



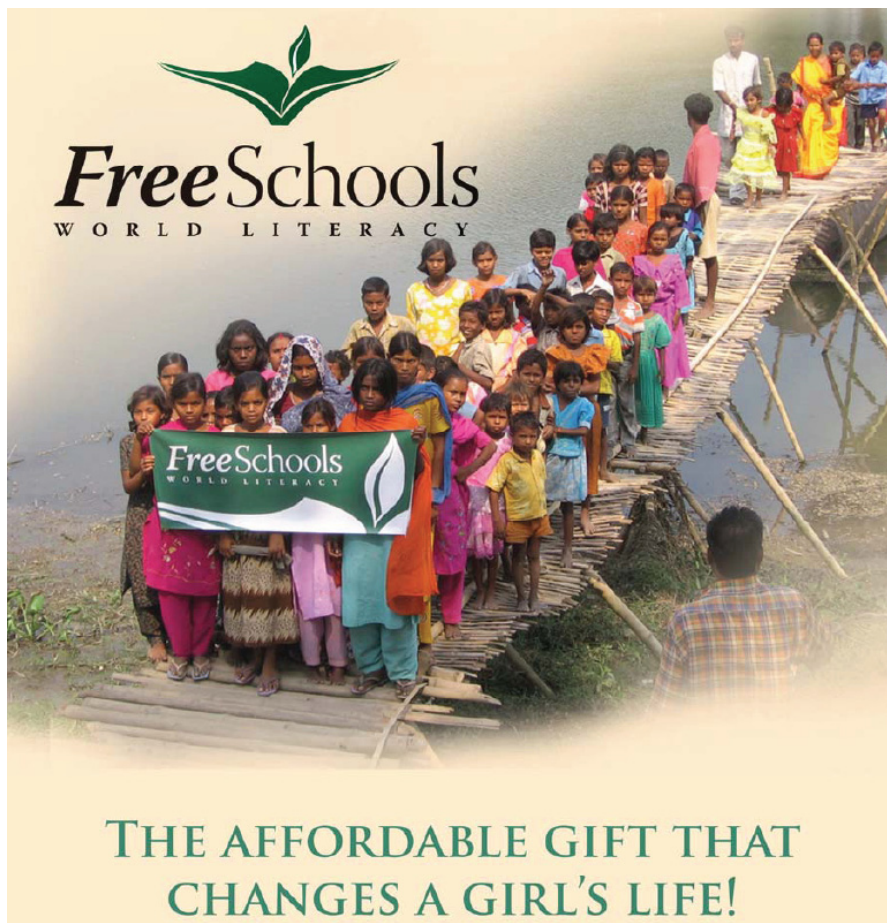
Free Schools
WORLD LITERACY

**FreeSchools World Literacy
(Australia)**

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR YEAR ENDING

31 DECEMBER 2016





ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2016

STATEMENT OF GOALS AND PURPOSE

The purpose of FreeSchools World Literacy is to provide free education in order to break the cycle of ignorance and poverty that leaves millions in hopeless despair. The organization provides free literacy programs; teacher employment and training; income-producing skills, health education; food and clothing; and is documenting changes in the wellbeing of the community as a result of its programs. By providing ongoing funds and scholarships for the existing and planned new schools, FreeSchools World Literacy hopes to replicate its model throughout India, Thailand and other developing countries of the world.

FreeSchools World Literacy Objectives are as follows:

1. To provide literacy programs and classes to members of the public.
2. To develop and provide education and training programs to persons who will conduct literacy training.
3. To develop employment training and education programs for needy persons.
4. To relieve poverty in developing nations by providing food and other basic supplies to persons in need.
5. To develop or promote public health in developing nations by educating and instructing the public on prevention of and curative measures for, health problems and by researching and documenting changes in the health of the community

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

President's Report

It has been over a decade and a half now since Mark Bloomfield and I traveled to Motihari Evening School in Bihar State, India in 2000 – a single schoolhouse for the poor children of the village being run by Sister Crescence. There, I realized for the first time in my life, the real need for free education for the poor, and the ability of education to drastically change the lives of those who were lucky enough to get it. I also saw the benefits of that knowledge spread from the student back to their families and to the local community.

Now, sixteen years on, as we enter year 2016, there are over 3,000 students being taught by 87 teachers at 74 FreeSchools World Literacy funded centres in India, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Zambia with donors in Australia having raised a total of \$84,535 to those efforts since that time.

Also this year, I had the privilege of traveling to India, after a 16 year absence, to again see the FreeSchools, this time in the company of my daughter Francheska. We met with presidents Sue Tenant and Geri Johnson of FreeSchools World Literacy Canada and USA respectively and our international partners to discuss the way forward for FreeSchools in India.

Thanks to the continuing selfless work of our overseas field partners; Sister Crescence and the Fakirana Sisters Society in Bihar State, India; Rev. Ashish Amos and ISPCCK in New Delhi; Amarok in Bangladesh; the Mirror Foundation team in Thailand; and Immanuel Mercy Reachout Ministries in Zambia; we are seeing the real benefits of this education flow back into the local community.

