

Unexpected...

Schule macht Schule Newsletter December 2023

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



The unexpected ... comes often. So that's why this newsletter isn't just full of the joy of moving the children into the new house and other pre-Christmas happenings, but also tells the tale of another new, unexpected challenge.

As always, enjoy the read!

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1. We're living in Mustang House!

In mid-November, winter school began in Bhakunde for our 20 primary school pupils. They're now living for the first time in Mustang House, our very own residential building, planned by Christoph Brandstätter. For the first time, they have sufficient (warm!) showers, and toilets available, and there is enough electric lighting in every room ...

We're still standing in amazement at it all: when building engineer Rajendra Paudel said in March that if everything went well, the building would be ready in a year, we felt that was a very ambitious prediction. In fact, it all went

Above: Dawa Sangmo and Kunga Tashi during the free reading lesson.

On the circumferential balcony, in front of the dormitories on the first floor. On the left you can cross to the school building via a broad, covered "bridge", under which the water foams during monsoon season.



very differently and – in a positive sense – unexpectedly: construction began in April and moving day came in November!

The new building is connected via bridges to the old workshop, which has been adapted into classrooms, and is still missing most of its furniture. We're improvising: the children are sleeping on mattresses on the floor and their few possessions are stored on shelves that we've pilfered from the school building. In the dining room, which also serves as the prayer room, the children sit on thin mats and eat at flat little tables, of which there are too few. In the pantry, sacks of rice, cans of cooking oil and gas bottles are piled on the floor.

But none of it matters, because for one thing the children and staff are unbelievably humble, and secondly, they know that they can expect proper equipment for their house to come bit by bit thanks to support from the Lions Club Salzburg..



The old workshop building, where renovations are now complete too, serves as a teaching and activity area:

Online yoga in the hall on the first floor (the television was donated by Sonam Wangdu, a former Jharkot student who is now grown up), craft in the former improvised kitchen, morning assembly (in the traditional chupa on Wednesdays) on the veranda in front of the classrooms. The brick-red wall in the background is Mustang House!



2. A wonderful promise

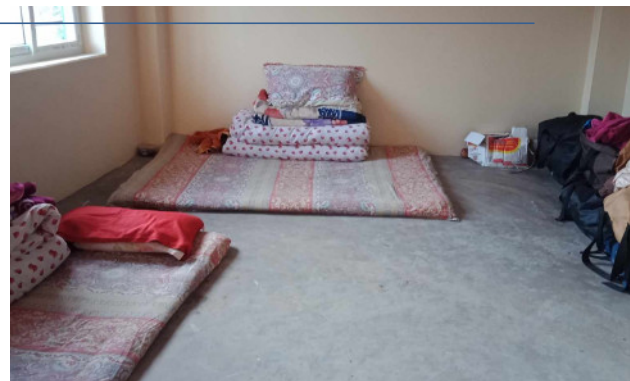
The Lions Club Salzburg has already offered support for some of the technical equipment and so for example we have been able to have good quality lighting fixtures and fittings installed, as well as emergency power supply and a biogas system.

The Lions Club will also be making decent furnishings a reality:

- With 4-6 children in each dormitory, they will sleep in bunk beds and share a simple wardrobe.
- The dining room will be furnished with traditional low dining tables and benches, as well as a "European" table and chairs for guests. There will also be an altar for the daily Buddhist pujas.



- Beds and wardrobes will be added to the staff bedrooms and guest room.
- A biogas and bottled gas cooker is planned for the kitchen, as well as sufficient shelving. There may even be a refrigerator.
- The pantry will be wonderfully practical with a simple shelving system..



Dawa Tenzin and Tsering Dawa are looking forward to have beds instead of the mattress camp! (above)



Above left: Teatime in the improvised dining room.

Left: Anyone wanting to take a shower needs to put on the pink flip flops so that everything stays nice and clean as long as possible



We have commissioned a local carpenter to build the furniture. It's cheaper to do it that way in Nepal than to buy something from a catalogue that would be imported from India or China anyway. The wonderful team from the Children's Village in Bhakunde is helping us once more to organise everything in the best way possible.

Thank you, Lions Club Salzburg,
thank you Season and Tanka in Nepal!



Lions Club Salzburg

Children's Village director Tanka Gurung, project manager Tsering Dolkar and Mr Muslim, the carpenter, discuss details and prices for our furniture.

3. A shock in August: Eviction from the monastery!

There were rumours in the spring, but we didn't want to believe it. There's a lot of talking in Nepal and a lot is considered that then doesn't come to anything for years.

