours, Tsering Lhamo*



2021 as Girls Captain (school representative) at the SOS school



Bathing in the river in 2010, and 2017 at the Lekshed Tsal School

(Note: The SEE board exam is the central national written exam, which decides the advancement into Class 11. A 12<sup>th</sup> grade

qualification has recently been declared the standard (in theory) of Nepalese school education; there is no system of vocational training comparable to ours.)



**Dolma from Tangbe** in Upper Mustang is 22 years old. She came to the project at the age of 8 and, when she was 15, moved directly to the Sorig Bumshi Institute for Tibetan Medicine (that was possible at the time with special preparation for the requirements there. Nowadays our children follow the path previously described, attending school until Class 12). Since her transfer, Dolma's medicinal training has been financed by our friends at the Polish organisation [schoolsfaraway.org](http://schoolsfaraway.org). She writes:

*It has been more than a month since we are back from our 3 months stay at Dhorpatan, collecting medical herbs and treating patients. Nowadays we are having our regular classes, and our final exam will be mid of February. And hopefully it's my graduation around April, I'm in 5th course now! So I'll be graduating soon – but only if I pass!*

*My mom is here in Kathmandu too, I met her last Saturday. She will be staying here until winter ends.*

*I am teaching English to the junior medical students here. I'm good at English because of the Jharkot project's education level, all thanks to the English teaching volunteers I've learned from. By the grace of your support the project is still going on with lots of good helping hands. We all are really blessed.*

*Hope our bonding never ends  
Sending love and hugs  
Dolma*



*Dolma in 2008, when we met her for the first time, with our then youngest Lhakpa Chenzum*

*2021 with her mum in Kathmandu*



*Dolma's home village of Tangbe  
At the Sorig Bumshi Institute chemist  
Travelling in Dhorpatan*

[www.schule-macht-schule.at](http://www.schule-macht-schule.at)  [www.facebook.com/schulemachtschule](https://www.facebook.com/schulemachtschule)

**Spendenkonto** bei der Volksbank Salzburg:  
Schule macht Schule | IBAN: AT09 4501 0000 0811 1486 | BIC: VBOEATWW

Subscribe or unsubscribe to our newsletter: just send an email with the subject "subscribe" or "unsubscribe" to [team@schule-macht-schule.at](mailto:team@schule-macht-schule.at)