

Quarterly News 1 - 2013

Dear Friends and Supporters of kanthari and Braille Without Borders (BWB),

The first three months of 2013 have gone already. This means it is time for a quarterly Newsletter. We will start with kanthari and further down you can read the updates about the Braille Without Borders projects in Tibet:

Kanthari

Graduation

Finally graduation week had come. On the 21st, 22nd and 23rd of January 2013, the participants presented their Dream Speeches to an international panel of experts. The speeches were live-streamed on the internet and well received well by the on- and off-line audience.

1. **"The beauty of Blindness"**: inspired by the Braille Without Borders concept, participants spoke about the importance of not reducing blindness only to "inability" or "disability". You can also ask yourself, what are the positive aspects of being blind? The need for concentration, for clear communication, a strong memory, to have a lively imaginative and last but not least blindness means that you are being forced to solve problems, to do things your own way. With this in mind, the participants presented their projects, Blind sparks (Bruce, India and Jacqueline, Ghana), Njia (Mary, Kenya) and ARTMAN, Tamas from Hungary, to promote a positive view on Blindness.

2. **"Empower the Community"**: These projects will benefit marginalised groups of society. Sristi, a young Nepali blind lady wants to start a home for elderly handicapped people and street children. A peace activist from Sierra Leone, Saa Lamin, using football as a tool, wants to show young people prospects for peace. Patrick from Uganda will provide health care training to children. Manglu, a member of the Paniya tribe in Kerala is planning to set up an alternative training center for school dropouts.



3. **"Social change through entrepreneurial ideas"**: this group initiated entrepreneurial ideas to bring about social change. Karthik from Pondicherry wants to start a self-sustainable village for handicapped and otherwise marginalized people. Mary and David want to start a home for children that are affected by domestic violence which provides vocational training. Lawrence from Nigeria will set up an agricultural project that will create a mind-set change of unemployed young people in Nigeria showing them that it is possible to make a living in the countryside. Ojok from Uganda runs a bee-keepers cooperative for the blind. Tayo will use bee-keeping to provide employment opportunities for street children in Lagos. As different as these approaches are, all have one thing in common: All of the initiators have been personally affected by marginalization, they know the problems from personal experience and have no fear to find new solutions, even if they are forced to fight against traditions and conventions.

Graduation Day; the 25th of January 2013 was a memorable day for all graduates, visitors and supporters. Chief Guest Malikka Sarabhai, a well known Indian Social Activist and Dancer and special Guest former Ambassador TP Sreenivasan encouraged the graduates with motivational speeches. The participants performed an inspiring play that was written and directed by our catalyst Santhosh George. Several songs were sung, several dances were performed and Tamas from Hungary treated the audience with a spectacular fire-spinning performance. A few days later it was sad to say goodbye to the graduates. But their journey of realizing their own social projects and initiatives has finally made a start. We are sure that all of them will create a positive impact within their communities!



Fieldwork and Presentations:



Visit to Wayanad: in March Sabriye and Santhosh visited 2012 kanthari-graduate Manglu in Wayanad district, North Kerala. Manglu belongs to the Paniya tribe. As many other tribes in India, the Paniya tribe is socially disadvantaged and not really integrated in society at large. The Paniya have their own language and culture. The children of the tribe who want to attend classes in regular schools, must first learn Malayalam. As a child, Manglu went to regular school however because she did not speak Malayalam, she couldn't understand the teacher and therefore dropped out. Many children of tribes had/have similar experiences as Manglu. Nowadays, many of them just stay at home. Alcoholism amongst youth is a big problem. Manglu and her brothers and sisters were lucky. They attended Kanavu, an alternative school designed specifically for children of their tribe. Today however the traditionally built campus is not used anymore. Because many students don't attend regular schools, Manglu wants to revive the Kanavu school concept. "I want to show people in Kerala that even with alternative school education, you can lead a meaningful and fulfilling life," says Manglu.

Bangalore: Sabriye and Paul were invited to speak at the accenture BPO leadership conclave in Bangalore. Both addressed the 156 managers speaking about
- kanthari, a new paradigm of leadership

- the importance of transforming concepts and challenging the Status Quo
- The pleasure of daring to dream BIG and to embrace risks.



Vellore Institute of Technology:

Sabriye and Paul spoke at Vellore Institute of Technology. The talk was mainly addressed to students of the VIT Innovation Centre, a department that was initiated by MIT Graduate Ted Moallem. The talk included the history of kanthari, how to follow your passion and the importance of creating low cost technical solutions and sharing these in order to create a positive social impact.