A total of \$5,057 was raised for FreeSchools World Literacy aid projects during 2016 reporting period in the following campaigns:

1. \$1,435 was raised for the Thai schools due the efforts of the Coenraads Family's Francis C. Nieves Memorial Fund, the Forest Kirk Women's Fellowship and Jacqueline Melilli.
2. \$1,620 was raised for the Indian FreeSchools in Bihar thanks to the fundraising efforts of a dedicated group of regular donors including Melissa Alldis, Kathleen & Trevor Swadling, Andrew & Delphine Swadling, Che Stapleton, Isabel Abraham, Ken Morley and Tracy Falkner. This also includes student scholarships raised by the Forest Kirk KidzChurch (for Shilpi), Warrick & Lorna Brady (for Lalmuni), the Forest Kirk Men's Group (for Subhash) and Francheska Coenraads (for Ruby).
3. \$2,000 was raised for the Immanuel Mercy School in Zambia, our Africa project now one year old, thanks to the single-handed commitment of Donna Cervantes and with thanks for 'the blessing of our Lord' on her successful retirement project.

FreeSchools World Literacy maintains high-quality audited annual accounts and reportage presented to Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) standard.

Finally, I would especially like to thank the FreeSchools World Literacy Committee of Management, many of whom have been members and donors since the Committee's inception.



Dr. Robert Coenraads
President – FreeSchools World Literacy (Australia)

2016 MEMBERSHIP OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Our Committee of Management has now been in operation since the first official meeting of FreeSchools World Literacy-Australia in June 2007. The Committee has been meeting online at regular intervals and conducting annual general meetings since that time.

The Members of the Committee elected during the 2015 Annual General Meeting are as follows:

ROBERT COENRAADS President of FSWL Australia
8 Trigalana Place, Frenchs Forest NSW 2086
coenraads01@optusnet.com.au
Phone: (02) 9451 8496, Mobile 0408 419 632
Professional Qualifications: BA Hons Geology (Macquarie University), M.Sc Geophysics (University of British Columbia, Vancouver). Ph.D Geology (Macquarie Uni), Fellow Gemmological Association of Australia), Fellow Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy
Occupation: Director (Coenraads GEMS Pty Ltd)/
Chief Geologist (Australian Gemstone Mining Pty Ltd)/
Lecturer, (Gemmological Association of Australia)/
Author – non-fiction/fiction

IAN ESMORE Secretary of FSWL Australia
Daylesford Design Studio, PO Box 335, Daylesford, Vic 3460
daylesforddesign@gmail.com
Phone: 0427 481 077
Professional Qualifications: Dip Mechanical Engineering, Dip Ed (Technical Division), Dip Computer Graphics (Chisholm), Registered Building Practitioner, DP AD-1995
Occupation: Director (Daylesford Design Studio)

MERINDI BELARSKI Treasurer of FSWL Australia
17 Whelan Avenue, Figtree, NSW 2525
belarski@bigpond.com
Mobile: 0448 983 393
Professional Qualifications: Bachelor of Business
Major in Human Resources, minor in Ethics and Sustainability
Occupation: Senior Manager, Customer Engagement and Service for Community Sector Banking

BERNARD GABRIEL BELARSKI Committee Member of FSWL Australia
1/12 Church Street, Belmont NSW 2280
belarski@bigpond.com
Mobile: 0400 929 626
Professional Qualifications: Father
Occupation: Parent

DONNA MARIE CERVANTES Committee Member of FSWL Australia
93a Obi Lane, Maleny Qld 4551
windmilldc@yahoo.com
Mobile: 0416 865 263
Professional Qualifications: Certificate IV in TESOL (Sea English Academy,
Sunshine Coast, Aust). Advanced Diploma of Recreation Management (Yeronga
Institute of TAFE, Qld, Aust). Diploma of Teaching (Christchurch Teachers College,
NZ). Dip Physical Education (equiv BSc.)(Otago University, NZ). Dip Fine and
Applied Arts (Polytec Otago, NZ).
Occupation: Distance Education and Yr 11 Art Teacher, Australian Christian College.

GRAEME CHAPMAN Committee Member of FSWL Australia
57 Barker Street, East Brisbane QLD 4169
Home: (07) 33912052
GraemeChapman@archart.com.au
Professional Qualifications: PhD Geophysics (Macquarie University)
Occupation: Geophysicist; Artist (Architectural Art, Brisbane)

ANYA RAMANI
email: anyar92@gmail.com
Mobile: 0430225662
Professional Qualifications: B Mining Engineering/ B Commerce (Finance)
Occupation: Student at University of New South Wales (Masters in Actuarial Studies)
Junior analyst at Hudson Investment Group (Sovereign Gold Pty Ltd) (former
occupation)

DELPHINE SWADLING Committee Member of FSWL Australia
44 Dodds St, Redhead, NSW 2290
swads@bigpond.net.au
Mobile: 0438443834. Home: (02) 49449550
Occupation: WOSC, Broadspectrum

KATHLEEN SWADLING Committee Member of FSWL Australia
15 Basset Street East. Mona Vale NSW 2103
kathleen@theswadlings.com.au
Phone: (02) 9999 6929
Occupation: Volunteer Communications and Website Project Manager for Urantia
Association International



