



First Annual General Meeting 2008 for FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

DATE commencing: Friday 3rd Oct 2008 TIME: 9 am
DATE completion: Friday 24th Oct 2008 TIME: 6 am

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

Member pre-registration is essential to participate and vote

Minutes of the Meeting

1. Rollcall of members present and apologies.

There were 12 participants in attendance and 1 apology

Merindi Belarski
Ben Bowler
Jildou Brouwer
Donna Cervantes
Robert Coenraads
Ian Esmore
Betty Lyon
Chelsea Mclean
Delphine Swadling
Kathleen Swadling
Sue Tennant
Judy Townsend

Apologies

Yvonne Hirt

2. Welcome and background briefing by the Chairperson/President.

Welcome to the 2008 Annual General Meeting and First AGM for FreeSchools World Literacy. The commencement date of this AGM was announced on the 6th September during our 15th FSWL Monthly Meeting. An Agenda for the 2008 AGM was sent to all interested participants prior to the meeting on the 24th September, and again on the first day of the meeting, and its receipt acknowledged.

3. Minutes of previous years formation meeting (AGM) 3rd June 2007.

As circulated to membership

Motion: That the minutes of the 2007 AGM be accepted.

Move: Merindi Belarski Second: Ian Esmore Carried

4. President's Report.
As circulated to membership

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT 2008

It has been eight years since Mark Bloomfield and I travelled to Motihari Evening School in Bihar State, India. There, I saw first hand 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 the knowledge spread from the student back to their poor families.

Eight years on, and with over 3,000 students being taught by 80 teachers at 72 FreeSchool World Literacy funded centres in India and Thailand (classes average around 50 students), I am seeing the real benefits of this education flow back into the community in which the students live. Thank you to Sister Crescence and Rev. Ashish Amos in India, and the Mirror Foundation and Ben & Jildou Bowler in Thailand for their continuing selfless work in coordinating the schools in the field.

The scholarships program, now in its third year, has grown to 12 students in India and 6 in Thailand. It has also been particularly rewarding for me to observe my own children, Francheska and Leonora, gain a deeper understanding of what it means to help those less fortunate than themselves, through their correspondence with the Indian scholarship students, Sonal and Samridhi, that they are sponsoring.

Our first Committee of Management has been in operation since the first official meeting of FSWL-Australia in June 2007 and has been meeting online once a month since then. The 2007 Committee consisted of Robert Coenraads (President), Ben Bowler (Vice President), Ian Esmore (Publicity Officer), Delphine Swadling (Secretary), Merindi Swadling (Treasurer), Erica Light, Yvonne Hirt, Donna Cervantes, and Kathleen Swadling (Committee Members). I would like to thank them for their dedication to the FreeSchools project. .

In September, we were saddened by the loss of Erica Light from our Committee and wish her well on her Godward journey.

Special congratulations and best wishes for their future together are conveyed to Ben Bowler and Jildou Bouwer following their wedding in Thailand, and also to Merindi Swadling and Bernie Belarski following their wedding.

This coming January we look forward to the opportunity to visit our FreeSchools students in northern Thailand. Joanna Townsend and her mother Judy will also accompany Sue Tennant. Jo works at Channel 9 News and, having learnt about our organization, and now with the opportunity to meet the children first hand, she will be in an ideal position to present the FreeSchools story to all who are willing to listen.

Dr. Robert Coenraads
President
FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia

Motion: That the President's report be received and accepted as read.
Move: Robert Coenraads Second: Ian Esmore Carried:

5. Treasurer's Report.
As circulated to membership

FreeSchools World Literacy - Australia
8 Trigalana Place
Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086

Financial Statement for 2008 Annual General Meeting
To 30 September 2008

Date

Incoming Funds to FSWL - Australia

Total Donations to 2001 to July 2008	\$ 12,969.00	
Donation for specific Africa Program	\$ 1,000.00	
Donations July to 30 September 2008	\$ 425.00	
Bank Interest	\$ 4.28	
TOTAL Incoming Funds to FSWL		\$ 14,398.28

Outgoing Donations to Overseas FreeSchools

28-Jun-01	\$ 727.00	
16-Aug-02	\$ 827.00	
06-Mar-03	\$ 816.00	
25-Aug-03	\$ 816.00	
05-Mar-04	\$ 716.00	
24-Mar-05	\$ 730.00	
04-Oct-05	\$ 1,700.00	
08-May-06	\$ 870.00	
07-Aug-06	\$ 1,000.00	
17-Oct-06	\$ 1,000.00	
28-Nov-06	\$ 720.00	
06-Mar-07	\$ 733.00	
05-Feb-08	\$ 1,439.00	
05-Jul-08	\$ 875.00	
TOTAL Outgoing Donations (Loss)		\$ 12,969.00

