

NEWSLETTER

Free Schools

WORLD LITERACY

www.freeschools.org.au



VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 ~ 2008

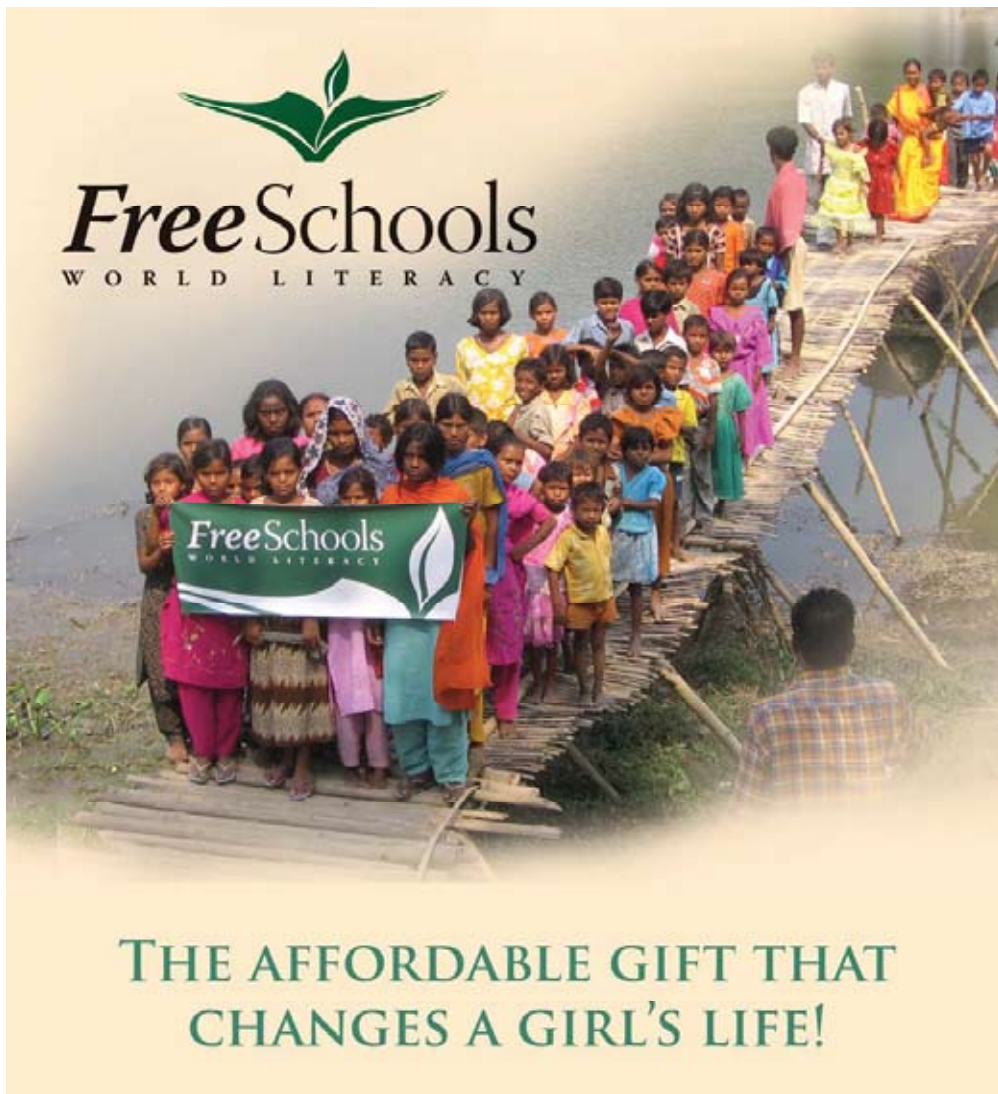
Message from the president

It has been eight years since Mark Bloomfield and I traveled 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 51 FreeSchool World Literacy funded centres in India and Thailand, 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 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 and 6 in Thailand, and we have included reports of their progress in this newsletter. 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.