**FreeSchools World Literacy
(Australia)**

FINANCIAL REPORT

FOR YEAR ENDING

31 DECEMBER 2016

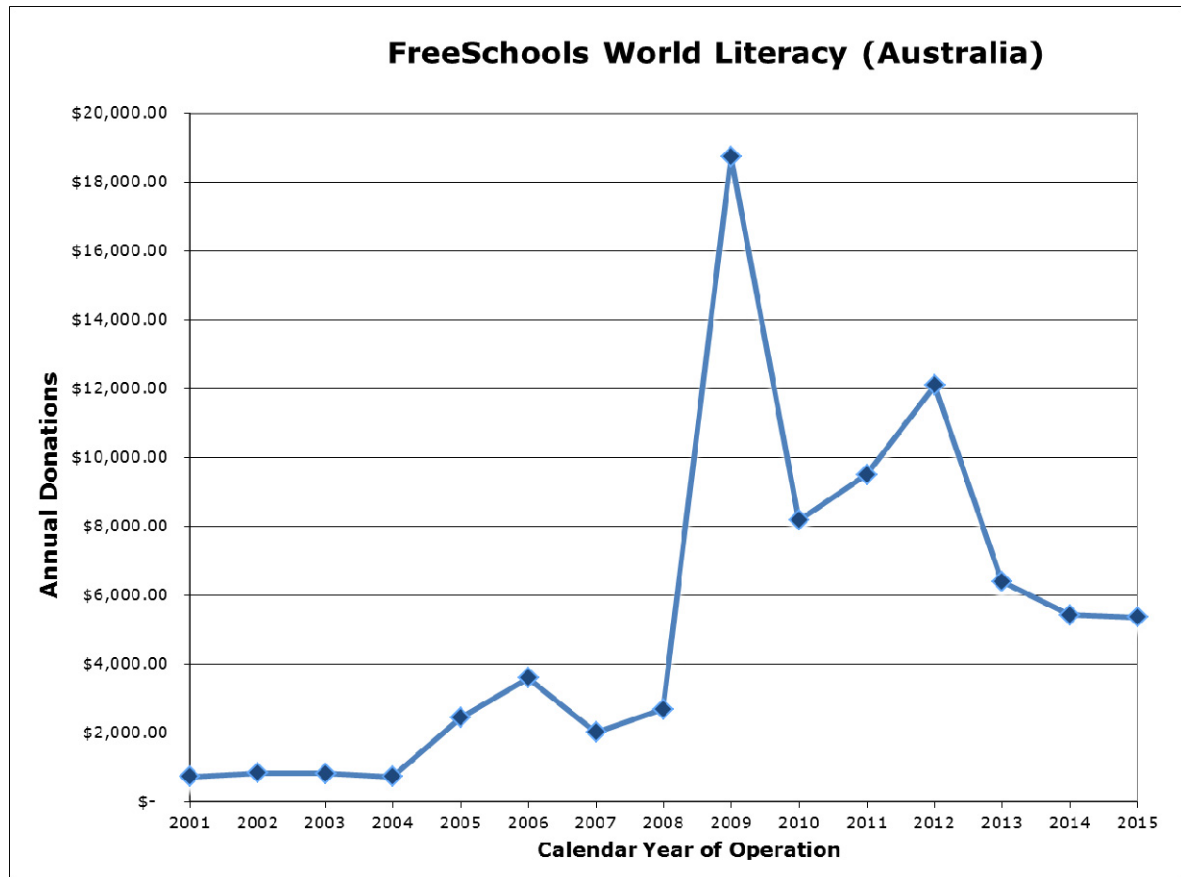
FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia		
INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING		
	2016	2015
REVENUE		
Donations and Gifts - monetary	5,055	5,349
Donations and Gifts - non monetary	-	-
Grants	-	-
Other Income	2	2
Total Revenue	5,057	5,351
EXPENSES		
Overseas Projects	4,975	5,245
Community Education	-	-
Fundraising Costs	-	-
Administration	60	40
Total Expenses	5,035	5,285
Excess/(shortfall) of Revenue over Expenses	22	66

NOTES:

1. Fundraising is via donations so no costs are involved
2. Administration costs are bank fees \$40

FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia					
TABLE OF CASH MOVEMENTS FOR DESIGNATED PURPOSES					
Cash movements for year ended	Designated Project	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available at year end
2016	Bihar, India	\$ 75	\$ 1,620	\$ 1,600	\$ 95
2016	Thailand	\$ 20	\$ 1,435	\$ 1,435	\$ 20
2016	Africa	\$ 20	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 20
2016	Interest	\$ 72	\$ 2	\$ -	\$ 74
TOTAL 2016		\$ 187	\$ 5,057	\$ 5,035	\$ 209

FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia
 GRAPH OF DONATED FUNDS VERSUS CALENDAR YEAR



Statement:

1. FreeSchools World Literacy is reliant on donations for its overseas projects and is financially healthy. During 2016 FreeSchools raised \$5,057 and sent \$5,035 to its overseas projects. Bank costs of \$60 were incurred in sending these funds overseas.

2. These funds were disbursed to FreeSchools projects in Bihar, India (\$1,600), Thailand (\$1,435) and Zambia (\$2,000) where they were used to pay salaries of teachers working at the FreeSchools. This works out to be an average cost of about \$15 to \$20 per year per child being educated and we consider this application of donor funds to be highly effective in providing an education to disadvantaged children.

3. Although currently not a financial member of ACFID, FreeSchools World Literacy remains fully committed to full adherence to the ACFID Code of Conduct.

4. Complaints can be lodged against FreeSchools World Literacy with the President of the Organisation, Dr Robert Coenraads, or any of the other members of the FreeSchools World Literacy Committee of Management, whose full contact details are provided in this report.

5. Complaints about a breach of the Code of Conduct can be made directly to Code Manager of the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee, by completing a complaint form on their website <http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/files/complaint-form>, and attaching all relevant information.

