

# Braille Without Borders

## First Quarterly Newsletter- 2012

Dear friends,

welcome to the year of the Dragon! The Dragon stands for fire, energy, progression and speed. That this is rather accurate was proven already because this year indeed started with lots of action both in Tibet as well as in Kerala.

### TIBET

#### 1. Inclusive education.

For many years our blind children have integrated themselves in regular schools. This was possible because of the belief of the school directors and teachers that integration is possible. In February this year however a law was put in place which makes it obligatory for any school to accept blind and physically handicapped students. We welcome this decision very much, however this process can be more successful when some pre-conditions are in place; before Blind and visually impaired children integrate themselves, they should be prepared in an intensive course; here they should learn the different Braille systems, mobility, daily life skills and develop self-confidence. (See further down in this newsletter: Speech at award ceremony) We herewith want to thank Mr Wangchen Gelek and his colleagues of the Tibet Disabled Persons Federation for their tremendous support to reach this important milestone.



#### 2. Damage in the farm.

The winter and spring time in Tibet are known for its cold and heavy winds. In February a fierce storm raved over the Himalayan Plateau and caused substantial damage in the BWB vocational training farm. A large part of the roof of the former theatre which is used for hay storage and for horseback riding, was torn off. Also the roofs of the greenhouses were severely damaged. Luckily no one got hurt. Thanks to several days of hard work of the entire BWB farm staff the damage was repaired.

#### 3. Tibetan Orca

In order to be able to work with computers as a blind person, a Braille display or speech synthesizer software is needed. Braille displays are extremely costly. Also the wide-spread speech synthesizer system "Jaws" is not affordable for blind and visually impaired people in developing countries. Good news is that an alternative speech synthesizer system is available; It is a software package named "Orca" which runs on the open source operating system Ubuntu. Orca is available in several languages already and this number increases from year to year. One of our Tibetan colleagues, Tennom has been working on the realization of a Tibetan Orca version. The work is still under construction but we hope that sometime soon our students will be able to have digital Tibetan texts read out by the computer. This will be a major step for the education of blind students in Tibet because in regards to access to literature they then don't rely only on printed Braille books anymore.

### KERALA

#### 1. Curriculum development.

Since the last batch of participants have graduated, the campus is rather empty. The reason for this is that the future kanthari courses will last 7 months instead of 11. Currently we are adjusting the curriculum accordingly. 15 to 20 participants will be selected to take part in the upcoming course which will start on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2012. The next batch will then start in January 2013. The newcomers will experience the graduation of the previous batch and understand where they will have to be 6 months later.

#### 2. Cathy@Kanthari

Cathy Jordan is our new director operations. Cathy comes from Australia. She has, among others, worked in the NGO field in India. She will be leading the academic team and work on implementation of processes and structures. Paul and I will therefore be able to have more time to focus on the vision, fund raising and the spreading of our ideas.

### 3. Kanthari, a Chili that makes a difference!

Our new name, "kanthari" has been "travelling" across many places over the past few months. The tongue twister "International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs", never was the ideal name. A kanthari is a plant that grows wild in every backyard of Kerala. It is one of the spiciest chilies in the world. But it is not only spicy, in fact it initially comforts the tongue. It tastes almost sweet, reminding me of an unripe strawberry. But suddenly the sensation starts in the back of the mouth. An explosion that makes you forget where you are. Kantharis are unusual chilies; small but powerful, with strong medicinal values. Yes, they are fiery but also Purifying and energizing. This was exactly what we were looking for: A symbol for our unusual Institute, a name for a new type of leaders, the problem solvers we want to incubate.

### 4. Graduates 2011

Several graduates of the Kantharis class of 2011 are already very active.

Raja, from the South Indian State of Tamil Nadu, is searching for a plot of land where he wants to establish a home for children of prisoners who have killed their wives. In many cases, such children are not being taken care of at all. Raja wants to provide training to these children so they will find a place in society.

Beatriz from Peru has already started a training center for blind children high up in the Andes.