Assets

30-Sep-08 Cash in Bank (ready to be sent overseas)	\$ 1,429.28	
TOTAL Assets		\$ 1,429.28

Motion: That the Treasurer's report be received and accepted as read.
Move: Robert Coenraads Second: Ian Esmore Carried:

6. Election of Committee of Management and Nomination of Public Officer

The committee was elected as follows:

ROBERT COENRAADS has been nominated as President/Chairperson of FSWL Australia

BEN BOWLER has been nominated Vice President of FSWL Australia

IAN ESMORE has been nominated as Publicity Officer of FSWL Australia

DELPHINE SWADLING has been nominated as Secretary of FSWL Australia

MERINDI BELARSKI has been nominated as Treasurer of FSWL Australia

DONNA CERVANTES has been nominated to the position of Committee Member of FSWL Australia

KATHLEEN SWADLING has been nominated to the position of Committee Member of FSWL Australia

BETTY LYON has been nominated to the position of Committee Member of FSWL Australia

7. Chairperson to confirm appointments.

Ian Esmore moved a motion that the nominees for the committee – Robert Coenraads, Ben Bowler, Ian Esmore, Delphine Swadling, Merindi Belarski, and Donna Cervantes be accepted as listed for Committee of Management positions. Seconded by Merindi Belarski. Robert Coenraads moved a motion that the nominee for the committee – Kathleen Swadling be accepted as listed for ordinary committee member position. Seconded by Ian Esmore. Robert Coenraads moved a motion that the nominee for the committee – Betty Lyon be accepted as listed for ordinary committee member position. Seconded by Ben Bowler

President Robert Coenraads confirmed the appointments to the Committee of Management as listed in Item 5.

8. Confirm schedule of membership fees

It was confirmed that FSWL Australia will have NIL membership fees. Robert Coenraads has moved that we are to have NIL membership fees. Ian Esmore seconded this motion

9. General Business :

Ben and Jildou: Over the last weeks and months Jildou and I have been involved in gathering an alliance of interested organisations for the purpose of setting up a FreeSchool type program inside Shan State in Burma.

As most of you will be aware the situation in Burma is one of the most diabolical anywhere in the world and certainly in Asia. A number of the FreeSchools here around Fang have been serving the large Shan community

who live here having fled the regime's brutal dominance of their native Shan State.

Shan State is historically an independent state and was treated as such by the British colonialists. Over the last 50 years they have been betrayed by the Burmese military Junta, annexed into The Union of Myanmar and have lost their freedom and basic human rights. In some senses it is a situation akin to the Tibetan experience, in other senses it is a great deal worse.

The Shan, like the Karen people have been involved in the longest running civil war in the world today, more than 50 years. Shan State covers an area 4 times the size of Holland and is home to some 6 million Shan people.

The situation inside is one of terrible brutality where fear and poverty rule the day. There are very few organisations working with the poor people in this area of Burma.

The Karen situation is quite similar although they do get a great deal more assistance from foreign (predominantly U.S.) aid organisations. One reason for this is that the Karen people are now largely Christian whereas the Shan people remain overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhist like their Thai neighbours. As such, U.S. Christian groups have been more attracted to working with the equally deserving Karen people.

One of the big barriers to working inside the Shan area is the ongoing violence and oppression from the Burmese army. Any yet there are a small number of groups who operate inside with the protection of the Shan Rebel Army (SSA). Indeed this is the only way to operate with any security.

One group Partners Relief have been getting medical teams and supplies inside Shan State now for some time, working with the SSA and Free Burma Rangers. Both these orgs are Christian but their activities are about saving lives, not souls. Both these robust organisations are willing partners in this evolving project, with the working name, 'Learn to Live Network'.

We are working with these groups to formulate a plan to get desperately needed education projects into the Shan communities. The key to the proposal is to work with supportive Monks from within the Shan Sangha (Buddhist Clergy). The Temples are the only network with the infrastructure to pull something like this off on a large scale + they have the added advantage of being highly respected by the people.