FreeSchools World Literacy (Australia)

DETAILED CASH MOVEMENTS

FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2016

GOVERNING BODY DECLARATION

The Committee of Management of FreeSchools World Literacy declare that:

i) The financial statements and notes as set out on pages 10 to 12, are in accordance with the Incorporated Associations Act of Victoria and:

a. Comply with relevant Australian Accounting Standards as applicable;
and

b. Give a true and fair view of the financial position as at 31st Dec 2016 and of the performance for the year ended on that date of the association;

ii) In the Committee of Management's opinion there are reasonable grounds to believe that FreeSchools World Literacy will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

This declaration is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee of Management of FreeSchools World Literacy



.....
Dr Robert R. Coenraads
[President]

.....
Mrs. Merindi Belarski
[Treasurer]

[Sydney] February 2017

FreeSchools World Literacy - Detailed Cash Flow Movements for the year ending 31 December 2016

Date	Description	Project Bihar,India=1 Thailand=2 Africa=3	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available
1-Jan-16	opening balance Bihar, India	1	\$ 74.99			
1-Jan-16	opening balance Thailand	2	\$ 20.00			
1-Jan-16	opening balance Africa	3	\$ 20.00			
1-Jan-16	Interest Accrued		\$ 72.05			\$ 187.04
4-Jan-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 287.04
4-Jan-16	Fee for Overseas Telegraphic Transfer	2			\$ 60.00	\$ 227.04
11-Jan-16	Jacqueline Melilli	2		\$ 15.00		\$ 242.04
27-Jan-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 257.04
16-Jan-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 282.04
27-Jan-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 312.04
1-Feb-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 412.04
15-Feb-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 427.04
26-Feb-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 452.04
29-Feb-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 482.04
1-Mar-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 582.04
15-Mar-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 597.04
29-Mar-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 622.04
29-Mar-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 652.04
31-Mar-16	Interest			\$ 0.10		\$ 652.14
1-Apr-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 752.14
15-Apr-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 767.14
26-Apr-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 792.14
27-Apr-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 822.14
1-May-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 922.14
13-May-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 937.14
26-May-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 962.14
27-Jun-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 992.14
1-Jun-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 1,092.14

FreeSchools World Literacy - Detailed Cash Flow Movements for the year ending 31 December 2016

Date	Description	Project Bihar,India=1 Thailand=2 Africa=3	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available
15-Jun-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 1,107.14
27-Jun-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 1,132.14
27-Jun-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 1,162.14
30-Jun-16	Interest			\$ 0.23		\$ 1,162.37
1-Jul-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 1,262.37
15-Jul-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 1,277.37
26-Jul-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 1,302.37
27-Jul-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 1,332.37
1-Aug-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 1,432.37
15-Aug-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 1,447.37
26-Aug-16	Isabel Abraham	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,467.37
26-Aug-16	Tracy Faulkner	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,487.37
26-Aug-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 1,512.37
29-Aug-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 1,542.37
1-Sep-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 1,642.37
15-Sep-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 1,657.37
26-Sep-16	Isabel Abraham	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,677.37
27-Sep-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 1,707.37
28-Sep-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 1,732.37
30-Sep-16	Interest			\$ 0.36		\$ 1,732.73
3-Oct-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 1,832.73
14-Oct-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 1,847.73
17-Oct-16	Che Stapleton	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,867.73
21-Oct-16	Donna Cervantes Kantalomba School	3		\$ 500.00		\$ 2,367.73
24-Oct-16	Warrick and Lorna Brady - Scholarship Lalmuni	1		\$ 75.00		\$ 2,442.73
24-Oct-16	Kidz Church - Scholarship Shilpi	1		\$ 140.00		\$ 2,582.73
24-Oct-16	Ken Morley	1		\$ 150.00		\$ 2,732.73
26-Oct-16	Isabel Abraham	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 2,752.73

FreeSchools World Literacy - Detailed Cash Flow Movements for the year ending 31 December 2016

Date	Description	Project Bihar,India=1 Thailand=2 Africa=3	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available
27-Oct-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 2,782.73
28-Oct-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 2,807.73
31-Oct-16	Donna Cervantes Kantalomba School	3		\$ 1,000.00		\$ 3,807.73
1-Nov-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 3,907.73
3-Nov-16	Forest Kirk Mens Fellowship - Scholarship Subhas	1		\$ 75.00		\$ 3,982.73
14-Nov-16	Donna Cervantes Kantalomba School	3		\$ 250.00		\$ 4,232.73
15-Nov-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 4,247.73
16-Nov-16	Che Stapleton	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 4,267.73
28-Nov-16	Isabel Abraham	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 4,287.73
28-Nov-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 4,312.73
28-Nov-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 4,342.73
1-Dec-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 100.00		\$ 4,442.73
9-Dec-16	Forest Kirk Womans' Evening Fellowship	2		\$ 200.00		\$ 4,642.73
15-Dec-16	Delphine & Andrew Swadling	1		\$ 15.00		\$ 4,657.73
16-Dec-16	Che Stapleton	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 4,677.73
20-Dec-16	Donna Cervantes Kantalomba School	3		\$ 250.00		\$ 4,927.73
22-Dec-16	International Transfer to India - Sacred Hearts	1			\$ 1,599.99	\$ 3,327.74
22-Dec-16	Teacher's Salary Kantolomba School	3			\$ 2,000.00	\$ 1,327.74
28-Dec-16	Isabel Abraham	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,347.74
28-Dec-16	Kathleen & Trevor Swadling	1		\$ 25.00		\$ 1,372.74
28-Dec-16	Melissa Alldis	1		\$ 30.00		\$ 1,402.74
28-Dec-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	1		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,422.74
28-Dec-16	Robert Coenraads (Francis Nieves Memorial Fund)	2		\$ 20.00		\$ 1,442.74
28-Dec-16	Francheska Coenraads (scholarship Ruby)	1		\$ 140.00		\$ 1,582.74
29-Dec-16	Internat. Transfer to Mirror Foundation, Thailand	2			\$ 1,375.00	\$ 207.74
30-Dec-16	Interest			\$ 0.81		\$ 208.55
31-Dec-16	Interest					
31-Dec-16	TOTAL		\$ 187.04	\$ 5,056.50	\$ 5,034.99	\$ 208.55

