



Sixth Meeting

FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

DATE commencing: Friday 2nd November 2007 TIME: 9 am
DATE completion: Sunday 4th November 2007 TIME: 9 pm

INTERNET VENUE: FreeSchools Literacy Australia email network
fswl-australia@googlegroups.com

Minutes of the Meeting

1. Rollcall of members present and apologies.

There were 8 participants in attendance
Robert Coenraads (President)
Ben Bowler (Vice President)
Delphine Swadling (Secretary)
Merindi Swadling (Treasurer)
Donna Cervantes (Committee Member)
Jildou Brower
Sue Tennant
Mark Bloomfield

Apologies

Yvonne Hirt (Committee Member)
Ian Esmore (Public Officer)

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the Fourth and Fifth meetings were sent to each member of the committee and accepted by the committee
Moved by Merindi Swadling and Seconded by Donna Cervantes

3. Reports from the Committee.

The President's Report was received by the committee

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to the 6th meeting of FSWL Australia. This month I thought I would like to share a letter with you that I received from Vincent Paul, the father of Sonal and Samridhi - the two students that my daughters are sponsoring to attend day school in India. As you can see the \$72 annual scholarship, which is so little to us, goes so far in India. The letter is addressed to me but, of course, it reflects the work of a whole chain of people starting with Mark Bloomfield and Sister Crescence, and ending with each one of you now involved, supportive and interested in the FreeSchools project.

Bettiah
The 19th day of September 2007

My dear Mr. Robert,
regards.

Rev. Sr. Crescence conveyed to me that in her letter you have remembered us and sent much regards to Sonal and Samridhi.

Dear brother I look at everything and find as a mysterious Plan of God, how God connected you and your family to our family. Sr Crescence sent the names of students to you for Scholarship. According to some divine plan you chose my two daughters to be pen friends of your two daughters. I wonder at this choice. See the similarity in both families. My family is a God-loving Catholic Family, so is yours.

I have only daughters, no son, so you too have. I am all alone a male member in my family, I guess you too are.

Dear Robert I cannot describe how lucky, how happy, how fortunate I find myself to have you as my brother, my friend and benefactor of my three daughters.

Perhaps you do not know it yet that Nancy, a student of B. of Nursing, is my eldest daughter to whom you have helped generously through Sr. Crescence, without knowing Nancy is my daughter. So I cannot but thank you and thank God to give you to us.

I am counting for the days when we could meet face to face. Now I can only send you our love through a letter.

My dear brother, I, and my family members, are very obliged for your love in the shape of financial help. And I cannot repay you and your family members.

Only we pray for you all

Now I end my words with love, regards to you all and love to Leonora and Francheska much much much

Yours
Vincent Paul

Sister Crescence has provided 5 other student's names (see minutes 2nd meeting) to whom FSWL is currently providing scholarship, so if any of you know somebody who may be interested in writing letters a student, there is that opportunity.

Thank you all for your participation and comments.

Kind regards,

Dr. Robert Coenraads (President)

4. Progress in Thailand.

Greetings from Fang, I trust all is well with you.

Here everything is going well, we are in the process of transitioning to the Mirror Group who will manage the project for the foreseeable future. We have been training the guys and I am sure they will do a fine job. Currently it looks like they will take over fully in December this year.

Ben Bowler

5. Progress in India

Dear Friends,

I've just returned from India, earlier than expected. The Sunday before leaving I caught that nasty virus going around Toronto and for the first week in Delhi I took every preventative I had to keep it at bay but after four days in Bettiah I lost the battle. All that coughing and sneezing was a colossal drag for everyone but we had to carry on. My son John left Bettiah on Tuesday with several sisters who needed to go to Patna. I realized that the rest of us had to leave together (Dr. John Lange and Saskia) as the return trip Patna/Bettiah which totals 14 hours of the worst roads possible (the "national highway" is nothing but huge gaping pot holes) required the company of Sister Crescence and to leave at different times would put her out considerably. I also discovered that when we are there, normal life for the entire convent is put on hold as Sister Crescence is Senior Superior. She can't be away from her job for more than a week.

