

April 2013

Dear Friends,

Whew! After an extremely busy trimester, we are now wrapping up the school year. The students have finished taking their final exams; we have one more week left of classes before the beginning of the blazing hot six-week summer vacation. In a few days, our 8th grade graduates will be leaving us and moving on to high school! This term we renovated our library and upgraded our computer lab. At the end of March, we pulled off our 9th annual Spring Celebration.



Let's start with the Spring Celebration! In typical Varanasi style, even though we had received police permission to conduct our show at a certain place and time, we had to change the venue of our program at the last minute (a political rally had also been scheduled at that time and place). However, with one day's notice, we were able to find a second nearby location. So, on March 25 before an audience topping 1000, our students danced, sang, danced, juggled, acted, danced, recited, clowned, and danced (did I say danced?) their hearts out. The audience moved to the music, laughed at our comedy, and was dazzled by the closing fire show. Our drama prompted people to think about gender inequalities by reversing typical male and female roles. Seeing it, people were laughing hard, but they were also forced to think hard about how women are typically treated in that society. It was hard to pick just a few pictures to share with you, but I've included just six photos below. If you want more, you may visit [Facebook](#) where I have posted about 30 photos of the show. You can also read an entertaining report about the performance at: "[Life Beyond Chow Mein at School's Big Fat Annual Program](#)". The blog was written by a long-time friend of and volunteer in the school. It starts out, "Every year, Asha Deep School pulls off probably the biggest and fattest school program in Varanasi on one of the most popular ghats on the Ganges River. And I got to sit in the middle of it." If you want more, follow the link! For now, these photos will have to suffice:



Also taken at the show: a recent picture of our teachers. Siddharth Sir is shown separately because he was announcing at the time our teachers lined up to be garlanded. These are the people who help our school succeed!



For the last few months, one of our long-term volunteers, Meg, worked at cataloging and organizing our school library. For more than a year, this project had

been on hold. Now several donated books are out of boxes and on shelves. Thanks Meg!



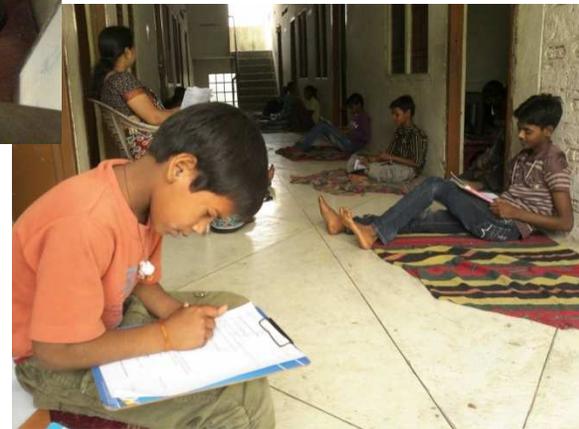
Benares SchoolFund Foundation, an organization that supports several schools for the poor in Varanasi (see their website at: <http://www.benaresschool.nl/?lang=en>), donated €1000 specifically to upgrade our computer lab. We are so grateful for their generous gift! We were able to purchase a new battery for backup power (otherwise we are unable to run classes during the daily power outages) and a few new monitors. We now have five working computers. Below, one of

our teachers guides a little one while other students work on their own projects.



Faced with exams, students try to show on paper what they have learned throughout the year. Results will be distributed May 3rd.

And with that, we will be saying good-bye to our second graduating class . . . the class of 2013. As with last year's graduates, we will be placing these students in a local, reputed high school.



A couple of weeks ago, I was chatting with one of last year's graduates. I had been a bit worried about some 6th grade boys, mainly because of the negative influences that surround them in the slum where they live. I was thinking, "Are they drinking? Are they smoking? Are they gambling?" I asked, "How are Sanjay and Babu doing?" "Oh, they're fine," he wrote, "Who doesn't want to study now? They want to study because they are looking at us studying and admiring us." When the lower classmen saw last year's graduates go on to a good school dressed in smart

uniforms (tie and all!), they realized that everything we had been telling them could be true. They could get a good education and become successful! So, many of them have buckled down and are studying more seriously. What a great effect!

So now I am working on finding sponsors for this year's graduates. Last year we had a wonderful response with all ten students sponsored for the year. Of course, I intend to continue sponsoring these children. This year we have nine graduates; three have already been sponsored (Anjali, Govind, and Rohit). I hope you will take this opportunity to sponsor one of the remaining students. Here are some ways you could help:

\$45/mo: covers all education related expenses for one child (as of today, I need 10 such sponsors)

The sponsors listed below would be needed only if I cannot raise full scholarships as above. Certainly, we will need at least 7-8 sponsors at these levels:

\$25/mo: pays a student's monthly school fees (10 sponsors needed)

\$10/mo: pays a student's tuition costs (17 sponsors needed)

\$90 (one-time gift): pays a student's admission fees (18 sponsors needed)

\$50 (one-time gift): pays for a student's books and school supplies (17 sponsors needed)

If you would like to choose a particular student to sponsor, we can provide an email address so that you would be able to communicate with "your" child throughout the year. Obviously, we cannot send these children on to high school without your help, so I hope many of you will step up to meet this need. If you know of a friend who may like to help an Indian child receive a high school education, please share this opportunity!

Finally, I would like to mention one last wish. I had been hoping to visit Asha Deep for about a month this summer right about the time it re-opens for the next school year. Unfortunately, I have been unable to save enough money to do this. It will have been two years since I left Varanasi -- a long time for a principal to be gone from a school. I think it would be important for me to be there, to show that I still care about the school, to do some teacher training, to connect with all the teachers, and to make sure that the essential principles of the school continue to be followed. Since I am paid hourly, a visit to India would involve not only the cost of the flight but also the loss of a month's income. I would probably need to raise \$4,000 to make the trip. Part of me says that if I could raise that amount of money, it would be better spent paying teacher's salaries. However, I know it would make a positive difference if I could be at Asha Deep in person this summer. Well, I'm just putting this out there. Let's see what happens.

Thank you for your interest and support of me personally, of my teachers, and of the children of Asha Deep.

love,
Connie