Robert Coenraads with his daughters, Francheska and Leonora, and the students, Sonal and Samridhi, that they are sponsoring.



THE AFFORDABLE GIFT THAT CHANGES A GIRL'S LIFE!

At the first official meeting of FSWL-Australia in June 2007 our first committee was elected and in the following month FreeSchools World Literacy was incorporated in Australia for the purpose of becoming a registered charity organization. The Committee meets online once a month and consists 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).

Dr. Robert Coenraads (President)

Annual Newsletter for 2008

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

“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]

Objective

FreeSchools World Literacy Australia has come into being 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 1996 at a small convent school in Motihari, Bihar, India. Sister Crescence and Mark Bloomfield developed a simple inexpensive 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 very unfortunate place to be born female. 60% of Bihari girls are malnourished and 62% of girls age 6 to 14 are not attending school. Only 23% of women in Bihar are literate, meaning 25 million women are illiterate.

How it works

Existing schools are refilled with impoverished children in the late afternoon during normal closing hours and retired 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 good meal and a set of clothes are also provided free of charge. The cost efficiency is startling — a year’s education for one child for under \$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. Literacy can help alleviate the acute and widespread suffering of innocent people as well as under gird 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 girl’s 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 today

What began in 1996, at a small convent school of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Bihar, India, has grown to over three thousand students in 45 schools; 29 in rural Bihar, India’s poorest state, and 16 schools throughout the isolated tribal villages and refugee settlements of Thailand. These schools provide employment to dozens of female teachers.

What it costs

The program is not only a great success but very cost-effective since there are

no building costs. By refilling existing schools during normal closing hours and hiring trained female teachers in need of income themselves, an “essentials only” syllabus is taught to children, otherwise too poor to attend school. An annual \$15 scholarship provides a year’s education for one child. A \$1500 scholarship finances an entire school for one year.

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.

FreeSchool world literacy student scholarship program

FreeSchool World Literacy has developed a scholarship program to help talented children, particularly girls, who are otherwise too poor to attend regular school during the day. These students are usually already attending a free evening school where the teachers have noted that they are showing aboveaverage ability. The cost to send these children to a regular school is just \$6 per month or \$72 per year in India and \$10 per month or \$120 per year in Thailand. Your contribution will help such students to:

- complete their school education
- obtain a career far more fitting to their ability
- better support their poor family
- take a place in their local community and complete the cycle

Frequently asked questions

Exactly what is my donation used for?

Your donation is used to pay for the student's annual school fees and to purchase a uniform/ books etc. It is difficult to imagine that such small amounts for us are well beyond the scope of these needy families.

Can we choose the student?

Students showing promise are chosen by the teachers and coordinators running our *FreeSchools* in India and Thailand. Scholarship students would be the most capable and enthusiastic in their class, and show exceptional promise. Given the chance, they would be the ones most likely to become leaders in their chosen career and be the most likely to in turn contribute to their local community. Depending on numbers, you may be able to choose a boy or a girl and possibly their age. Currently the program has been set up in India and Thailand only.

Can we write directly to the student?

You can write to your student. The teacher or supervisor in charge of the project will hand on your letters to the student's family, and usually help with any translation where needed. Each year, news about individual students and their progress in school will be published in our *FreeSchools World Literacy* newsletter.

How is the privacy of the students protected?

Personal addresses of the students or their family are not provided to protect their privacy.

What about administration costs?

All of your \$72 or \$120 annual donation goes directly to pay for the student's education. Our workers are all volunteers and so there are no administration costs.

The students — India

Ashish Kumar Majhi (boy age 19)

Ashish is a poor but very intelligent boy, and has always secured first place in all of his classes. His father is a cook in one of the convents. Ashish began at the Motihari Evening School and from there

was recommended to the formal school, St Mary's Motihari. Since Ashish has four sisters and one brother, his father, Nagender Majhi, has not been able to help him as he only earns Rs. 1800 per month. He is now preparing to appear for 12th year exams. His future plan is to be laboratory technician and support his parents through his earnings.

