

Braille Without Borders

Quarterly News 4 - 2012

Braille Without Borders - Tibet

From the Vocational Training Center for the Blind in Shigatse, Mike shared the following;

“Thoughts from around the stove”

It's a cold winter evening here up on the Tibetan Plateau. It's minus 12 degrees Celsius outside but the stove in the center of the dining room is aglow with burning wood and yak dung and the room is cosy and warm. The children and trainees have finished eating and are washing the dishes, pots and pans in the room behind the kitchen with solar heated hot water. The staff members are eating now, seated in the traditional Tibetan manner around the stove. The only sound heard is the sipping and slurping of noodle soup. It's just the first bowl after all and conversation won't really begin until well into the second and third bowls. In the homely peace of the moment private thoughts can run: the twelfth hour of the twenty-first day of the twelfth month of the twelfth year of the second millennium has come and gone. We are still here. There have been the usual little challenges found anywhere – coughs, colds, spats and reconciliation etc but the predominant tone of events has been benign and prompting of great gratitude.

Nyima Choekpa is preparing for her college admission exams – the first girl and student from BWB's first batch of blind and visually impaired children, to do so. She leads the way and is the role model for over thirty more of our children currently studying in government schools in Shigatse and Lhasa with more to come.

More and more local friends and benefactors here and across mainland China are joining our international friends concerned for our children's needs. A short 'tweet' on a Chinese social website last month resulted in a generous outpouring of winter clothing from all over China.

A major Chinese company Sunrain that manufactures solar heating equipment continues to help. At the moment of writing they are premiering a documentary they sponsored featuring our students and staff, at their headquarters in mainland China. The film will also be shown on national television.

Two of our vocational courses, the Music Department and the Bakery, have been greatly helped or are currently being helped by local friends. SunRain's CEO is personally involved in the creation of a professional teaching and performance facility for our music department.

Shanghai Young Bakers, a French NGO, provided 13 months worth of training to two of our colleagues from our baking department. They further visited our BWB bakery here in Belshung with a group of their graduates to give additional hands-on, on site training.





These are some of the highlights that come to mind around the evening stove, as our staff work their way through a second bowl of noodles and conversation begins to pick up. Now, as welcome as these highlights have been, it occurs that among the greatest source of permanent and ongoing satisfaction are these -- our faithful, loyal and quietly devoted staff. I look around and see Po Tenzing, our resident 'grandfather' and rock of security for our kids and staff – ever occupied, ever wise, ever thoughtful. I see Puntsok our farmer who when not farming looks for things that need fixing, helps get the kids up, fed and off to school and back. Tsenden and Yangzom our young cooks, Tai Yang and Tsam Chu our weaving and knitting teachers, Tai Yang who learned computer and Braille Book publishing, our house mother Guru, a young Tibetan village woman, Tsam Kyi and Passang Lhamo who run the animal husbandry and dairy and of course Adron, our local Tibetan 'power woman', go-to person and the heart of our public relations. These form our staff, from the local villages, not highly educated but skilled in all the very village skills they teach our blind and visually impaired students. The majority of them with us from the very beginning. They are a delight to work with, flexible, knowledgeable, able and willing to work wherever and whenever needed without complaint and ever smiling. These, our staff – the greatest, best and brightest highlight of them all.

Mike.

Nyima and Gyendsen shared the following from the BWB school in Lhasa;

White cane day

On the fifteenth of October, White Cane Day was celebrated by Braille Without Borders. We invited more than one hundred fifty people from around Lhasa, of which most of them are blind. We also invited people from different schools and the local police station. Our goal was to have a great celebration and to create a wider awareness about what blind people can do and of course the importance of the white cane. Journalists from local radio stations and news papers interviewed our students and some of our colleagues.

Medical treatment

In November, Gyentsen and three students were able to receive eye care treatment in Shanghai. Several operations were performed. The operations were not meant to restore sight but to relieve pain that was caused by regular infections. The operations were successful, and benefitted all four. Without pain the students can now concentrate on their studies. We say thank you very much to the Jade Buddha temple who sponsored the treatments.

Han Hong visits BWB

Han Hong is a famous singer in China. Most of her songs are dedicated to Tibet and its People. This year she visited Braille Without Borders together with the Sunrain company. She spent one week with BWB students and a film team from Beijing. They filmed the lives of our blind students and to experience the life of a blind person Han Hong covered her eyes with a piece of cloth. She very much enjoyed her stay and was impressed with Dechen Yudun, a young girl from our Rabbit class. Yudun is a talented singer and as many other students also enjoy singing and music, Sunrain and Han Hong's foundation agreed to establish a musical band with the blind in Tibet.