Pondicherry:

Sabriye addressed a large audience during the "Ability Night 2013" at the University of Pondicherry. This annual event celebrates differences. After Sabriye's words, the stage was handed to many groups of differently-abled people who offered the audience a variety of art forms ranging from dance, music, songs to cabaret etc. Paul and Sabriye also visited Baby Sarah's Children's home. This project is lead by former kanthari graduate Karthik. Baby Sarah's Home is an amazing organization where orphans and mentally challenged children are offered a place of learning and developing.



Intake 2013

During the past couple of months we have received more than 200 applications from around the world. Slowly but surely the news about the existence of the unique kanthari leadership training course is spreading. The kanthari intake team is very busy reading applications, essays and with interviewing potential participants. Till date 21 applicants have made it to the final round. Many applications are still in the pipeline and of all we wish to offer the best 25 to 28 a place to participate in this year's course.

Curriculum Development



A well and thoroughly designed Curriculum is the key to a successful training course. Our catalyst team has been very busy to adapt and further develop the last Curriculum to be ready to go when the new course starts in May 2013. As a lot of work went into the creation of the fictitious country of Chichuhlonga, it was decided that also this year the first act will take place in this challenging environment. Act two however will see major change. This year the participants will learn how to use film and audio as a tool to create social change.



Renovation and Maintenance

The new kanthari leadership training course will start in May 2013. All colleagues are working hard to get the campus in good shape. Maintenance and renovation activities are ongoing on a daily base. The auditorium was freshly painted indoors, a new natural filter was installed in the grey water treatment plant, The Nabulai hut on the lakeside which was taken down by a storm was rebuilt, and the entire anti-ant system was renovated.

Braille Without Borders

Self Integration

Braille Without Borders (BWB) started its work 15 years ago with the goal to offer visually impaired students practical skills and knowledge so they can integrate themselves in daily society. After two to three years of intensive training in Braille, three languages (English, Tibetan and Chinese), mobility, orientation and communication skills, blind students are confident to integrate themselves in regular schools where they equally participate in class. After primary school, the students continue their education at middle and high school. We have now reached another milestone as four of our former students who attend regular high school will attend the university entrance examination in June 2013. The local education bureau accepted four of the students to take the most important examination for university this year and reported them to be the first blind students ever in China who take university entrance examination together with sighted peers. The four students will hopefully open the door to advanced education for many other blind students.

Tibetan winters are especially quiet, but not dead. Nature and life carry on, under the ground and quietly. Our Farm Center too.

Braille Books

Students need text books. Visually impaired and blind students need text books in Braille. Our Braille book production unit has been able to 'double' its output by adding another computer, an additional operator and with the help of Nyima and Gyenzen, another Braille printing program. The additional Braille typist by the way is our own Dickye, a young Tibetan woman who learned Braille typing at a course given in the BWB preparatory school in Lhasa.



Music Department

One of our most active and appreciated components is the Music Department. They are regularly invited to programs across the country. Most recently they have been invited to perform at a TED talk in Beijing this May. So impressive have they become under the guidance of Ngudrup their blind director that a prominent solar product company has committed to building a music facility for them here at the Vocational Training Center.

Advertisement while waiting

China Mobile has helped us too. Give any of our staff a call and you will get a pleasant 'wait signal' introducing our Center with the back ground strains of a classic English madrigal, "Blue, Blue, My Skies are Blue". Very appropriate for Tibet.

Greenhouse

The greenhouse staff is happy and satisfied having survived the vicious winds of winter up here on the Tibetan plateau. They had recently replaced the original weather beaten 'winter blankets' with new ones, lighter and tougher, developed by the E.U. and the local Agricultural Bureau. This year all blankets made it through the winter without being damaged.

Signboards

The main farm-entrance on the Lhasa-Shigatse highway has a new look. Our government partners, TDPF and TDF in view of all the traffic that goes by requested they get mentioned on our sign board. We have duly acknowledged their cooperation on two brass plates, in Chinese and Tibetan, on either side of our entrance.

Cheese Production

The cheese production unit continues to develop. Nyima Wangdu has had much to do with this. He has been instrumental in researching markets, equipment and professional help.

Curriculum Development

There have been many changes, ups and downs, lessons learned, mistakes made and successes achieved since the inception of the Farm/Vocational Training Center. There is " a season and a time for everything under the sun" as the poet said, and the time seemed ripe this winter to finally create a written guideline, based on our experiences here over the years that would help 'our way of proceeding ' in this unique, changing, developing work-life situation and environment. The development of the written Curriculum is a work in progress.





Dear Friends and Supporters,

On behalf of all our students, participants and colleagues, we want to say thank you very much for your continuous support!

With best regards from Kerala and from Tibet,

Sabriye , Paul and the entire BWB – kanthari team

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