Sponsored by Gerhard Neuwiller

Prasant D'cruze (boy age 19)

Prasant is a student of St Mary's Motihari. His father, Anil, is a man of small means who finds it very difficult to meet the yearly expenses of Prasant's education. Prasant has turned out to be a champion in school athletics, especially in running, long jump and cricket. He has passed 12th year at Bettiah Jesuit school and is currently studying at college.

Sponsored by Valerie Paiva

Sonal (girl, age 18) and Samridhi (girl age 16)

Sonal and Samridhi are sisters and very good in studies. Over and above they are toppers in extra curricular activities of the school, such as dance, drama competitions and elocution. . Sonal has completed year 10 at St Teresa's Girl's School, Bettiah and is a born leader obtaining awards in elocution, dance, songs, drama, art and paintings. In dance she attends competitions on district and diocese level especially in Bharatyam dance. Their father, Vincent Paul helps the Sisters while their mother, Usha, earns some income as a teacher in a private Middle School in Bettiah. Her salary is R 2000 per month. The parents find it very difficult to provide for the education of their 3 daughters.

Sponsored by Francheska and Leonora Coenraads

Pratima Das (girl)

Pratima's mother, Champa Devi, began selling vegetables in the evenings on the road side, after Pratima's father, Ramjit Das, died 8 years ago with cerebral malaria. Pratima has 2 sisters and one brother, They live on the earnings from the roadside sales. All that the mother has is Rs 300/. The family lives in the open and have a diet of rice and salt. There only clothes are the set they are wearing. When evening school started at Motihari, Pratima was called to evening school, where her talent's and intellectual

capacities developed. Pratima seems to be an all rounder, has become the leader of her class. Her performance on stage is admirable, seen by the visitors from abroad. She has studied up to class 6 at evening school, and is a genuine candidate for scholarship to the day school.

Sponsored by Saskia Raevouri

Jyoti Manjhi (girl, age 19)

Jyoti comes from a poor family; the family does not have their own house. Father Nursing Manjhi works in mission, as a gardener, Due to lack of proper food Jyoti became TB patient. Our sisters felt pity on her and brought her to the Convent at the age of 9 years. She was given medication and proper food by the sisters. She improved and was so obliged to the sisters that she decided to live with sisters and serve them. She studied up to class 5 in N.F.P. education. She was very bright there and was promoted to Sacread Heart School Bettiah for 10th year. After passing, She was taken by our Superior general to Patna for college studies. Now she has completed 12th. She is studying Computer. Her parents cannot afford for her studies.

Sponsored by Saskia Raevouri

Rufus (boy, age 8) and Mihir (boy, age 6)

Rufus and Mihir, come from a broken home. Unfortunately, at the early stage, the marriage of their parents, Mala and Rajesh, became a failure. The father was a heavy drinker, and did not care or look after wife and children, so Mala returned to her parents with the two boys. Mala is teaching in a small private school, She gets Rs 600/- along with food per month, with these Rs 600/-. She has to maintain herself and the two sons. Rufus and Mihir stay at their grandparents place at Bettiah. Rufus passed class 1st from St Stanislaus Pathsala Bettiah and we helped him to get admission in Class 2nd of Mission School Bettiah run by Jesuits. Rufus obtained 1st Rank in his class. As Sister Crescence entered his house one day, she heard him shout, "I have passed in all subjects."

Rufus sponsored by Chelsea McLean

Sapana Kumari (girl age about 8 years)

Introductory information-Sapana's real parents can not be traced; One fine morning at 4 O'clock the traffic police heard the cry of a little child. Curious, he followed the direction from where the sound was coming and finally reached

a heap of garbage. There he saw a tiny baby, 3 to 4 days of age, lying on garbage, wrapped in rags, Her leg was being eaten by ants. The child was sent to Mother Teresa's orphanage. She was well taken care of by the sisters for 4 months. One-day, a couple came to the orphanage for a visit. After hear the sad history of Sapana, moved as they were, they decided to take the child and bring her up, Luckily the couple had no child of their own, so they became the parents of Sapana. Sapana is smart talkative, sharp, very intelligent, and very good in caricature. She was admitted in St Michalel's English Medium School in Bettiah. Here, she secures above 85% in every subject . She is in 2nd class. After the class she becomes a teacher at home and teaches the girls. She imitates her teacher.