We made the decision for the three of us to leave on Friday, but Thursday night we had a phone call from the Motherhouse in Patna that a state-wide strike had been called and that all roads would be blocked indefinitely. As Dr. John had surgeries booked this week in Arkansas he had to get out. I also felt like I had to get out to recover my health. I suggested we leave immediately and since Sister Crescence was in pain from a pinched nerve, I insisted that she remain in Bettiah. But, it is too dangerous to travel without the nuns, so after a very long day, Sister Elise (who it turns out is known as Bihar's "Mother Teresa") and three others (all of whom I will tell you about later), accompanied us. We were stopped at a major roadblock near Muzzafur but Elise got out of the car and with a dramatic story persuaded them to let us through. The nuns have "habit power" in Bihar and we were indeed saved from complete immobilization. Of course it didn't hurt that we had an entire convent of sisters praying for our safe arrival in Patna.

The living conditions in Bettiah, Motihari, Muzzafur and Patna (the capitol city) are extremely upsetting. The convent in Patna is quite civilized but the convent in Bettiah which is the only respite from chaos and filth is not equipped with window screens and is infested with mosquitoes and other insects (thanks to the flooding) and has electricity only two hours a day. The weather was very hot and humid and extremely uncomfortable for me without fans. I saw things this time I didn't last time, perhaps because I have a new set of eyes. The entire state from what I could see, is a garbage dump with teeming masses sifting through the decomposition looking for something to eat. I could never get over the children - so beautiful yet so terribly deprived - it made me extremely angry. The dust and filth in Bettiah and every other city we visited is positively criminal. I'm outraged that the Bihar government cannot even repair and pave its national highways and the main arterial roads in its cities. Without paved roads the endless traffic

makes the dust swirl like a thick ever-present fog that settles mercilessly on all prepared foods and markets that line the streets. India has the resources and with fair responsible governance the whole thing could be changed in 3 years. But alas, I digress.

While I'm frustrated by the government, I'm so grateful that FSWL is doing its thing in Bihar. You cannot even imagine the progress the children have made over the last year! The poise and confidence is the first thing you sense. The next thing is their appearance - somehow they manage to look beautiful and prosperous for our benefit - a complete contrast to the other village children whose parents still won't send their children to FreeSchool because they need them to work. But most of all, they show their stuff in music, dancing and drama. The latent pools of talent that have been unleashed by FreeSchools is simply stunning. Every school that we visited for a second time was barely able to contain the desire for the students to express themselves. The children and their parents now understand that FSWL is their benefactor and their expressions of deep love for us was totally unexpected. I'm only sorry that each and every one of you was not there to share in this incredible unfolding of human potential and gratitude. But I have pictures - and lots of them!

Our visit is the biggest event in every village. The question always asked is "When will you be back?" We are a lifeblood to these amazing children and their grateful parents.

My son John intends to raise money in the Vancouver Bike Community to fund badly-needed wheelchairs. Dr. John Lange intends to return each year to establish more "health camps" and a health care program to compliment FreeSchools. Saskia intends to raise money to expand handicapped facilities in Sagauli. FSWL will continue to fund the schools as they grow, mature and spread.

I'll be recovering at Brad St. for a few days if you need to reach me. It's best I get caught up on sleep and don't talk too much as it starts the coughing. I'll look forward to seeing everyone at our Board meeting November 26.

Cheers! Sue

6. General Business.

The following discussion took place during the meeting and is recorded here for completeness under the following headings:

1. Discussions on Africa
2. United Nation's Millennium Development Goals
3. FSWL Bank Account
4. The FSWL registration process in Australia
5. Continuation of open discussion topics

Discussions on Africa

Mark: "As Ben may or may not have mentioned, I'm eager to have them replicate Cresence's model in Uganda where kids are routinely used as either drugged up soldiers or sex slaves. As I am up to my eyeballs in seeding work I would be glad if Ben and Jildou would use that \$1000 that Donna Cervantes kindly donated towards the set up of African free schools to set up the first half dozen or so schools.

If they can't make it there, I'll start them up myself but only if I can find a totally abuse-free environment run by Catholic nuns.

The bottom line on this is that the lot of the north Ugandan kids makes the lot of the Bihari kids in India look positively utopian.

Let's keep that very much in mind."

Robert: "Thanks for your comments, Mark. It is such a pity when children cannot live their childhood years in innocence and freedom in an environment that encourages learning and self development.

Yes, I do remember that Sister Crescence's schools felt like small islands of utopia in a sea of poverty."

Jildou: "Mark thanks for your answers. I understand it's very much a matter of feeling as you go along. I will follow the news from the region and will wait for your experiences as you get there.

The first idea was to cooperate with, partner with Free Schools Australia. I feel it is better to do this work as part of a supportive NGO than just as Ben and I. Mainly because raising money with the Free Schools name would be easier than not.