Nicholas from Kenya has already opened a preparatory school for blind children within only two months after graduation. Twelve children are being taught Braille, mobility and orientation training. But Nicholas wants more than that. Similarly to our Braille without borders projects in Tibet, he gives a lot of importance to the development of self confidence. He wants to empower his students to become confident and participating members in society who don't get discouraged quickly.

## VISIT TO EUROPE

### 1. Switzerland;

The European tour first lead us first to Zurich where we had a meeting with the board of the Swiss BWB foundation. Reto Mueller, a Swiss businessman who visited BWB in Tibet last summer, organized an informative evening for friends and supporters of the BWB projects. Reto Mueller, Martin Seiz (founder of the Swiss BWB foundation) and Patrick Headon, former Businesses development Director of Ebay Europe and catalyst/teacher in our Kanthari program 2010, made interesting speeches about their visits and experiences with BWB and kanthari. In Lausanne we held a lecture at the well-known Businesses school IMD. The topic was about our concept of Leadership, on implementing of future ideas and over our transition from Tibet to India.

### 2. The "Bornheimer";

We were very excited to be selected to receive the "Bornheimer" award. The "Bornheimer" is a renowned prize which in the past, was awarded to; Eberhard Richter, Psychoanalist, the children's book author Astrid Lindgren, the Violinist and conductor lord Jehudi Menuhin, the dancer and Choreographer Royston Maldoom and the action artist André Heller. For the first time in Europe we were officially recognized as educators. Under the leadership of the dynamic head master Christian Becker, the decision making board had chosen the topic "Inclusion and exclusion/marginalisation" as criteria for this year's award. The integration of handicapped students was the main subject of the award celebration. The education minister Mrs. Sylvia Löhrmann gave a speech in which she addressed "Inclusion at eye level".

In our acceptance speech we presented the "Self Integration concept" that we had introduced to Tibet many years ago.

### 3. Swisttaler roots

One day after the award ceremony, we met with the board members of the German BWB association and several long term supporters. We described the logic of the journey that took us from BWB in Tibet to kanthari in Kerala.

Several board members of the BWB association Germany were also involved with the development of a creativity school in my home village in the seventies. My parents were also actively involved. The goal of this creativity school was not simply to “keep children busy” but to encourage them to become critical alert thinkers, who then could use these skills to actively contribute to a positive development in society.

Also in our Tibet project it is not about serving, but about empowerment of the blind child. We want them to take their lives in their own hand and become contributors to a positive development of the society. In addition it was important that the general attitude towards blindness would change from "Blindness as a punishment" to "Blindness as an opportunity". The blind person changes from being just a “taker” into a “partaker” and because of this he/she will move away from the margin of society towards the center of society.

In the Tibet Autonomous Region this concept works well. Several of our former pupils nowadays lead their own projects. Therefore we thought; why not spreading this concept around the world? If blind persons are able to develop their own projects why cannot sighted talented individuals who are pushed to the edge of the society, also do so? We believe that those, who are driven by a compelling necessity are particularly suitable to overcome adversity and therefore are the right ones to start social projects.

Out of 64 kanthari (IISE) graduates, already 28 smaller and larger projects have been established. 14 former participants are about to starting their projects and some are still in “standby mode“. All these projects need support. On our new web page [www.kanthari.org](http://www.kanthari.org), which is being developed as you read this, we will soon present some of their achievements and ideas.



If you know others who are interested in the development of kanthari, or who maybe want to apply to become a participant, a catalyst/teacher, or a volunteer or who would like to support in a financial way, please do pass on this newsletter to them.

On behalf of all students, participants and colleagues, we say THANK YOU VERY MUCH for your interest and your support!

With warmest regards  
Sabriye and Paul

# MISSING: CHANGEMAKER

“CARRIES A PLAN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE!”

There are still some open places for the Kanthari course starting in July 2012!

Apply at [www.kanthari.org](http://www.kanthari.org)