FreeSchools World Literacy - Detailed Cash Flow Movements for the year ending 31 December 2016

Date	Description	Project Bihar,India=1 Thailand=2 Africa=3	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available
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Date	Description	Project Bihar,India=1 Thailand=2 Africa=3	Cash available at beginning of year	Cash raised during year	Cash disbursed during year	Cash available at year end
31-Dec-16	Bihar, India Project	1	\$ 74.99	\$ 1,620.00	\$ 1,599.99	\$ 95.00
31-Dec-16	Thailand Project	2	\$ 20.00	\$ 1,435.00	\$ 1,435.00	\$ 20.00
31-Dec-16	Africa Project	3	\$ 20.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 20.00
31-Dec-16	Annual Interest		\$ 72.05	\$ 1.50	\$ -	\$ 73.55
31-Dec-16	TOTAL		\$ 187.04	\$ 5,056.50	\$ 5,034.99	\$ 208.55

NOTES:

2016 Interest	\$ 1.50
2016 Bank Fees	\$ 60.00

Total accumulated funds to 31 Dec 2016 of \$208.55 agrees with bank statement

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY (Australia)

Audit Report for the year ending 31 December 2016

Following an audit of the above organisation, it is my opinion that the financial records and supporting statements give a true and fair view of the activities of this organisation for the year indicated above.

It is noted that as in past years no official receipts were issued for each donation, but it is understood each donation was acknowledged by letter and each donation can be traced as a separate entry on the bank statements. This is considered to be satisfactory at present. If the committee for the FreeSchools World Literacy were to issue official receipts at some future time then that would be considered an additional safeguard to the present system of acknowledgement by letter of each donation.

In accordance with the ACFID Code of Conduct a Table of Cash Movements for Designated Purposes has been included in the Financial Report for the year ended 31 December 2016 and has been noted and verified by the auditor.

In regard to compliance with the annual and financial reporting requirements of the ACFID Code of Conduct, it is understood that the financial statements and reports prepared by the FreeSchools World Literacy charity basically conforms to the requirements laid down by the code.



R. Mills (CPA)
(Reg. No. 76573)

9/2/2017

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FORESTVILLE. NSW 2087
Ph: (02) 9451-0219



**FreeSchools World Literacy
(Australia)**

APPENDIX REPORTS

**FOR YEAR
2016**

Impressions of India

Dawn begins as a filthy yellow smudge on the horizon, slowly growing in intensity as I watch from the window of our India Rail carriage. The other two Presidents of FreeSchools World Literacy, Sue Tennant from Canada and Geri Johnson from the United States, and my daughter Francheska, are still asleep as we make the 17 hour train journey from India's capital, Delhi, to the town of Bettiah in the heart of India's poorest State, Bihar.

The smudge intensifies, the dry brown of the land lightening, bleeding into an oily brown sky around the horizon, the dust and pollution obscuring the brilliance of the orb itself, smothering it into a nondescript flatness.

Sunrise in this part of the world is never a particularly pretty event – this morning it is exactly the same as I remember it from the morning 16 years ago in February 2000 when I made the same train journey with humanitarian Mark Bloomfield. It is as if the sun itself has adjusted, toning its grandeur to match the dreary and backbreaking drudgery experienced by the countless peasants and their families living and toiling on the land, thousands upon thousands of endless scenes of poverty; snapshots fleetingly caught in the picture windows of the train carriage as it rattled nonchalantly along the track.

The sun rises higher, defining itself, separating the landscape into light and shade as acrid smoke from breakfast campfires curls into the thickening atmosphere, fires fuelled by wood, cow dung or discarded tyres, whatever the women can lay their hands on to cook for their families.

Only about 28 people make the train journey in the relatively comfortable 4-berth cabins of the first class car under the watchful eye of the conductor - we allowed ourselves that small luxury, booking weeks in



From left, Nitesh, Sue Tennant, Sister Crescence with Shilpi, Francheska and Geri Johnson at Bettiah Station.



A train pulls out of Bettiah Station in Bihar State, India. There are no clouds to be seen in the sky, yet the sky is white.

advance to be able to do so – but by far the majority travel in second class, or worse, crammed into the smelly, barred, open-widowed carriages of cattle class. The gamble paid off for some of us westerners though, as we nursed our exhausted frames, ravaged by the effects 'Delhi belly', to and from the carriage toilet throughout the wee hours.

Waiting on Bettiah platform, in the morning's relative cool, our in-country partner, the nearly-blind Sister Mary Crescence of the Sacred Hearts Sister's Society, was there to greet us, her assistants eagerly grabbing our bags and shuffling us towards the waiting 4-wheel drive for the short journey to the convent.

Under the mid-morning sun the heat intensifies. Straight above the sky is cloudless, but only the palest hint brownish-blue is visible even on the best days. Noon and beyond the heat builds unbearably to an oppressive crescendo – reaching its energy-sapping zenith just before the monsoon with temperatures soaring into the high forties, and from whence spread the old adage that only ‘mad dogs and Englishmen’ would be foolish enough to go out into it. The sensible ones soon learnt the only way was to sit it out under a shady verandah sipping a gin and tonic.