Sponsored by Saskia Raevouri

Liza Benedict (girl, age 6)

Mr Ashok Benedict is a man of small means. He lost his father at age 5, and his widowed mother brought him up and educated him to secondary school level. He married and had 3 daughters – the second youngest one is Liza aged 6 years. Liza's father is a teacher in a non-formal private Catholic school and his total salary is Rs. 1500, and with this he has to maintain his Christian family of 5 members. Liza is a student at St Aloysuis, Pattishala. Given the present financial condition of the family, Liza is recommended by the Parish Priest of Bettiah for financial help/scholarship.

Mariyan Benedict (girl, age 7)

Mr Ashok Benedict is a man of small means. He lost his father at age 5, and his widowed mother brought him up and educated him to secondary school level. He married and had 3 daughters – theeldest one is Mayan aged 7 years. Maryan's father is a teacher in a non-formal private Catholic school and his total salary is Rs. 1500, and with this he has to maintain his Christian family of 5 members. For Kindergarten and year one Mariyan was at St Aloysuis, Pattishala, and she is now a student at St Stanislaus Mission Middle School, Patishala. Given the present financial condition of the family, Mariyan is recommended by the Parish Priest of Bettiah for financial help/scholarship. Mariyan has passed class 2nd in Mission Middle School Bettiah, securing rank 1st in December exams.

Nikita Rai (girl age about 13)

Nikita Rai is the only daughter of Remy Rai and Daya Nidhi, residents of Varansi. At age 3, Nikita Rai received severe burns (60%) and her right hand was severely damaged. She is a student of Class 8 in an English Medium School at Varansi. Nikita's father is an assistant librarian in a private school earning Rs. 5000 per month for the upkeep of the family. The parents are worried about Nikita Rai's future and an application has come to me requesting for some help with her studies, and I recommend her for your kind consideration.

Sonu Victor (boy, age 14)

Sonu is a poor boy but his mind is very sharp in studies .His father's name is Victor Ishahaq who has no any job and has not been able to help in studies. While their mother, Asha earns some income as a nurse in Bettiah. Sonu is a tudent of 9th class in Sacred Heart School, Bettiah. He takes extra actives, such as dance, drama, sport and elocution. His further plan is to become a doctor.

Deepak Gyan (boy, age 12)

Deepak is the first child of Gyan Prakash and Clara, unfortunately. Gyan turend to be, a a drunkard and made the life of all three miserable. So Clara left her home and came to a Convent. There she was given a job to look after sick Sisters. These Sisters sent Deepak to Malighat, a Convent School. They requested me to help Deepak, who is in 3rd class.

Alaka Francis (girl, age 7)

She is very quit girl and intelligent girl. His father has no job but he earns something at casual works. Her mother earns Rs. 1500 per month, so she finds it very difficult to provide for the education of Alaka. Now Alaka is in class 3 of Sacred Heart School, Bettiah.

The students — Thailand

Darrin Sompert (girl, age 12)

Darrin has no parents anymore. Her father left before she was born and her mother left for Bangkok to work as a prostitute. She was taken in by a lady in the village with whom she has lived with ever since she was a baby. Napa, her new mother,

also had the care of a boy with no parents left. His name is Nougen, now 25, married with Nassii, 15, and they have a 2 year old. Nassii was 12 years old when she married and she never had any education.

Darrin is 12 years old and started in grade 1 with the 6 year olds. She has now already graduated to grade 2. Darrin is lucky that she always went to Free School for the last 2 years so she learned so much already. She knows the Thai alphabet, can speak, write and read quite well. Her health is not good but she is a fighter; she has TBC and will be on strong medication for the next 6 months. We took her to the hospital last month for treatment. Darrin was already ill last year and went to the hospital but wasn't able to pay the medical bill. So she could not go back to follow up on her TBC treatment because she was too scared. Because she was abandoned she has no papers and no ID card. We are all very proud of her.

