
JAMYANG FOUNDATION

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S POTENTIAL

2021 NEWSLETTER



5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110 | www.jamyang.org





Dear Friends of Jamyang Foundation,

Many warm greetings! We hope that you and your loved ones are thriving. Happy to report, the nuns and children in India and Bangladesh are all fine. They have adapted well to pandemic realities and are staying safe. We had to suspend our volunteer programs, to avoid endangering the vulnerable Himalayan populations we serve, including the English training program we planned for Ladakh, but here you can read the account of an Indian volunteer who arrived before the lockdown. Transforming obstacles into opportunities, the nuns and small children in our programs are very flexible and really love to learn. The study programs have totally changed their futures.

In Bangladesh, Visakha Girls' School reopened and will be expanding to sixth grade, thanks to a grant from Buddhist Global Relief. Thanks to Dakini Rising, we were able to plant 100 trees at Sanghamitra Institute in Bodhgaya. Despite the difficulties, thanks for your generosity, we've been able to keep all the projects going well during the pandemic.

Heartfelt gratitude to all our kind donors!

May you be safe, healthy, and happy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Karma Lekshe Tsomo".

Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Director



Indian Journey: Teaching to Believe

by Minh from Vietnam

It all began with the opportunity to hitchhike across northern India, a journey that took me from Kolkata to Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh. Even now, I still cannot believe that I was able to make it to Dharamsala just by asking local people for a lift. Somehow life finds its way.

As I hitchhiked from eastern India to the northwest, I looked for volunteer opportunities on *Lonely Planet*, using skills I acquired while working for AIESEC Vietnam. Within two days, I had sent applications to all the most well-known NGOs in India. Soon thereafter, a couple of acceptances arrived in my inbox. At first, I wanted to volunteer in the mountainous region of northwestern India, because I had watched many movies about this area. One was the famous film, “Three Idiots,” by Amir Khan. Interestingly, the school shown in the last scene of the movie was based on a real, innovative model school, Druk Padma Karpo School, located in Shey, Ladakh. Unfortunately, that school did not accept volunteers during the winter months, due to the extreme weather the area experiences at the end of the year. As an education enthusiast, I was very disappointed that weather conditions posed an obstacle.

Next, I received an invitation letter from Jamyang Foundation and was really hooked by the hospitality of the director’s words. By the end of my hitchhiking journey, staying with a host family in Himachal Pradesh, my left foot had become severely infected with a growing wound that I had not taken diligent care of in Rishikesh. To be honest, I was feeling a bit down



at that point, because I had been pushing my limits constantly for two months while living the down-trodden life as a nomadic hitchhiker.

Finally, I decided to book a train ticket from Chandigarh to Gaya, headed for Sanghamitra Institute. Once in Bodhgaya, I contacted Rohit, my Couchsurfing host, and asked to stay at his home for a few days before moving to the monastery. The host's father took me to the municipal hospital to get surgery on my foot. I can still recall how painful the procedure was.

A week later, Rohit accompanied me to the monastery. I came to Jamyang Foundation almost as a patient rather than a volunteer. Even so, the nuns all welcomed me. Since I could not move around much for the first few days, the nuns took turns bringing me meals and making sure all my basic needs were met. I was extremely moved and thankful for their kind support.

As soon as I could, I did my best to stick to the teaching schedule that was arranged for volunteers and took pride in doing my work well. I felt greatly energized by teaching and doing what I love best. Not understanding Hindi or Tibetan was a disadvantage while teaching the little nuns because English was not their first language. This led me to change my teaching



approach and teaching materials frequently, to adapt to the level of comprehension of each group of nuns.

In the youngest group of nuns were two little sisters who had just arrived at the monastery a couple of days earlier. Their background was similar to other Indian children who live in small towns and rural areas where the locals don't use English to communicate, as they do in large cities like New Delhi or Mumbai. Since we did not have a common language to communicate in, my strategy was to keep them entertained and slowly introduce English. That could mean just a random day of drawing with chalk on the ground or teaching them to play simple games or watching butterflies inside the monastery. My hope was that by constantly repeating simple single-syllable words, the nuns would pick them up and store them in their long-term memory. Gradually, we began scaffolding until their vocabulary bank was sufficient to understand a full basic sentence to use in daily conversation. The goal of my teaching philosophy for each group of learners is to avoid making the students feel fearful about learning and using English.