The plan that is developing is that Teachers & Leaders would be identified from within SSA controlled areas and brought to teacher-training camps along the Thai-Burmese border for around 3 months before being sent back to their own communities as Teachers and ambassadors of hope. The temples will be their classrooms and they will provide teaching for children and adults alike. As well as school programs they will be conduits for getting nutrition and medical supplies into the communities.

It is important to offer a diverse range of assistance because Shan people receive very little aid from outside due to the political situation and sanctions. We are in the process of identifying the right leading monks from inside Shan State to sponsor this project from within.

I urge FreeSchools Australia to become an advisory member of this program. The experience gained in India and Thailand will be most valuable in setting up a program in Burma. It is interesting to note that Burma in fact connects Thailand & India, not so far from Bihar.

I say advisory role as I am aware that there would be no funding coming for this project from FreeSchools any time soon and yet I think FreeSchools as an organisation has a great deal to offer the project as it evolves. FreeSchools offers, from an education perspective, a good deal of credibility and experience. Both Partners Relief and Free Burma Rangers, while having the incalculable advantage of actual experience running programs inside Burma, have been focused more on medical relief & rescue than education. So I think within the

concept of a Network or an Alliance and together with the Shan Temple network, we would have a strong team.

On a slightly different note I am highly encouraged to see these Christian groups excited about working (training & funding) with the Buddhist monks. When faced with the enormity of the human need in Burma, religious differences are best put aside. I see great potential in such a development.

While we would like to keep the program at a low profile locally for security reasons, I imagine if done well it would offer some vitalising PR opportunities in the West.

There is a lot of information to convey but I hope I have been able to get the main points across. If there are any questions or comments please feel free to discuss them.

Robert: I think that the FreeSchools model would be most effective in the situation that you describe in Shan State, particularly in that the organization is non-secular. You are also right in saying that FreeSchools has a lot of practical experience to offer, most especially in the form of yourself, Ben, and as Vice President you are in an ideal position to act as an ambassador for our organization in the region.

How do you envisage that we would go about beginning our low profile program?

Ben: Hello Robert & thank you for your encouragement. The first thing to say is that there is a great need for such a program inside Shan state and potentially in other areas of Burma.

The next thing to say is that it simply would not be possible without a) the involvement of the existing organisations that have experience inside the area b) the security provided by the SSA and c) the enthusiastic support of the Monk Clergy from within the region.

We have met with the leadership of both NGO organisations mentioned in our email and Partners Relief in particular is most interested in developing this idea. They have an existing relationship with the SSA and that is an essential advantage. We have met with advisors to the SSA who are also enthusiastic supporters of the project going forward. We are however still at the formative stages and it is many months before we can begin in earnest. The last piece of this puzzle is contacting with the appropriate Monks to drive this from within.

All FreeSchools can really do for now is to be informed and supportive. From a strategic perspective as I mentioned I believe FS has a certain amount of credibility and some experience to bring to the table. Also potentially if donors are found from within Australia for such a project, FreeSchools may consider channelling these donations through the eventual tax-deductable status. But such considerations are still a long way off.

If FS is willing to be a member organisation of the alliance then it will help drive the idea to fruition. We are having several meetings this weekend with interested parties and we will keep you informed of any developments.

Robert: You can count on FSWL-Australia's full support with the Shan State Program.

Ben: We have had some very encouraging meetings over the last few days about the proposed education project into Shan State Burma. Stuart Corlett who is the head of Shan Projects from Partners Relief and Development and I will meet with key Shan State monks next monday in Bangkok.

Partners already run the biggest education initiative in a combat zone anywhere on the planet in Karen State Burma. I suggest everyone interested in

FreeSchools have a look at this video - Karen State Free Schools Project. I am sure these guys are the ideal partner for this initiative.

Re the coming online meeting, I will be in transit for some of the time and away from constant internet access. I am happy to stand again for the office of vice president, although I am also content to step aside if somebody else wants a turn.

Ben: Yesterday Stuart Corlett, the Shan projects Director from Partners Relief, Jildou, some Shan civil leaders and I met with six Shan State monks at their temple in Bangkok. This is the Shan Sangha in exile in Thailand.

We had a very encouraging and enthusiastic meeting and we learned a great deal of value for a potential partnership. Firstly there really is very little education happening in Shan State, Burma at all. Bear in mind this is a population of six million. The state school system is a shambles. Consider that the Burmese ruling Junta spend about 50% of their GDP on waging the ongoing civil war that oppresses their own populations and less than 2% on education, that's all over the State of Myanmar, the density of schools in Shan State is much lower than in other states.