After the first positive reaction to your email to Robert and the team we had an email from Sue strongly urging to only focus on India. So we need to find out what the opinion now will be from the Australian team.

It will be hard to set things up with little funds from just some family and friends but we know that Mark has done it like that in India and look how the schools are blooming!

We are keen to explore the options of initiating an India-like model for Free Schools in Africa.

I'm keen to know what Robert, Ian, Merindi, Donna, Yvonne, Delphine, Kathleen and other member of the committee think about this initiative

Sue: "Dear friends,
I just wanted to provide some facts that support our FreeSchools work in India.

1. India is the world's fourth-largest economy.
 2. By 2034, India will have the largest population of any country on Urantia - 1.6 billion.
 3. One out of three of the world's malnourished children live in India.
 4. 700,000 million live on less than \$2/day.
 4. India has the world's largest youth population - 600 million are under the age of 25.
 5. 29% of India's population speaks English - that's 350 million people.
 6. In 2008, India's total pool of qualified graduates will double China's.
 7. India's middle class outnumbers the entire population of the United States.
- (from Planet India by Mira Kamdar ISBN-13 978-0-7432-9685-4; ISBN-10; 0-7432-9685-0)

The Urantia Book tells us that India harbours the highest mixture of world races with a strong blending of the red race. On page 1032, we are told that in India today, "the great need is for the portrayal of the Jesusonian gospel - the Fatherhood of God and the sonship and consequent brotherhood of all men, which is personally realized in loving ministry and social service. In India the philosophical framework is existent, the cult structure is present; all that is needed is the vitalizing spark of the dynamic love portrayed in the original gospel of the Son of Man, divested of the Occidental dogmas and doctrines which have tended to make Michael's bestowal a white man's religion."

Saskia and I, and recently Dr. John Lange, have witnessed this vitalizing spark in the 34 FreeSchools managed by Sister Crescence. The essential ingredient of success is Divine love in action. The sisters and teachers deliver it daily and we deliver it by organizing financial support, which is no small job. John Lange plans to deliver love in the form of health care. We pray that it will prosper because we are each in tune with the Father's pattern of brotherhood service and spiritual uplift.

However, we have been supporting FreeSchools for just 3 years and are barely touching the surface of a few thousand lives. There are over 80 million people in Bihar - 90% live in villages and are mostly illiterate. It is a tragedy that these people have been deprived of an education because of the caste system and the outright murderers and thieves who win elections by brute force and who now govern Bihar. Our FreeSchools provide literacy, and support the empowerment of women at a grass roots level but we need to expand..

This past trip we also established a partnership in Delhi with Rev. Ashish Amos and ISPCCK (publishers of The Urantia Book in India) to support 2 more FreeSchools and 4 Women's empowerment Centres in a God-forsaken Muslim section 45 minutes south of Delhi. These schools are run by Protestants and supply education in English, Hindi and Urdu. They hire Muslim teachers. Saskia and I had visited these schools last year and the progress that has been made in the last four years is very impressive.

But so far, the impact of FreeSchools is very, very small when we consider the immensity of the challenge,. We need much more help, focused on India.

The need is so very great, not just for Indian children, but for the future of Urantia, since Indian politics and economics will factor strongly in our future. We need more people, especially Urantians, who understand what's at stake in the cosmic sense, to support the expansion of the Indian FreeSchools.

I'm just wondering who is interested in this project from Australia?
Blessings, Sue”

Robert: “Sue has provided quite a provoking list clearly supporting the important work that we are doing in India, and it clearly encourages us to grow into the future beyond the approximately \$1,000-\$1,500 that wa have been sending to India over the past 7 years. We will, of course, never cease to support India until such time that it is standing on its own two feet, which I doubt that any of us will see anytime in the near future. So I hope that there will never be any doubt in your mind, Sue, that FSWL-Australia would ever lessen its interest in the situation in Bihar, India.

The country by country statistics that I provided showing the incredibly low levels of primary education in the worst of world's countries (many are African countries) did not include India, simply because the better states actually push its overall primary school education levels quite high and therefore on a country basis India sits surprisingly high on the table. These statistics do not, however, highlight small poor states that have somehow fallen through the gap, like Bihar, with people existing in the disgusting conditions as described by Sue.

Nevertheless all this does not exclude us from considering funding projects in Africa run along identical lines as those in India. As I mentioned before, every human child deserves an education, and at this stage we do not have enough money to support every needy child on this planet. So it is my firm belief that we follow the plan that will educate the maximum number of children per donation dollar that we can raise.

