



FreeSchools World Literacy Inc
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FreeSchools World Literacy Australia

ACTIVITIES OF THE APPLICANT

Our mission is to break the cycle of ignorance and poverty through free education.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of FreeSchools World Literacy Australia ("*FreeSchools*") can be summarized as follows: to break the cycle of ignorance and poverty through free education by providing literacy programs; teacher/employment training; income-producing skills, health education; food and clothing; and researching and documenting changes in the wellbeing of the community.

HISTORY

The first free evening school was founded in 1997 at a small convent school in Motihari, Bihar, India. Sister Crescence SSH, with financial assistance from humanitarian Mark Bloomfield, developed a simple cost-effective model for educating desperately poor children who would otherwise never go to school. The state of Bihar is regarded as backward, corrupt and lawless and a rough place to be born female. It's considered the infanticide centre of India where nationally over 150 million baby girls have been murdered in the last 25 years. Bihar's population exceeds 90 million. 80% of village heads of households are illiterate and over 30 million women are illiterate. 60% of Bihari girls are malnourished and 62% of girls age 6 to 14 are not attending school.

HOW IT WORKS

Existing schools are refilled with impoverished children in the late afternoon during normal closing hours and only qualified female teachers are hired to teach an "essentials only" syllabus. Priority but not exclusivity is given to girls and there is no proselytizing or religious discrimination. The students agree to teach their siblings what they learn each day. Reading, writing, arithmetic, health protection, crafts, income generating skills and civics are taught for two hours each afternoon in otherwise empty classrooms. A daily snack and a set of clothes are also provided free of charge. The cost efficiency is startling - a year's education for one child in India costs as little as \$15.

WHY SUPPORT LITERACY?

The United Nations' *Decade of Literacy – Education for All* campaign aims to provide the opportunity for every child to learn to read and write. Education will help reduce violence, terror, inequity and disease. In developing nations, ignorance, poverty and despair trap families in desperate circumstances and work a particular hardship on women and children.

Top government and NGO aid programs often fail to reach the village level. FreeSchools World Literacy is grassroots, delivering education from the bottom up. Women are empowered to help the poor in their own community, uplifting village life. With millions of villages in Asia, literacy can alleviate the acute and widespread suffering of innocent people as well as increase international cooperation and global security.

REPLICATING THE MODEL

The free school model is successful and simple to replicate. Since Asia is home to half the human race with 30% illiteracy, *FreeSchools World Literacy* will fund the expansion of schools in Thailand, India and other parts of Asia over the next 20 years.

WHY PRIORITIZE GIRLS' EDUCATION?

As future mothers and teachers, girls are given priority because there are fewer opportunities for them. They face numerous barriers such as deeply-rooted cultural and religious norms, poverty, discrimination, safety, and AIDS. A lack of teachers, text books and separate bathroom facilities often prevent girls from attending school. Even the most modest fees, uniforms and transportation are beyond the reach of impoverished families. Girls often skip childhood, burdened by enforced labour and sibling care and marry as young as age 10. India is second only to China in population and has the most child labour in the world. Three times as many girls as boys die, often from malnutrition or murder. Many are sold into prostitution or bonded labour to ease the family's economic hardship.

International economists agree that the single best investment to improve the wellbeing and economic prospects of developing nations is girls' education. Female literacy is linked to delayed marriage, fewer and healthier children, improved economic prospects, better parenting and more democratic civic participation.

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA

FreeSchools World Literacy was incorporated as a legal entity in Australia under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (16th July 2007) to formally support and expand the free evening school program that was started in July 1997, at a small convent school of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Bihar, India. Today FreeSchools has some 3000 students in 74 schools in India and Thailand, which are administered by 90 teachers (2008).

WHAT IT COSTS

The program is both cost-effective and successful since there are no building costs. By refilling existing schools or using any donated indoor or outdoor space that is safe for children, costly infrastructure is avoided. Only trained female teachers are hired to teach an "essentials only" syllabus to children without access to education. In India, an annual scholarship of \$15 provides a year's education for one child and a pledge of \$125 per month will support an entire school of 100 students. Schools in northern Thailand among the hill tribes and Burmese refugees average only 30 students per school. The annual cost per student is \$54 and a monthly pledge of \$135 supports an entire school.

OUTREACH

FreeSchools will increase public awareness of scholarships through its website www.freeschools.org and by liaising with organizations that foster literacy such as book clubs, literacy centers, libraries, schools, book stores and those concerned with international cooperation and human rights such as international service organizations, community, cultural and religious groups.

THE FUTURE

By providing ongoing funds and scholarships for the existing and planned new schools *FreeSchools World Literacy Australia* will join an International movement to help break the cycle of ignorance and poverty that leaves millions in hopeless despair. *FreeSchools* hopes to replicate the model hundreds of times throughout India, Thailand and other Asian countries.

"Study after study has taught us that there is no toll for development more effective than the education of girls and the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, or improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS."

[former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, 2004]