On behalf of all the students and colleagues, we want to thank everyone who supported BWB in 2012 and we will continue to work hard to offer the students the best possible education in 2013! Nyima and Gyendsen



Kanthari - Kerala

What happens to you if you are either not able to see, to hear, to walk or use your arms?

This is what many Trivandrumites found out while visiting the Transform Trivandrum exhibition at The Kanthari campus. Taking away a sense or ability forces an individual to find solutions in order to cope with daily life. Visitors were assigned in groups of 4 and each group member was limited by taking away one of the above mentioned senses or abilities. The groups had to go through a course that included many obstacles and in order to pass these the members needed to find solutions and work as a team. On their way, the groups visited several stalls set up by local NGO's who informed about problems of marginalized groups of people living in Trivandrum.

At the end of the course the group members were freed from their limitation and brought to the "Vision Incubator", a room that was pitch dark. By taking away sight, the visitors were less distracted and able to focus on finding solutions for the problems that were presented by the NGO's as well as to provide new ideas to create a better and more accessible Trivandrum. After this brainstorm in the dark, the groups were led to the auditorium where the same NGO's presented their current solutions.

About 150 visitors came and experienced an "unusual" day. Feedback received showed that such an experiential exhibition can function as a mind-opener and fosters creative potential!

The exhibition was a part of the Kanthari curriculum and offered a great "hands on" learning experience for all involved.

Act two: Back to Reality

During the second act the participants "returned" from the virtual world of Chichuhlonga to the reality of Kerala. During act 2 they have worked with local organizations and applied all their skills that were acquired during the first act. Amongst others, the participants worked with NGO's who work with children of prostitutes, local tribes, blind adults or street children. The end of act 2 led to the above mentioned exhibition.

Also in act two we had several visiting catalysts who taught interesting subjects; Reetu Jain, Dance improvisation and facial expression, Kevin Brinkmann; The art of Storytelling, Anirrudha S Gadankush (see picture above); Non Violent Communication, Anita Ratnam; Social movements/change, Petra Wijen and Carina Poels; Proposal writing from a donors perspective, Mr Balachandran and Mr Radhakrishnan; Malayalam.

Act three: Exploring the real world.

During the third act of the Kanthari Curriculum the participants go out into the real world. They do so throughout a 6 weeks lasting internship in NGO's, companies or other organizations. They all had to identify and find a placement that would match their personal dream projects. As a Kanthari, so as a critical thinker and motivated person, the intern provides an essential contribution to the organisation that will lead to a positive impact in the organizations goals. On our website you can read about some of their experiences:

<http://www.kanthari.org/media/kanthari-hot-bites/>

Intake 2013

The intake process for candidates for the 2013 Kanthari course is going on in full swing.

There are many people who have heard about the program and who want to become a Kanthari. We foster participants from all over the world. Some have university degrees while others have little to no formal education. Some are blind or physically disabled, others have no disabilities at all. Important is a sense of ownership, motivation, creativity, talent and passion to make the world

a better place and the strength to be forces of good rather than victims of circumstance. If you happen to know individuals, who have the courage to challenge the status quo to positively change their surrounding, who have overcome adversity and who are highly dedicated to a cause, please let them apply at www.kanthari.org/apply

Hot Bites:

We regularly update our website with brief blog posts in the form of “Hot bites” please have a look at <http://www.kanthari.org/media/kanthari-hot-bites/>
Also we have an audio Hot-Bite newsletter which can be found at:
<http://www.kanthari.org/media/monthly-audio-newsletter/>

Dear Friends and Supporters of Braille Without Borders and Kanthari, on behalf of all the stakeholders in Tibet, Kerala and everywhere else in the world, we also would like to say thank you for your great support and interest in our work. From a cold winterly Tibet and a summerly Kerala we wish everyone all the best for this year's festive season and for the upcoming new year. With warmest regards,

Sabriye and Paul

Braille Without Borders and kanthari can also be found on Facebook:
Please have a look and share the links as well as this newsletter with anyone who is interested and of course we appreciate it if "Like" and "share" buttons can often be pressed. The addresses:

www.facebook.com/kantharis and
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Braille-without-Borders/198613140184341>

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