But in the end, it came to be that headquarters of the ordinance under which Jharkot monastery stands had decreed that a kind of high school for monks should be built in Jharkot. The section of the building on the monastery grounds that the project has been able to use and has maintained in good condition since the late 90s is to be torn down and a new building will be constructed in its place for the monk school. There will be no provision for us from spring 2024!

The abbot of Jharkot, who doesn't seem particularly enthusiastic about these plans, was unable to help us.



Suddenly the past: playing around in the monastery courtyard.

We must explain: a wandering life stands at the centre of *Schule macht Schule's* Jharkot project. During the warmer months, the children live up in the mountains, surrounded by their ancestral landscape and culture – and not too far from their families. They come down to Pokhara valley for the winter to receive continuous education and support and be exposed to Nepalese majority culture.

And now – right when the financial situation isn't straightforward due to the building of the winter school – we lose the summer quarters!

What to do now?

Together with the staff in Jharkot, our volunteers explored, measured and documented various options available for moving into abandoned schools in the surrounding villages. In Dzong, in Chongur, in Phaylak. In each place, the area was either too small, or extensive renovation measures would have been



necessary. Ultimately, we have decided to accept the offer from Palgen Gurung, who as chairman of the Jharkot project association has always gone to great lengths for our children: he is offering a roughly 430m² piece of land, on which we can build a simple residence according to the standard we have had thus far at the monastery, and he will supervise the construction work.

We are securing the whole thing with a legally binding agreement for permanent use by the project, which is also legally binding for Palgen's successor.

A beautiful setting: the view from Palgen's land in the centre of Jharkot, with the monastery beyond.



4. So what does this mean?

- First of all, the project will remain in Bhakunde for at least this coming summer and won't make the journey to the mountains for the warmer months. As silly as it is that the new building site has popped up right now, we're happy that it didn't happen earlier. At least there's now a home for the duration of the construction period – and what a home it is!
- Secondly, we need support once more: we've already had to divert € 35,000 of the € 150,000 for the construction of the winter school (including equipment) from the reserves for boarding school operations. Although the building in Jharkot will cost significantly less, based on the current planning status we are making an optimistic estimate of € 40,000 for a good 140 m² of living space; € 285 per m².

5. Advent magic – last chance!



We really wanted to send out this newsletter before the third Advent weekend (which is why, in spite of the fact I have a patch over my right eye, I'm sitting here, typing away at the computer as fast as I can):

This weekend (16 and 17 Dec) is the last chance to enjoy really good punch (with or without alcohol) and snacks at the *Schule macht Schule* stand at Latschenwirt Adventzauber in Grödig. We also have little gifts on sale for Christmas (jam, cakes, body butter, handknitted socks, cashmere shawls



from Nepal ...), which are the perfect way to support *Schule macht Schule*. Open 12 noon to 6.30pm.

[Info Latschenwirt >>](#)

And with Christmas presents in mind: take a look at the more than 120 ARTificial building blocks on our building website. Buying one is the perfect way to combine gift-giving and helping from the comfort of your own home!

[ARTificial building blocks >>](#)

The core Schule macht Schule team wasn't able to cover all seven Advent Magic dates alone. Fortunately a number of adults and children were on hand to help - as well as two dogs for one shift!





Patient Tsering Wangmo - she took the beautiful photos of the festival of light!

6. Unexpected visitors

Our boarding school mother Tsedol sent us a photo without any explanation: a girl in bed.

Isn't that ... yes, it's Tsering Wangmo, who left us in 2021 and transferred to the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School (and continued to be supported by her *Schule macht Schule* godparent).

She's recovering with us for a few days at the winter school. The SOS Hermann Gmeiner School wanted to send her to relatives, but she has no family who lives near Pokhara. So Tsedol took her in and took her to the doctor and is making sure that she is being pampered by our cooks.

At the weekend, other project girls from the SOS Hermann Gmeiner School came to visit the new school and their former project siblings and spend the night. All of them in the mattress camp except for Tsering Wangmo. She's sleeping in one of the two beds we still have from before... By the way, the boys had come to visit last week.

All of them are so happy and proud of "their" new boarding school – even though they no longer directly benefit from it.



Playing just like the old days: the girls from the SOS school enjoy their time with their Jharkot school family.



7. Team complete: Pasang Tashi...

A colleague of many years unexpectedly left us in April 2023: teacher Palsang Lhamo. She received a work visa for France and is now supporting her family from there. We wish her all the very best, although we were very sorry to see her go!