Nanga Jala (girl, age 12)

Because there are too many children in her family, Nanga's parents couldn't afford to send her to school. She is going very well and is able to follow the lessons well.

Naying Jaai (girl, age 10)

Naying's father was a Thai soldier who never stayed with her and her mother. When Naying was very young her mother left her with her grandma and to start a new family. Her mother has never seen her since. Her grandmother is too old to work and cannot pay for the school fees. Naying is bright and happy to be at school.

Darika Suriya (girl, age 8)

Darika has only her mother left. Again her father was a Thai soldier who doesn't even know of her existence. She looks like she has been at that school for a long time; she just fitted in right away and made new friends.

Sponsored by Donna Cervantes

Channon Krongkrawpana (boy, age 8)

Channon's family is too poor to support him. He has been struggling a bit with the Thai language but is now showing some improvement and good social skills by making contact with the other kids.

Sponsored by Donna Cervantes

Tatphon Jaopongpai (boy, age 8)

Tatphon’s family is too poor to support him. His father is not functioning well. Tatphon is struggling with the lessons as well with the social interactions with his classmates. He is not talking to other children and is not responding to any question of his teacher. We suspect that he experiences a severe culture shock and has a much poorer understanding of Thai than the other 5 children. In the village he is gregarious, but at school he experiences the opposite, which off course must be quite stressful. We are very happy that his mother actually came to school to talk to the teacher. She hardly speaks Thai and cannot help him with his learning but the fact that she is supportive is great to know. Tatphon will start this week (August) at the kindergarten to get extra help with the alphabet and to gain confidence with speaking. While the younger children will have a nap after lunch, he will get one on one remedial teaching. We are following him closely in his learning but even more important in his emotional development so we can make decisions such as placing him in kindergarten for more care. We do trust that he will settle in slowly and will start to make some friends.

The rewards s of literacy

- Literacy empowers girls with income-producing skills
It keeps them from early marriage and reduces birth and infant mortality rates.
- When able to read and write, add and subtract girls are less likely to be cheated, sold into bonded labor or tricked into human trafficking.
- The study of Health and Hygiene helps protect against HIV AIDS.
- Literacy finds expression in music, dance, drama and humor – liberating natural talents that have been submerged for generations.
- The brightest are scholarshiped into formal schools and will become leaders.
- Village women initially partner with *FreeSchools*, but the whole village discovers the benefits of cooperation and grassroots democracy.
- *FreeSchools* demonstrates caring respect for the individual and has no religious discrimination.



Yes I would like to support *FreeSchools* or sponsor a student

Please find enclosed my gift of:

\$ (your choice) to support the operations of *FreeSchools*

\$ 16 to support a child to attend a *FreeSchool* in India

\$ 72 to provide a scholarship for one student to attend regular school for a year

There are two methods to make your donation.

1. You can pay by cheque

My cheque is enclosed and crossed “Not Negotiable” and made payable to *FreeSchools* World Literacy

or

2. You can make a deposit directly into the *FreeSchools* Westpac bank account

Account name: *FreeSchools* World Literacy Inc.

Account BSB: 032 196

Account Number: 266 690.

Please complete your contact details below.

Name Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss/Dr:

Name of supporting organization (if applicable):

Address:

State:..... Postcode:.....

Telephone:..... Email:.....

or

Please debit my

Bankcard Mastercard Visa

Account Number.....

Expiry Date..... /

Repeat Donation Annually yes/no

Signature.....

Send your donation to:

FreeSchools World Literacy — Australia

Attn: Dr. Robert Coenraads — President

8 Trigalana Place, Frenchs Forest, New South Wales 2086.

More information

For more information and photos, please see our website <http://www.freeschools.org.au>
You can contact the President directly — Robert Coenraads (02) 9451 8496 or the Publicist Chelsea McLean 0413 792 908. Or perhaps you might like one of us to give a presentation about *FreeSchools* to your group or organization.