After the heat, the streets of Delhi and the rigours of the train journey, the tranquil grounds of the Convent of the Sacred Hearts Sisters stood before us like an oasis in the desert, its two giant imperial palms standing silent sentinel on either side of the entrance gate ushering us into the welcoming grounds. Gaily coloured flowerbeds and hedges adorned the front of the imposing two-story sky-blue convent building where everyone was waiting for us.

The live-in primary and secondary Bridge Course girls swept around us eagerly in waves, regrouping and spreading with the fluidity of a school of fish – particularly enthralled by Francheska who, being fresh out of school, was closer to their age. They gathered in front of us in rehearsed formation, throwing garlands of flowers around our necks, and singing the ‘Hearty Welcome’ song with verses both in Hindi and English.



Buildings and grounds of the Sacred Hearts Convent



Francheska Coenraads surrounded by the Bridge Course girls who live and take classes in a special building funded by FreeSchools volunteer, Saskia Raevouri.

Our aim was to visit some of the world’s poorest schools – schools for children on the absolute bottom rung of society’s ladder, schools in the poorest of villages accessible only by dirt track, schools sometimes without even a classroom and perhaps only a tarpaulin stretched between the trees to shade the children from the ravages of the sun – but they were functioning schools none-the-less. They were our Free Schools and we were proud of them, supported through the generosity of hundreds of our donors living comfortably in Australia, Canada and the US, each willing to do their little bit to make these poor children’s lives better.

Things had come a long way since Mark and I visited Sister Crescence's very first school in the year 2000. To see her warm welcoming face once again, and in such good health and spirits after all these

years, was a wonderful feeling – it was as if no time at all had passed between us, and I, for one, was raring to see the schools, the students and the progress that she had been making.

But first on Sister Crescence's list for us westerners was lunch in the dining hall with the other Sisters followed by a prescribed afternoon of rest in our chambers. With the help of the Bridge girls, rooms had been prepared for us; freshly painted windows decked out with flyscreens, beds with mosquito netting, air conditioning fans, plus an ensuite shower and toilet with towels and soap, and a printed itinerary hung on the wall above our desk and chair outlining our program of activities: A mighty effort made by those whose own rooms were significantly more Spartan than our own.

From the windows of our quarters, daily scenes in the convent grounds played out before us, the sisters and their staff tending the sun dappled gardens,



Freeschools Presidents Robert Coenraads (Australia), Geri Johnson (USA) and Sue Tennant (Canada) in discussion with Sister Crescence in the Convent dining hall.

tilling and irrigating small plots of garlic plants, beans, pumpkins and corn amongst the shady plantations of mango, jackfruit and guava trees – complete with a cow out back supplying the convent's dairy and fertilizer needs.

The new Bridge Course dormitory building and classrooms, built and supported by FreeSchools World Literacy through the efforts of Saskia Raevouri, stood proudly alongside the dining hall. The girls took Francheska aside, guest of honour, into their dorm where, sitting on their sleeping mats all lined up in a row against the wall, they laughed, wrote notes in each other's diaries, and told stories.

Elsewhere on the huge acreage controlled by the Catholic Church, we were shown other gated grounds and fine buildings similar to those of the convent, including various chapels, the Sacred Hearts Convent School, a school for the deaf and blind, the novitiates school, and a public infirmary/women's health and birth clinic being run by the Sacred Hearts Sisters.



Bridge Course girls on their sleeping mats in the dormitory.

Donations to FreeSchools World Literacy go directly to the schools with no losses along the way, the exchange rate ensuring that every precious foreign dollar has maximum purchasing power in India. The way it works is that our donors' funds are used to pay teacher's salaries – each teacher being in charge of a class of 25-30 students – and this means it costs us approximately \$20 per child per year to ensure they receive an education - that life changing education every child in this world deserves. The free schools are secular, meaning all are welcome, although in any circumstance where a choice must be made, preference is given to girls in order to counter the gender disadvantage they already suffer, particularly among the lower castes. And, to the keenest and brightest of our students, we offer scholarships (worth about \$120 to \$180 per annum) enabling these lucky ones to continue on to college and even university studies. The bottom line; educated women typically manage their lives better, starting their families later and having fewer and better educated children. It gave me great pleasure to meet one of these former students, Nancy Vincent, who our family had been supporting, with her scholarship going towards medical text books. Nancy now lectures in Nursing at the university. Her proud parents came to the convent, laden with albums full of graduation photos, and her younger sister too - she had been pen pal with my own daughter over the years.

There were many touching moments during our school visits over the following few days, teachers and students alike dressing in their finest, and most likely their one and only good set of, clothes for the benefit of the foreign visitors, a feast of bright colours, but for me there were two highlights: In one school, the young teacher, Prince, was teaching in the front yard of his parents' home, reading to the class from a colourful picture book (which we obtain for a few cents a copy from Pranthum a not-for-profit publisher). It was a typically oppressive afternoon when we arrived; the children sat cross-legged on the ground under a tarp, heads swivelling to follow



The next generation of students are given a science lesson by former FreeSchools student, Prince, under a tarpaulin in the front yard of his parents home.

us as we took our designated places in a row of plastic chairs. At the end of the lesson we spoke briefly to the children on the benefit of education, our words of inspiration, translated by Sister Crescence, being 'that only the sky is the limit' for those lucky enough to get the opportunity to learn. Upon congratulating the teacher, I discovered that 'Prince' had been one of our original free evening school students, one of those who I saw as a child, who had now returned, driven by a desire to repay the kindness and opportunity shown to him, to share his knowledge with the next generation— giving back to the community to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.



