

## **2012 Newsletter No. 9 Part 1: Moanoghar 2012** (www.moanoghar.org)

Ho everyone! How are you? Thought you might like some news....

It has to be said right off that the journey to Moanoghar is no pic-nic. Flight connections are appalling, the roads (Chittagong to Rangamati being the least one has to do) is amazing for quality, the “special” Bangladeshi driving style – the motto of which is “Just pass” as the others will definitely get off the two lane highway, which they do – the mix of vehicles, and the endless traffic jams and other events. I have to admit that one arrives in Rangamati in less than top form.



Then one arrives, and there are the children and the beautiful green vegetation and the charming staff of the school and you know that this school is truly unique. Would you like some specifics? Okay. It is unique in size = 1200 children almost all indigenous Buddhists, including 600 boarders mostly orphaned or from very far away or very poor. It is unique in arrangement = the buildings are up and down hills, in fact there is nothing but hills here. It is unique in quality = the dedication of everyone from the main cook to the Ashok Kumar Chakma, the new Executive Director (News Flash: the previous Executive Director, Chanchu Chakma, felt that

Ashok could do a better job than he could and so returned to previous duties at the school. Original, no?) and everyone in between (largely ex-students) “loves” the school and feels “honored” to work there – quotes are exact words from many....!!!



The children are children are wonderful are fun are a challenge. But how can your heart stay still when you see them? How can you not feel sorry when you know that they only eat twice a day!! Three meetings were organized during my stay with first of all the admin staff, then the teachers and then the poor, stressed tutors – the people who stay in the hostels for the children’s protection and to help them.

I chose to ask them their main problems, then the thing they liked best about the school and finally their wishes (attainable) and dreams (unlikely to be attained but important as a guiding light.) Here is a very short summary.

### **Admin Staff Meeting**

10 principal members of the administration of Moanoghar were present. They run the entire compound + all the outside projects.

We introduced ourselves and then passed on to finding the worst thing about Moanoghar according to each person. The comments mostly ran along the same lines.

Poor planning, poor training, poor control.

All seem highly remediable so we all had a try:

Poor planning can be dealt with almost immediately by putting better systems into action and implementing a clear program, eg. Financial planning for the year ahead.

I proposed to go and look into simple systems for the resource management but am told there are systems which simply need implementing.

Poor training can be dealt with by looking for people who can come and put up training programs, by finding speakers etc. Most seemed to think that training was needed on many levels. eg. How to correctly account for advance money; how to function more efficiently.

Poor control and monitoring needs more skillful workers who can do more spot checking.

I felt sorry for Ashok's plea for better communication with him in writing. He said that people come and tell him important things but fail to write them down for him so he has trouble remembering everything. This can be remedied by constant reminding to write things down and ensuring everyone that simple notes will do.

The general trend of things considered the best part of Moanoghar were a unanimous agreement of the high degree of good will, togetherness, and solidarity. The joy of the diversity of Moanoghar was also mentioned.

The wishes were around the idea of general improvement of standards and a tendency to greater self-sufficiency.

The dream is for free education for all even in remote areas.

The meeting was very open and participatory. Next time no phones.

Concern was expressed about the huge amount of wastage (water = taps left on + broken pipes etc. and food = children don't like lumps in the rice or potato skins etc.) and so we made a song which the children learned and will sing maybe once a week – they loved it... (Good for English pronunciation of "w" + "cl" + "f" = all difficult for them.)

Don't waste, don't waste, don't waste food.

Don't waste, don't waste, don't waste water.

Keep the campus clean, clean, clean

Then we all will be happy!

### **Teachers' Meeting**

Present 7 Senior teachers.

The bad thing is the language problem. Some of the children arrive speaking no Chakma, no English and no Bengali. There is no time to deal with that as the curriculum has to be finished. Too many children in the classrooms which are too small for the number and no way to move around for group or other activities. One teacher was particularly bothered by this as, through the great amount of training that they receive (from the government), they cannot implement methodologies learned.

Teachers take in outside extra tuition in their spare time to supplement their low (normal) pay so no time to do extra things at school. They stay from 10 to 5pm.

The good thing was that most of the teachers expressed very strongly their pride and joy in being part of Moanoghar. Some mentioned that they could have a better job elsewhere but that they were very keen to see how the school develops and so had turned down offers.