At this point FSWL Australia could not consider funding the extra initialization costs, for example airfares and living expenses, to investigate the possibility of starting new free schools in new countries (eg as \$1,600 spent on an Africa return airfare could instead fund an additional school of 100 children each in Bihar for a year). Such infrastructural costs would make the supporting of needy children in Africa more expensive per child than the comparable costs in Bihar (as happened in Thailand). Mark is seeding over in Africa right now, and if he comes across another Sister Crescence, then well and good, some new schools may spring into being that may even be cheaper to run than those in India - and that would certainly be inspiration to support both Africa and India.

All that said and done, if Ben and Jildou have a burning desire to work with Mark in Africa, I would also not want to stand in their way of using the FreeSchools World Literacy name and their own time to raise funds to get themselves over there. Or to spend their own time raising funds to send to Mark to start freeschools over there in Africa under the Sister Crescence model (to which Donna has already generously donated). The most important point to make here is that humans tend to perform to their optimum when they are doing something that they believe in with their whole heart - more enthusiasm leads to more commitment, and ultimately more funds raised and help given. If people are free to strive for their goals they believe in, then great things can happen. And there is scope for this free will choice.

Anyway that is enough on the matter by me. Our way forward will provide much food for thought and comment, but as there is a committee of sensible people available to deliberate carefully on every thought or plan before it is put into action, I am sure that we are not going to make any serious mistakes in working towards our goal."

Sue: "Dear friends,
Jildou is right. I was always reminded of how much further \$2000 and later \$3000/month (allocated to Thailand) would go in funding schools in India. But to imply that India "is the only thing on the radar" for me is not correct.

I think Ben and Jildou will do a great job for FreeSchools wherever they go and did not fully grasp that they wanted to continue in this work. I felt obliged to make a strong case for more support in India because we are only beginning to take root there. There is so much more that is needed; it is overwhelming. I tried to provide as much information as possible regarding FreeSchools in India so that when you get your charitable tax status you can make an informed decision. For best results it is always better to work together and focus but we are independent organizations and you're free to do whatever you want. I just wish that more of you could visit India and see things first-hand. Once you take on a FreeSchool project, there's no turning back and it's easy for us to spread ourselves too thin.

But since Ben and Jildou are still keen to work with FreeSchools I have a proposal. We would gladly support their expenses in India for a year to help Sister Crescence. We are desperate for an English speaking computer literate person/s to train people in technology and to communicate with us. There are even accommodations in the convent for them. Sister Crescence needs so much help and what a chance in a lifetime to work day -to-day with her! There are tremendous opportunities to advance Women's empowerment and literacy centres. Sister Elise (chief of health services) works with 300 staff and volunteers (funded by donors and NGOs) who service both West and East Champaran. We met with about 30 supervisors, mostly men, who are totally dedicated to girls education and the relief of poverty. The FreeSchools project is qualitatively different and Sister Crescence's own cherished project but they cooperate and work out of the same convent in Bettiah. While I would need to first discuss this with Sister Crescence, I believe that they would be ecstatic to have the help of a western couple. The people are so grateful for our help and presence when we are there. It could provide a tremendous boost to Sister Crescence and the FreeSchools and believe that there is a real service opportunity of the highest order here. It would make a tremendous difference to FreeSchools in India and with such an experience under their belt, Ben and Jildou would know much better what is required in establishing sustainable FreeSchools in Africa.

But just for the record, the Thai project is also very important to me and our Board. I made the trip to Thailand last June specifically to meet Ben and Jildou and to assess the situation as fairly as I could. Last May, our Board was inclined to phase out the schools and focus on India as our Board still does not have a functioning fundraising committee. Traveling to Asia for me is never a small matter, but it was worth the trip to see the good work that Ben and Jildou were doing which was described in our second newsletter (see www.freeschools.org). I also funded a photographer friend from Toronto to document the lives of the students and teachers for improved publicity for Thailand. I developed a better understanding of how our model had changed and got

much closer to the Hill Tribe and Shan children. I left feeling determined to find a way to keep the schools going.

The problem is managing the FreeSchools is not a full-time job and it's not sustainable for us to have to pay volunteers' living expenses and to find and train new volunteers every year. A charitable managing partner is the only way to make the schools work. At the end of my trip and with the help of our photographer, I initiated contact with the Mirror Foundation in Chiang Rai. Over the summer we negotiated a managing partnership and I am most grateful to Ben for helping to make this transition work. The Mirror Group are experts in Hill Tribe culture and share our goals. This development will save us a great deal of money and will certainly help maintain these schools in the future.

