



Ninth Meeting

FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

DATE commencing: Friday 7th March 2008 TIME: 9 am
DATE completion: Sunday 9th March 2008 TIME: 9 pm

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

Minutes of the Meeting

1. Rollcall of members and others present and apologies.

There were 4 participants in attendance
Robert Coenraads (President)
Delphine Swadling (Secretary)
Merindi Swadling (Treasurer)
Sue Tennant
Kathleen Swadling

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the Seventh and Eighth meeting were sent to each member of the committee and were accepted by the committee
Moved by Merindi Swadling and Seconded by Robert Coenraads

3. Reports from the Committee.

The President's Report was received by the committee

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to the 9th meeting of FSWL Australia.
It is truly inspiring to read all the progress that FreeSchools has been making. In Sue's emails, she reports that have, "We are well over 60 centers and counting."

Special congratulations and best wishes for their future together are conveyed to Ben and Jildou following their recent wedding in Thailand, which I am sure we would have all enjoyed attending. All the best for a wonderful life of achievement, together working at what you love doing most.

Thanks again to all of the committee for taking the time to participate, and for your valuable comments.

Kind regards,

Dr. Robert Coenraads (President)

4. Progress in Thailand.

Sue: In Thailand, with the Mirror Foundation adding additional merits to our project, we are funding 14 teachers of Hill Tribe FreeSchools.

As well, we are funding an independent FreeSchool "Ban Huay Sisiad" south of Chiang Mai, supervised by Somdeaw, who was instrumental in founding the FreeSchools with Mark in Fang and who continued to work closely with Ben and Jildou all last year. Som is a remarkable person who left his job as head of English in the Fang High School to relocate near his parents about 5 hours south east of Fang. There he is reviving a poor village government school that has failed by neglect and is infusing new energy with a FreeSchool class and a female teacher.

This is the status of FreeSchools today. We are well over 60 centers and counting.

Sue: Dear friends, Please find attached Somdeaw's February FreeSchols report for your information. Many thanks to Ben and Jildou for continuing to cultivate this relationship, which has grown into another FreeSchools. We are blessed to have such quality people involved in this project.

Hi Sue,

Thank you for 5600 B received to pay Miss Nok and expenses for February and March.

I met the people from Canada for a very short time because they needed to go to Huay Chanu. I think they loved the Free Schools like you.

Ben's wedding was very beautiful - so sweet. If someone wants to get married in Thailand, I can help.

We now have three computers and my students cleaned and decorated a computer room. They are very happy to use and learn computers because it is a very new technology for them. They never touched a computer before. I have to teach them how to use the "mouse". So they play lots of games to practice. And I and my students also made a library room [small but very nice]. Every noon the students must read in the library. This is our rule. And we have a big room for activities where we watch TV, sing, dance and do activities.

Next year, I'm planning to teach my students to use the Internet and learn more English for communication. I will plan the project or curriculum for the students to study from real situations, with more experience than study in the classroom. They will have to search the internet and ask people in the village in order to study real places. It will be experimental and individual project work. It will mean that they must try to solve problems or find answers by themselves in several ways.

Our class must change from Teacher Talk and Chalk Talk to a Student focus where the Teacher acts as assistant or counsellor.

I agree with you to pair my class with a Canadian school to exchange photos and information. It is a very good idea and great opportunity for my students and it would be a helpful learning experience for my village children. They will learn more about the whole world not just about their village.

My task is to teach them a lot English. Every night I plan and dream about my school. When I wake up I can do it true. It may not be big, beautiful or important to others, but for me it is a big bonus and makes me very proud.

Thanks Sue. You give me inspiration.