The Shan temple network we learned is a loosely knit 'cloud' of relationships. Counter-intuitively this actually bodes very well for the project.

There are many Junta spies through out all of Burma, think of it as something like Nazi Germany in the late 1930s. Teaching Shan culture is forbidden. Teaching history or politics is forbidden. Teaching science or mathematics is forbidden. The Junta rightly surmise that an uneducated population is less likely to rise up against it.

So the fact that the temples operate independently is good inasmuch as if we create a system to deliver projects over there then it cannot be killed at the head. Each Abbott is the 'king' of his temple. If he wants to participate in this program it will run without too much disturbance. Having said that the teachers will need to be discreet when teaching 'off syllabus' subjects.

The idea is now developing and the Shan Sangha in Thailand will now prepare a strategy of how best to create such a system with the first step being selecting the training site which almost certainly will be over the border here in Thailand perhaps near Fang.

Without sounding too dramatic it is important that we keep the project as confidential as possible. If there is someone you want to contact about this or to share with someone please contact me first.

If there are any questions or comments please feel free to discuss within the group.

Ian: Find attached 'The Age' newspaper article on NGO's in Bagladeshi and in the same recent edition on Burma. Both readings give an overview of the scope of NGO activity in the Asia region near to Burma and the situation of the military regime confirmed by Ben's email report on meetings near the border area.

Ben: Thanks Ian for these very interesting articles. The general impression here from groups who have been engaged in Burma for the last decade such as Partners Relief is that when Gen. Than Shwe dies or 'retires' there will be 10 ready to take his place and quite possibly worse than him. One of the biggest challenges is that the subject populations are so demoralised and dejected that they would be totally unable to manage or govern their people even if the chance arose.

The thing about education of course is that it encourages people while they are suffering oppression as well as building the populations' capacity in readiness for

the day when they will be free. For either to have any affect it must take place on a systemic scale and that is an enormous and yet necessary undertaking.

And in the second article some amazing examples of thriving NGOs in the Bangladeshi experience, the home of course of micro-credit. Thanks for the informative reading.

Donna: In Thailand, where I worked, a few years ago, was a student at my Resort where I worked, from Burma..He said that the only way that any student beyond Primary School(often even less) got further education was to be sponsored. He had a friend that had been sponsored by a family in Aust. (he worked really hard and became a Doctor) he begged me to sponsor him when I went back to Aust...I was unable to due to my circumstance at the time.... so had to decline...when I was in Thailand there was constant conflict on the border of Burma (that country is medieval).....I still feel that this is a country lost in a political mess... that does not support basic human rights.

Wish we could do something...bit of a loss..I think...

Ian: In the late 70's and 80's I visited the region many times in Thailand (11 visits), Laos and Burma. I have mixed feelings re-venturing in political embroiled countries, including my African visits. If I view FSWL we are such a fledgling group compared to other NGO operators.

My feelings are we should tread very carefully in known waters with known boundaries of operation. The more experienced NGO's don't take risks and for good reasons. There may be a perceived great need to serve and an opportunity to pilot new inroads. Any slightest mistake however can blow our reputation in the eyes of the international corporate scene. We just do not have the experience. I think the risk is too great!

Having said that the above are my comments only. This is a committee process and Ben is currently in the field seeking endorsement to continue the work. Sitting in my office is a long way from the Thai-Burmese border.

However I would prefer to hold off any important decisions on this topic until Sue's visit in January whereby there is the opportunity to update with the Mirror Foundation and the networking with their objectives in that region.

Merindi: I've put together a template for our donor database (see attached). I plan to use this to record donor's details (address, telecoms, etc) as well as the dates and type of their donations. This will be sufficient for our needs pre-a 'proper' database (like eTapestry). I will work with Robert to copy his details over to the new spreadsheet, and will take over the management of this task. Ian - do you think we should use my database for the purpose of this year's AGM? Or something different? Anything in my work you suggest change before I start populating it with donor data?

Ian: On viewing the database -Comment: Do you intend to have columns for
Email address
Donor amount
A for active donor or X for newsletter only contact
date joined?
Comments column. eg wants to sponsor student?

10. 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 monthly meeting will be varied, as the President will be overseas during November. The next monthly meeting, the 16th Monthly Meeting of FSWL-Australia will be held from Friday 12th December to Sunday 14th December.

The business of the meeting concluded at 6:00 am on Friday 24th October 2008

The Committee is thanked for its involvement

END OF MINUTES

The FSWL Committee - Australian Contact Details

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