So I think it's only fair to say we have demonstrated strong support for the Thai project.

Blessings, Sue."

Jildou and Ben: "Dear Sue and Australian team,
Sue you made some interesting points and put forward some good ideas. I thank you for your thoughtful responds.
I like to explain that when Ben and I came to Thailand we never restricted ourselves to give just one year. We both feel that we would like to continue to serve in the field, helping children in need as long as we possible can.

We also value your insight that serving in India would give us great experience with the Model that we then could bring over to Africa, which is something that is still in our hearts. We both do understand that in order to fund a new project in Africa, whenever that would be, we would need to find new fundraising streams.

We are open to your suggestion of going to India based on the assurance that we are needed and would be useful there. Our first response is that if we would go down this path, something like a 4 - 6 months period in India would be what we would be prepared to commit to at this stage. So Sue, do you think we are really needed in India and do you think we can do something to help Free Schools given this time period?

Sue: "Dear Jildou and friends,
I'm very happy that you are open to a period of service with the FreeSchools in India! The more I think about it, the more I am convinced this could be a seriously pivotal step for FreeSchools. But I've been quite swamped today with other responsibilities. Hopefully in the next couple of days I can draft a job description that you can take a look at, and if it seems doable to you and Ben, then I would attempt to both put it in writing for Sister Crescence to consider as well as talk to her on the phone about it. But I need to use the phone at our Toronto office as we have over 2000 minutes of free long distance to India and I can't get away from Silver Springs until next Monday. It also is not easy to reach her (time difference and her busy schedule) and can sometimes take several days. So I would greatly appreciate your bearing with me over the next little while and I will be in touch. Blessings, Sue

The United Nations Millennium Plan

Ben: "<http://www.theage.com.au/news/web/google-gives-a-birds-eye-view-of-poverty/2007/11/02/1193619116213.html>. The above article in today's paper concerns a recent development to bring further attention to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals. It is important to us because goal no 2 is *universal primary education for everyone everywhere by 2015*. See <http://www.mdgmonitor.org/goal2.cfm>
We could well tap into this for publicity and fund raising.

Robert: "Thank you, Ben, for drawing our attention to that new MDG website (see my email to them) and their potential publicity and fund raising benefits.

Also important is their country profile database (with important statistics such as net enrolment in primary education) which can guide our future efforts to world education problem zones (areas such as Somalia, Nigeria, Comoros and Ethiopia with shockingly low levels). See data table below.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to congratulate you on the setting up of such an important website in terms of being a database for educational, health and developmental targets. This website is going to be an important resource and progress monitor for all those interested.

Our organization, FreeSchools World Literacy, is attempting to achieve progress in the area of your Goal 2 (target area 3 - universal primary education for everyone everywhere by 2015). We began in 1999 and now have over 3,000 students learning at 45 FreeSchools World Literacy-funded centres in India and Thailand. Please visit our website at <http://www.freeschools.org.au> and international links to see details of our work.

I look forward to working closely with the MDG monitor and organizations mentioned therein in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Robert Coenraads
President
FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia

Data Table: Percentage Attendance of Primary School

COUNTRY	%
Somalia	12
Niger	30
Comoros	31
Ethiopia	31
Burkina Faso	32
Djibouti	33
Chad	36
Guinea-Bissau	39
Mali	39
Sierra Leone	41
Central African Republic	43
Mauritania	44
Burundi	47
Albania	52
Congo, Democratic Republic	52
Afghanistan	53
Gambia	53
Benin	54
Haiti	55
Côte d'Ivoire	56
Pakistan	56
Guinea	57
Zambia	57
Angola	58
Sudan	58
Saudi Arabia	59
Mozambique	60
Nigeria	60
Equatorial Guinea	61

Lao Democratic Republic	62
Cambodia	65
Ghana	65
Lesotho	65
Liberia	66
Senegal	66
Eritrea	67
Bhutan	70
Togo	70

The FSWL Charity Bank Account:

Nothing further to report this month

7. Set date and time for COM meeting. Close meeting

Meetings of the Committee of FSWL Australia will be held on the first Friday of each month. The next official meeting will be from Friday 7th to Sunday 9th of December, 2007.

The business of the meeting concluded on Monday 5th November 2007

The Committee is thanked for its involvement

END OF MINUTES

Appendix 1

The FSWL Committee - Australian Contact Details

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