Pasang Tashi filled this vacancy in May and it's as if he has always been part of the team. He teaches natural sciences and social studies, as well as English when there are no volunteers at the school.

He appreciates the family atmosphere at the school and the cooperation within the team. After lessons up in the mountains, he helps out in his parents' restaurant in his home village of Kinga, which lies further down the mountain. During winter school he is dedicated to the children during his free time too, playing games and sport with them. He is an important role model for the boys.

Pasang Tashi with our youngest charge, Sonam Tsering.



8. ... but openings for volunteersn

Equally unexpected, we have more gaps in the line of volunteers after things dramatically improved in winter 2022/23 (Covid rather did for us).

The Hungarian-Swedish student Sara is still in Bhakunde for a few more days. Inge from Germany, a retiree and leader of sustainability workshops arrived a few days ago and will stay until the end of January.

Left: Inge during her first stay in Jharkot in 2019.

But after that we don't have anyone until the summer! Of course, our Nepalese colleagues will manage, but they and the children above all value the breath of fresh air, the variety and relief in their workload that the volunteers bring.

And what do they themselves say after their stay?

... the image of eleven children huddled together in a tiny space, watching a film on the laptop. Squatting, nibbling cookies, highly concentrated. Two of them lying arm in arm on the shelf...

Through my volunteer work, I was able to experience a very fulfilling, meaningful, enriching time and I felt very comfortable in the social environment, especially in Jharkot.

My hair was plaited and at lunchtime every child wanted to sit next to "Miss Maxi". I was soon right in the midst of everything and a part of this wonderful project.

I would recommend the adventure because it gives you the opportunity to completely immerse yourself in a new culture. You will hear, see, taste and perhaps even feel things that basic travellers cannot experience in this form.

Drawing lessons with a view of the Dhaulagiri, football matches at 3500m above sea level, blessings from Buddhist monks, collecting herbs with the children.

I didn't really have expectations. I learned a lot about myself and although it definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone, I am really happy I chose to do it.

It was so often the case that I found myself thinking: "How, Ines, HOW did you get into this situation?" Be it dancing in traditional clothes at a wedding in the village, or cheering on "our" riders from Jharkot at the horse race at the Yartung festival.... or the "bed police", who had to take the (self-proclaimed) monsters back to their beds ... and all that at 3550 m above sea level, in the middle of the Himalayas.

I didn't just teach them English, more importantly, the children showed me what life was really all about. The two months I spent in Nepal definitely won't be the last. Because now I'm into "dal bhat power 24 hour" :)



You live, eat, drink, laugh in and with a whole new world.

These are just a few snippets from the replies from the volunteers since July 2022. You can read more from them in the [appendix below >>](#).

We need volunteers in Nepal right away, except during the holidays from mid-March to the end of April. Please keep your ears pricked for someone who could be interested and spread the word for us. And if you have the time and inclination, why not join us yourself!

Starter information for interested parties is here: www.schule-macht-schule.at/jharkot/english/pdf/volunteers_2022.pdf

Or simply send an [email to Schule macht Schule >>](#)



9. Gaden Ngachoe – a festival of light

Shortly before Christmas, Buddhists celebrate the festival of Gadhen Ngachoe: people light candle offerings to symbolically bring light to "the darkness of ignorance".

This year, the balconies, verandas and bridges at our winter school are shining with the candles lit by the children. Together they recite the traditional texts that are as familiar to Gaden Ngachoe as „Silent Night“ is to our Christmas celebrations.

"It was so touching to see how carefully the children protected

the flames", Sara told us during one of our regular Skype calls between Nepal and Salzburg. Tsering Wangmo's photos really capture this too, don't they?



Together with the children, we sincerely thank you for your interest and compassion and for living the highs and lows with us, as well as for every contribution you have made to bringing light into the children's futures.

We wish you and your loved ones a very happy Christmas!

Wolf Pichlmüller

Christina Klaffinger

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Appendix: Voices of the volunteers

We posed a few questions for our post-Covid volunteers and also gave them the chance to share whatever they thought would be of interest to others.

Theresa, August/September 2023

Drawing lessons with a view of the Dhaulagiri, Football matches at 3500m above sea level, blessings from Buddhist monks, collecting herbs with the children in a beautiful mountain region and the daily portion of Dal Bhat – the Jharkot project is a really special experience and gives you the opportunity to immerse yourself in a completely new culture. The daily lessons with a motley group of bright pupils brings so much joy and it's difficult to head home after time spent in the project!