Students and their teachers take a break from their lessons to pose for a photo in front of the Ellen White Free School.

On another day we visited a newly-built two-classroom school packed with primary age children, who at the end of our visit, obediently filed outside for a group photo, standing proudly in front of their school. It was called the “Ellen White School”, because one of our supporters decided that her own house in the United States would be sold when she passed away, and the proceeds used to build a school in India. A bricks and mortar school meant that the poor children of that lucky village, come monsoon, storm or blinding heat, would always have a permanent place to learn. The brass plaque to be mounted beside the school’s front door was still being engraved at the time of our visit.

Back in Delhi, we met with another of our in-country partners, Dr Ashish Amos and Ella Sonawane of the ISPCK. Here we learned that our Ghaziabad Free School was filled to capacity, bursting at the seams with children eager to take advantage of the high quality educational programs being offered there, and that plans were afoot to secure inexpensive land on the outskirts of the city to build a much bigger school to meet the growing demand. The original Ghaziabad buildings could then be used as an empowerment centre where women, often the mothers of the FreeSchools students could learn tailoring and other skills, enabling them to run their own small businesses. Ashish and Ella were anxious to know if our supporters might like their idea and we were able to reassure them that a bricks and mortar project would always have a great appeal – being something tangible, something real that would go on being useful for decades and decades to come, something that donors could know, as Ellen White did, would be around serving humanity long after they were no longer around. Apparently our FreeSchools programs at Ghaziabad were so popular that even middle class families in the neighbourhood were asking if they could pay for their children to attend, and this revelation threw up a whole raft of new ideas for growing in-country funding for some future projects.



Ella shows Francheska and Sue a colourful patchwork quilt made in the Women’s Empowerment Centre where income-earning skills are taught.

Ella was also keen to have volunteers come to work in the schools, teaching the children in the mornings, and the women in the afternoons; English, drama, music, computing, sewing or any other skills that might be useful. Ella felt that such visitors were a great inspiration to the FreeSchools students encouraging them to believe that for them anything was now possible.

In the closing days of our Indian visit, my daughter Francheska gazed over the silhouetted marble domes of the Taj Mahal from the rooftop of our nearby hotel. Mesmerized by the scene, she reached for her camera.

“Look dad, how wonderful! The full moon is rising over the Taj Mahal.”

I’d allocated a few extra days to take her to see the Taj Mahal - truly one of the world’s greatest seven wonders – I wanted her to see what the Indian people were really capable of creating - the magnificence of their real culture beyond her limited view of Old Delhi’s crumbling buildings, tangles of live electrical wiring hanging dangerously low into narrow filthy streets crowded with beggars, aggressive vendors and horn-blaring motorcycles – crushing city population densities reaching Armageddon levels. As lucky westerners, we’d had a pleasant day getting to the town of Agra in the air conditioned comfort of Mr Singh’s taxi, relaxed by his easy, safe driving on the open highway.

I hadn’t seen the Taj myself, having missed that opportunity 16 years earlier when, by chance, Mark Bloomfield and I happened across Dr Amos at the 2000 New Delhi World Book Fair – we had far more important things to talk about back then than our sightseeing plans! It is amazing where a chance meeting can lead.

“That’s the sun, Francheska,” I replied. “See, the moon’s up there,” I added, pointing straight up at the faint silvery half-orb in the darkening sky over our heads.

“I’ve never been able to look straight into the sun like this before,” she exclaimed, adjusting her camera, concentrating on the shot. “Why is it like that?”

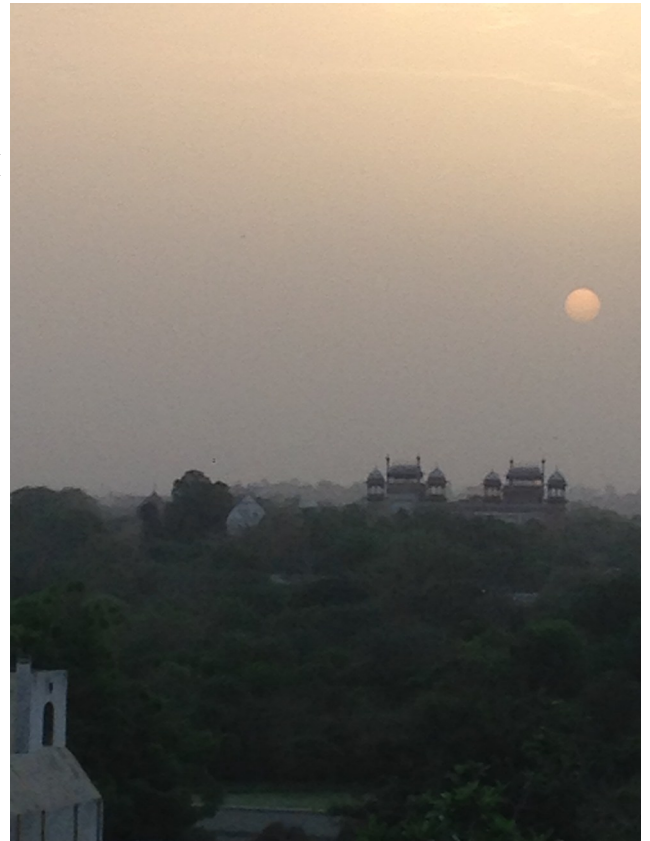
“The sun’s rays have to pass through a lot of atmosphere at this time of afternoon – it dulls them right down, and the atmosphere in this part of the world is particularly thick.”