Their wishes centered on hoping for improvement and increase of the space available so as to be able to take in more students (hundreds were turned away earlier this year because the classrooms are maxed out at 70 – 100 kids!!!! Real need for a new building.

Their heartfelt wish was for more space so they could teach more dynamically.

Their dreams concerned the hope for true academic excellence.

### **House Tutors' Meeting**

All 13 came = 4 women, 8 monks and one man.

Not very talkative. But some things came out. They feel that giving advice is very important and encouraging the children who don't study well. For the younger children (boys in particular) it is important that they learn to keep clean. For the older ones, discipline is important.

I was asked to give some advice and suggestions to them and so I shared with them the importance of not only being like a mother to the children (as one person said) but also being a good example because the children learn by example and that that is probably the single most important dimension of their lives. Also spoke of consistency in dealing with children and treating all alike. Gave some small suggestions of techniques.

Good meeting except that they didn't talk much.

We had a go at monitoring the wastage at meals and improved awareness of that...

Much time was spent monitoring the various projects. Money had taken some 8 months to arrive so everything was late. The repairing of Krishna Kishor Bhavan built in 1986 and probably never touched since, of Karuna Bhavan same state both housing well over 100 boys was fun to watch advance a good bit. Much time was taken in recycling wood and bricks (removing bad bits, removing old cement etc.) from the previous building (Krishna Kishor Bhavan had to be pulled down because it was rotten, the foundation was too shallow and the floor not level).

Then there was the digging of the new well for drinking water, the building of new toilets for girls, the fixing of the girls playground and building of two staircases (let me tell you, they need steps there because a) the hills are steep b) it rains and you cannot make it in the mud c) they preserve the soil which is



eroding fast.) These were all part of a package for money donated by Khoon Chee Vihara in Singapore.



Many things happened as the days went by. Ven. Buddhadatta, our friend who had lived with us for years in Korea, kept me ultra busy: meeting people, going to meals and chanting (6 pm in

various places = don't miss it if you go there) and so on.

The Douglas A Campbell Foundation has come to be oriented towards toilets, garbage and tooth brushes, at least as far as work done during visits. years' garbage drive (the garbage cans are fabulously campus almost clean....) a custom has grown up of meal, an event and a cultural show. So this year we after discussing with everyone (admin, teachers, other children) that the event would be the designing of new a much needed change. We felt that we required that is an identity of Moanoghar reflecting the diversity



And so, since last successful and the "having a day" = a decided staff and uniforms -- something of the

students and their Bangladeshi nationality all rolled into one. Everyone in the Hill Tracts weaves and so the cloth should be made at the school employing some of the masses of struggling widows. We calculated 8,000 yards of cloth for 1200 uniforms of various sizes = about 3 months work. Sewing about 3 months with a little overlap about 5 months work in all. It was concluded that they may each have one set by Bengal New year in April.

So it was decided that The Day would be on Thursday October 18, the day before I left. The day before that I had the pleasure of spending the day meeting totally charming people. First



of all we spent time in an isolated village one hour by boat on the lake where they offered us lunch. (We gave out sweets and tooth brushes and paste. Of course we guessed 150 but there were 300 people there and luckily it was a market day...) The first was the UNDP Hill Tracts Program Implementor, Rob Stoelman. It was so interesting to learn all about their projects in the Hill Tracts mainly those of setting up 300 schools in very remote areas and the introduction of a system to bring empowerment and cohesion back into the crumbling



communities which were once semi-nomadic and not cannot be. Then we met the Chakma king, Raja Devasish Roy. There too, the dynamic conversation was so informative.

Very cheekily I invited both to our event of the next day and..... they came! What a joy for the children to have such gifted people watching their show. But let me go back to the day so that you get the program clear.



Six hundred children + some at least 40 staff + hot, humid weather = a delightful and fun chaos. And that is what it was. The children ate chicken curry, eggs, dahl, rasagula (a sweet) and bananas until their little bellies (nearly) burst (in case you are tempted = roughly USD500), then went to draw the new uniforms -- which looked like the ones they have as they don't know anything else!!! -- followed by the Cultural Show

including a fashion show of the traditional dress of the 10 or so tribes present to heavy hip-hop music; I only wish you could have been there...

Next day was Chittagong to Dhaka to Kolkata to Bangkok to Seoul -- connections to Chittagong are not the greatest.

More later. Stay well and happy, mujin