Maxi, October-December 2022

When I met the children they were initially both very shy and very curious in a very sweet way. But after what felt like just 5 minutes, they had completely warmed to me and made me part of the big Jharkot family. My hair was plaited and at lunchtime every child wanted to sit next to "Miss Maxi". I was soon right in the midst of everything and a part of this wonderful project.

Kathi, August/September 2023

What did I bring home with me? The image of eleven children huddled together in a tiny space, watching a film on the laptop. Squatting, nibbling cookies, highly concentrated. Two of them lying arm in arm on the shelf. An unforgettable sight.

As a teacher the work I did there was particularly exciting as aside from the cultural contrasts it also showed me the differences between the Nepalese and Austrian school systems.

Would I recommend volunteering in Jharkot? I would advise any adventurous person to visit the school in Nepal and to work there for a while. You will be welcomed with open arms and numerous questions by the children and you'll feel at ease from the first moment to the last. Being integrated into the community gives you deep insight into the culture, values and traditions of the people. Beyond that, you would be spending time in one of the most magical places in the world – among the white giants of the Himalaya. I am unbelievably grateful for this valuable experience!

Karoline, July/August 2023

I would recommend the adventure because it gives you the opportunity to completely immerse yourself in a new culture. You will hear, see, taste and perhaps even feel things that basic travellers cannot experience in this form. Finally, one thing is 100% certain - you will leave your comfort zone. And if you want to involve yourself you will discover new things in your surroundings and in yourself!

Philipp, Juli-September 2022

I brought home a lot of pleasant memories from the magical place that Jharkot is. I loved how the kids brought so much life into that small village. Their creativity knew no boundaries. They always found ways to make the most out of a situation. I sincerely recommend volunteering, because you really connect with the local people there. You live, eat, drink, laugh with a whole new world.

Sara, October-December 2023

What did you bring home from this experience?

How little is enough to be content and happy in life. These children really don't have much and they are happier than almost all the kids I have met before.

How did the kids connect to you?

They were very curious, open and welcoming from the beginning. One of their first question was if I also have cows in my village. They are all great kids and it made me feel like I'm part of their family for a little while.

Did your volunteering meet your expectations?

I didn't really have expectations. I learned a lot about myself and although it definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone, I am really happy I chose to do it.

Gloria, Mai/Juni 2023

I cannot put into words the unbelievable time I had with the children.

The most wonderful thing for me was seeing each child bloom and grow in lessons. Every day was an adventure. We had so much fun learning, playing and above all laughing together. I didn't just teach them English, more importantly, the children showed me what life is really all about. Sticking together, sharing, being happy and never forgetting to stay playful. The two months I spent in Nepal definitely

won't be the last. Because now I'm into „Dal Bhat Power 24 hour“ :)

Marion, April-June 2023

I became aware once more that the elementary has great importance in pedagogical thinking and action. The children there can keep themselves busy in a variety of ways with just a little sports equipment and some toys, unlike the majority of our children here, who flounder without “entertainment”!

Through my volunteer work, I was able to experience a very fulfilling, meaningful, enriching time and felt very comfortable in the social environment, especially in Jharkot.

Ines, July-September 2022 and July/August 2023

What did you bring home from this experience?

The urgent need to immediately book my next flight to Nepal 😊!

How did the kids connect to you?

After initial shyness, the pupils all wanted to show me what they could do and what they knew. They took me by the hand and led me everywhere, everyone wanted to be on my team when playing baseball (though I never hit a single ball) and demonstrate their abilities. Skipping and painting was admired and I haven't seen that many proud owners of wobbly teeth since my own primary school years.

What was the most unexpected situation for you?

I can't decide. It was so often the case that I found myself thinking: “How, Ines, HOW did you get into this situation?” Be it dancing in traditional clothes at a wedding in the village or cheering on “our” riders from Jharkot at the horse race at the Yartung festival. The children's fashion show, which we organised on the roof of the boarding school, or the “bed police”, who had to take the (self-proclaimed) monsters back to their beds ... and all that at 3550 m above sea level, in the middle of the Himalayas.

Why would you recommend joining the adventure?

It is simply the perfect mixture of adventure and relaxation. Encountering the new and reconsidering the old. Listening and being listened to. Being speechless and bringing home countless stories.

Did your volunteering meet your expectations?

You can't really imagine how it will be ahead of time. You're thinking about aeroplane tickets and itineraries and hoping that the children will think you're okay. But the ideas you have in your head are exceeded on so many levels, focus is pulled to so many other things that unexpected things – spontaneity, sensitivity and a big helping of humour are called for. I am definitely a different person from the one who went.

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