I didn’t want to spoil her moment with additional detail about the permanent thick brown blanket of exhaust and dust pollution trapped behind the massive wall of the Himalaya range, smothering the entire northern half of the Indian continent. After a while you start to get used to it, I mused – even forget that it is there – apart from that nagging little cough every now and then.

“Have you noticed how we’re never getting sunburnt here?” I added, but Francheska was already lost in her own thoughts. I’d already given her enough. She focused on the framing, the angle and best zoom.

“Look at this one dad,” she turned the back of her camera toward me, arrowing through several shots to get to the one she liked best. “Just great isn’t it?” At that moment Francheska was at peace with India, and, therefore, so was her dad.

“Fabulous!” I exclaimed, screwing up my eyes to take in the thumbnail-sized image. “Just wait until you see the ones you’re going to take tomorrow morning. Gates open at five forty five and we’re gonna be the first ones in there.”



Francheska’s late afternoon photograph of the Taj Mahal from the hotel rooftop.

President's Message to FreeSchools Members and Friends

It seems a child's fortunes in life are dealt out with the same randomness as a poker hand from a shuffled deck. The cards are dealt to each at birth - however the deck is definitely stacked, with gender and nationality playing a significant role. The disadvantages faced by third-world children, particularly girls, are horrendous.



These inequalities were highlighted in National Geographic's January 2017 Special Edition on Gender.

Nine-year olds from around the world were interviewed for their direct and candid responses on gender and other issues they will be forced to confront during their lifetime – in their answers you can see, straightaway, the cards each of them have been dealt.

Mikayla McDonald, sitting on a haystack in her overalls, proudly lays her answer out straight - the way it should be for everyone. *"There isn't anything I can't do because I'm a girl. Everyone is equal. There is always the same amount of opportunities for everyone."*

Girls like Mikayla from Canada and Tomee from South Dakota are lucky – their hands always come up kings, queens and aces, their lives laid out like bold and shining paths before them - although it does *"kind of bother"* Tomee, *"how there was not one girl president."*


We recognise, and encourage, Mikayla's can-do attitude in our own children. As parents, we guide them with great care into a fruitful adulthood.

Fang Wang from China feels stifled by her mother's old fashioned attitudes: *"Sometimes I secretly help my brother on the farm. Mom whacks me when she finds out. She says that girls who do these things will grow calluses on their hands; then they become ugly."* China is rapidly advancing nowadays, buying membership of that exclusive club of lucky countries whose children are privileged.

Unfortunately for the other girls, the fateful hands they are dealt often fold; they are mostly runs of useless twos threes or fours, laid flat on the operating table of outdated religious and cultural practices, exposed to the leering men sitting around that table; those who call out the cards. We in the West have little experience with the terrors these girls face, but it is here that we can help the most.

Alfia Ansari of Mumbai, India, says: *"We won't get education in school, but boys will be educated, and therefore they can travel anywhere, but girls can't."* Nawar Kagete of Kaputir, Kenya, has even worse to say: *"You are seduced wherever you go. You are chased by men, If you go to fetch water, you are chased; you go to collect firewood you are chased."*

From time to time it is important for us lucky-ones to listen to these stories. It enables us to affirm why education for children, especially girls, is so important in today's world, and the vital role played by organizations such as FreeSchools World Literacy in providing this much-needed education in countries like India, Thailand and Zambia.



The image shows a group of children of various ages standing on a narrow wooden bridge made of bamboo or logs, crossing a river. In the foreground, a group of children holds a green and white banner with the FreeSchools World Literacy logo. The background shows more children and adults on the bridge, and the river reflects the sky. The overall scene is set in a rural, possibly developing area.

FreeSchools
WORLD LITERACY

FreeSchools
WORLD LITERACY

**THE AFFORDABLE GIFT THAT
CHANGES A GIRL'S LIFE!**

FreeSchools World Literacy has already helped many disadvantaged children attain the necessary education to bridge the troubled waters of poverty and oppression, and arrive safely on opportune shores. From this vantage point, they stand a fair chance to make their way forward in life to wherever their goals and dreams may lead them.

It is still not all aces, kings and queens for these children, but at least FreeSchools World Literacy has given them a start along their life's journey. Even if only a hand of tens—because life's problems for girls in India's rural Bihar State are always going to be hard to beat no matter what. – But perhaps these 'four of a kind' now stand a good chance of going a long way.



You, as members or friends, of FreeSchools World Literacy have the privilege of being in a powerful position to help such unfortunate children, just like the Cajels, Shilpis, Rubis and Lalmunis of this world we already help, knowing that your efforts, however insignificant – perhaps just the cost of a cup of coffee a week - will make such a vast impact on the these children's lives. Contact me if you are willing...

Dr. Robert Coenraads

President

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MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of FreeSchools World Literacy is to provide free education in order to break the cycle of ignorance and poverty that leaves millions in hopeless despair. The organization provides free literacy programs; teacher employment and training; income-producing skills, health education; food and clothing; and is documenting changes in the wellbeing of the community as a result of its programs. By providing ongoing funds and scholarships for the existing and planned new schools, FreeSchools World Literacy hopes to replicate its model throughout India, Thailand and other Developing Countries of the world.