The next youngest group were all elementary school age. Children of this age are developing their cognitive abilities and can be quick learners. They constantly need something appealing to stay focused. I decided to play songs featured in some classic American movies, such as "Singing in the Rain" and "The Sound of Music." Asking the students to imagine the words and phrases in context was essential since they could not acquire words without having a sense of their meaning. By watching the movie characters interact, while singing along with



the video, the children were introduced to new vocabulary and kept repeating the words until they knew them. I asked them to stay focused by giving them some signals, such as a Quiet board.

Once the students knew some basic words, we moved on to pronunciation and visualization. At this point, I played the recorded voice for words in the dictionary and asked the children to repeat them, correcting errors as needed. Mastering pronunciation was not so difficult. At that age, kids normally pick up words in context and mimic them, so I tried to get them to sing along or play games with the words. In the visualization phase, I tried to translate the words and lyrics into simple drawings. I was a student of graphic design, so I challenged them to work diligently and improve their work on the aesthetic level.

The oldest group of nuns I taught were teenagers, so keeping my lectures interesting was a must for me as a teacher! The pace of learning was much faster than the other groups, so this was a bit tricky for me sometimes, especially if I was not well-prepared. However, I learned that by boosting their confidence and awareness, they made fewer mistakes. The first rule was not to repeat mistakes and to give them some intangible reward if they showed improvement.

During their teenage years, all students want their conversation partners to listen to their thoughts. Rather than taking the role of teacher, they want us to be friends and work alongside them. The activities for this group were more advanced and broader in scope, from using



Jegal wooden sticks with numbers to composing a comic strip. In these activities, I gave them full control to develop their scattered ideas, using basic words to construct correct full-length sentences. By this stage, I expected them to be able to put full sentences together, to be able to respond to any situation and express their thoughts.

These are just some ideas based on my teaching experience with Jamyang Foundation. I hope they will be helpful. These days, all the nations in the world are struggling with the Covid-19 pandemic, including India. I just received a text message from Elles Lohuis, the volunteer coordinator, saying that all the nuns were safe and continue to pray for all sentient beings. For me, that's the most important thing to hear from them. Back in Vietnam, I pray for them and their loved ones to stay safe to get through this tragedy peacefully.



Purifying the Place, Purifying the Heart

by K. S. Devina

Love is not patronizing and charity is not about pity. It is about love. Charity and love are the same. With charity you give love. So don't just give money but reach out your hand instead. ~ Mother Teresa

As a passionate solo traveler, I've traveled to lots of cities and villages, but it was when I started volunteering with the needy that I found the higher self within. In June 2019, I happened to go to Zangla Monastery, also known as Changchub Chöling, in Zangskar, Ladakh, in the Indian Himalayas. Zangla is a small village that is well known for its pristine beauty. I volunteered for the monastery and learned that "Deprivation introduces you to the genius slumbering within you."

While teaching 25 nuns for a month, I got to know their survival issues as well as the gaps in their awareness. The areas where I was challenged most were quality education, health and hygiene, digital literacy, language arts, waste management, and the promotion of religion and culture. I strongly felt that I could not do much to resolve these issues in a short time. All I could do was navigate the problems and map possible solutions. I did not feel the sense of euphoria I usually do after volunteering at a place. Here my journey was to explore the new



horizons that are accessible to the nuns of Zangla Monastery. In spite of financial instability, I could not drop the idea of sharing the knowledge I had attained. I stumbled many times due to financial crises, but chose to crawl instead of stopping.

The year 2020, the lockdown year, brought lots of insights and wisdom that equipped me better than ever. I planned a new curriculum based on the New Education Policy 2020 to enhance the quality of education at the monastery. The objective was to prepare the students to face the world by combining modern education with spiritual teachings. Rote learning was to be replaced by experiential learning, role play, fun elements in learning, concept building, peer learning, and so on.

With many events and programs in mind, I reached Zangla in April 2021 to bring about positive change. To ensure the students' good physical and mental health, I introduced morning yoga training. All the nuns attended classes and practiced yoga with dedication. On July 6, the birthday of H. H. the Dalai Lama, each nun took a pledge to integrate at least one teaching in their lives. That was the unique gift they presented to His Holiness, who always aspires to create compassionate human beings.