Love Deaw

5. Progress in India

Sue: Saskia spent 6 days in Toronto with me the week before last and all last week at home finalizing the one-page profiles in Pagemaker on each FreeSchool and women's empowerment (tailoring) centres in Bihar. It was a huge job, countless hours, and she did all the work. It turns out that there are often three different names (and spellings!) for the location of the schools, not to mention the names of the teachers. The final discernment had to come from the consistency of the pictures themselves (several thousand) from two visits (2006 and 2007) with different clothing and from 4 cameras (mine, Saskia's and John's - plus Mark's the year before). I can't emphasize enough what a remarkable feat was accomplished by Saskia and what thanks from FreeSchools we owe her. I don't have the computer skills, notes, time and patience to have done this on my own. I believe that she intends to continue the story and documentation of FreeSchools on her website at www.squarecircles.com so I encourage you to look for it in the near future.

As a result of her work, we know for sure that FSWL is funding 38 schools + 3 tailoring centres in Bihar. I will send you a CD with the beautiful pages of each center for your information and use in Australia.

In addition, FSWL is funding 6 all-Muslim ISPCCK FreeSchools and 3 women's empowerment centres in Dr. Ashish Amos' schools south of Delhi.

Sue: I just got off the phone after 1 1/2 hours with Sr. Crescence.

1. Regarding the renovation and the FreeSchools residential program at Sacred Heart convent in Bettiah, she's waiting for new bricks (they make the new bricks in Bihar Feb/March). Bricks made last year were destroyed by the floods. 14 girls have been found eligible* and are currently being interviewed for the Van Hoek Convent school (Sister Marcel) which opens in April. Their capacity is 15 girls. Sacred Heart will be 20.

Together we calculated the cost per student to be 800 IND/month (includes tuition, room and board, uniform, toilet items, stationery and pencils, Hindi/English textbooks). Each student or the whole project needs to be sponsored. Here's the math:

Monthly/student
800IND \$20.22 Cnd. \$20 U.S. \$22 Australian

Annual/student
9600IND \$243 Cnd. \$239 U.S. \$260 Australian

Total amount needed annually for Van Hoek Convent FreeSchool residential program:
9600 x 15 students = 144,000INR (\$3,582.09US).

The same costs (per student) will apply to the new Sacred Heart residence next year.

*Eligibility criteria:

1. must be coming out of the FreeSchools experience and reading and writing at the same level
2. must be able to leave their parents and feel at home in the convent
3. must be 8 yrs of age or older

2. Sr. Crescence' assistant has gone - he was "bluffing" her, she said. She's quite tired and concerned with her tremendous workload (an older sister broke her leg yesterday and she had to spend the entire day at the hospital; a very capable sister left the order; her eyes are bad) but

says the schools are doing very well. She said she sent me 2 emails - one in mid-January and another last week but I never received them.

3. She shut down the schools in Sati. It wasn't working and took a whole day to travel there. Schools now total 35 with 3 tailoring centers.

4. A doctor in Patna told her that he had heard that stem cell treatment for retinal degeneration is showing good results. She's going to get more information.

We spent a lot of time discussing a new budget for the FreeSchools as they are evolving and becoming more effective. She's limiting each class to 50 students. Each school is going to be divided into a Junior and Senior school and a second teacher will be hired. She feels she must pay the teachers more. Costs will increase and I've asked her to itemize all her costs and send them to me as soon as possible but honestly I don't know how she can do it without an assistant. She has to have a proper assistant who can convey information. There are other problems as well but we'll figure it out.

Robert: Thank you very much for that update, and it is tremendous to see everything working so well and growing.

Like yourself, though, I am extremely concerned about the increasing workload and dependence on Sister Crescence for the success and day to day running of the program. It is several times in my life now that I have seen programs/organizations suffer or even fail when key individuals, that have been linchpins of the organization, have been forced to withdraw their services through stress, illness or other reasons. Responsibility must be shared around among subordinate individuals who then have time to grow and learn the details of the program. It was bad luck about the assistant, but the process of finding good staff is often like that.

The proverb is - "don't put all your eggs in one basket", and we need to organize and pay some more permanent staff - even at the expense of student growth in the immediate future. Surely there are others as honest and as hardworking as Sister Crescence that are near to her and can be entrusted with some of the responsibility of her burden?

I know this is a far more difficult task to achieve in India than it sounds, as you have been looking into it during both your trips to India now, but I wish you all the best in your work.

Sue: You are quite right and so today I made the decision to go back to Bihar and help Sister Crescence sort all this out - minus the time-consuming hospitality and school visits. I will probably leave in two weeks.

Our FreeSchools Board members have made it clear that they need an accurate budget, realistic projections and total financial disclosure before they feel confident in approaching corporate donors. I need to work with Sr. Crescence day-to-day to work out these details, find and train an assistant, and get a lot of other questions answered. But I believe that this can be best done personally, prayerfully and in the spirit of God's love. I know she wants me to be there with her - she has as much as asked me to help.

I have a good relationship with Rev. Amos and Ella who oversees the ISPCK FreeSchools. We share the same goals and I will ask for their counsel and help while in Delhi. They may have some ideas of how we might possibly even work together to help Sister Crescence in Bihar. They may know people - they may have ideas.

Robert: You are really amazing in your dedication and commitment to the project. I'm glad that you have the time and ability to do this trip, and it is definitely the right thing to do. I would like to relay my very best wishes for success in your mission and I am sure that the rest of the Australian committee also echoes these wishes.

Kathleen: I echo Robert's comments about your dedication to this program and also his best wishes for your trip. I'm quite moved by your willingness to act so quickly in such a way. I think your relationship with Rev. Amos could be very important here.

I know I haven't been very vocal on this list but rest assured I'm an active "lurker" and most impressed with the level of dedication by those who are being so pro-actively involved with FreeSchools. Please know that you are in my prayers. May God bless and guide your steps, your heart, your mind, your soul, your actions, and your words, and may he keep you safe. Take care dear one.

Sue: Your expression of support is greatly appreciated. Thank you so much dear friend.

Every day we move a little bit further on our journey with FSWL. Our goal of raising \$90,000 this year is quite formidable for a start-up charity and a totally volunteer organization. But somehow we're going to do it. Because every now and again, we meet people who are drawn to our work because we are not so "big" and they want to help us. The bottom line may be that when we put the opportunity out there, we get the help of angels.

Today, we had an Open House in our small Toronto office and 20 volunteers signed up to help FreeSchools. We may now have the potential skill base that we have been dreaming about for two years. People want to do something for the good of humanity and I think it's our job to show them how they can.

Sue: Yesterday I talked with Sr. Crescence and she's expecting me to arrive in Patna on March 25th. I've booked my flight arriving in Delhi on March 18 and departing April 7th. It's 12:30 a.m. my time now and I'm just about to call Ella at ISPCK. I'll be one week in Delhi and hopefully spending Easter with her and/or Rev. Amos, then on to Bihar. I pray they can give me some good ideas and contacts but of course there is the Catholic/Protestant thing to overcome. It's bigger than I thought. Sr. C knows I'm very serious about establishing dependable email contact and a monthly method of accountability, but it still comes down to finding the right assistant.

6. General Business.

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

1. FSWL Bank Account:

Merindi: I don't have any major treasury news to report:

- Internet banking has been set-up. I plan to transfer \$250 sponsorship money (from Donna) to the FSWL Canadian account this afternoon via Internet telegraphic transfer. This is the first time we've done this, but I have full confidence in Westpac and international transfers. This will be the most cost effective and efficient way to get money out of Australia.
- I plan to put together a donation / tax-receipting process this month. I'll keep everyone informed on progress.

Robert: Thanks very much for your efforts. The new system you are designing will make the whole process clean and neat. A great improvement on my previous system of scraps of paper with names and numbers on them! I will prepare a letter of thanks that can automatically accompany each tax receipt that your system generates, and the two can be sent out to each of our donors or sponsors.

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 4th to Sunday 6th of April, 2008.

The Committee is thanked for its involvement

END OF MINUTES

Appendix 1

The FSWL Committee - Australian Contact Details

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