After two months of rigorous training, we decided to display all our efforts, initiatives, and projects in an exhibition titled, "Our Culture, Our Identity." All the nuns put in untiring and



relentless effort to set up five stalls in the main bazaar of Leh, the capital of Ladakh. There, they displayed posters, stone inscriptions, manuscripts, yoga demonstrations, waste recycling projects, *mandala* construction, a quiz corner, origami, and a culture tree. The students' exhibition was greatly appreciated and was reported in the local *Reach Ladakh* newspaper. When we returned to Zangskar, we organized the same exhibition in Padum and Zangla to create awareness among the local people and encourage them to preserve their culture and environment.

I had always wanted to elevate the quality of education in the monasteries, so the next event I planned was a teacher training program on Teacher's Day, September 5. The resource person was Rigzin Angmo, the activity coordinator at SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh), who guided the teachers in learning about contextual teaching. As an educator from Delhi, I walked the audience through the highlights of the National Education Policy 2020. I also introduced the attendees to creative teaching strategies they can implement to make the process of teaching and learning more effective.



I demonstrated some pedagogical strategies to integrate art, experiential learning, sports, and fun elements into the classroom in ways that are appropriate for Zangskar. At the end of the program, the vibrant young students of Changchup Chöling Monastery presented a song dedicated to the teachers. The event proved to be a great tribute to all the teachers as the leaders and changemakers of society.

The nuns at the monastery were also guided in learning about waste management and the segregation of waste materials. The young nuns along with the older ones cleaned the monastery compound. After segregating the waste, they reused plastic bottles for planting saplings. They used other waste materials, such as cello tape rolls, dish soap containers, and broken cups, and transformed them into useful things. The nuns of the monastery participated enthusiastically in all the activities, making the program a great success.

We left no stone unturned in setting an example as ambassadors of cleanliness in Zangla. The nuns of Changchub Chöling Monastery showed their genuine concern towards the medicinal water sources near the village of Zangla. That these water sources have potent medicinal properties is evident from the number of people who become cured from many



diseases after drinking this natural spring water. Unfortunately the same medicinal water is being polluted by visitors. Recognizing the danger, the nuns of the monastery decided to revive the medicinal water by cleaning the spring. On September 25, they freed the area around the spring from chips wrappers, plastic bottles, clothes, chocolate wrappers, and other trash. They then placed dustbins around to help keep the medicinal water clean.

In an effort to sensitize people to cleanliness, the students at Changchub Chöling Monastery organized a poster-making competition in Zangla. The monastery invited all artistic young people to express their imagination through painting and encouraged them to become changemakers. Students from 5 to 15 years old, from various schools around Zanskar – Karsha Gonpa School, Zangla Government High School, Dugjen School Photang, Pipiting Lamdon School, Rainbow Public School, and so on – participated to showcase their creativity.

The event began with the lightening of a lamp and chanting, and was graced by the presence of several distinguished Buddhist teachers: Geshe Tsewang Rigzin, Gen Mingyur, and Gen Sonam. These teachers encouraged students to participate and develop their imagination. An appealing song, “Mission Paani,” was performed by the students of Changchub Chöling to sensitize those who gathered to the importance of saving water. At the conclusion of the event, they mesmerized people with a beautiful dance performance that illustrated how to wash one’s



hands properly. The guests appreciated the initiatives of Changchup Chöling Monastery to create a cleaner Zangskar. The young students propagated the message, “My dream India is a clean India.”

Changchup Chöling Monastery conducted their Annual Debate Examination on October 9. The monastery invited residents of all the other monasteries in Zangskar to be part of the event to help revive this valuable Buddhist tradition. The event was attended by people from different walks of life, who benefitted from the wisdom that Buddhist philosophy offers. The students of Changchup Chöling, who have been studying Buddhist philosophy for many years, currently under the supervision of Geshe Tsewang Rigzin, demonstrated their logical reasoning skills on topics such as Collected Topics (*Düdra*), Commentary on Valid Cognition (*Tsema Namdel*), orik etc. The debates were followed by a cultural program that conveyed the message of cleanliness, water conservation, environmental protection, and the importance of preserving one’s cultural heritage. Teachers and students shared their insights with the villagers and emphasized educating the hearts of the students, not just the minds. This event will surely uplift the mindset of the people and help them appreciate Buddhist philosophy and its relevance for current issues.

The nuns at Changchup Chöling Monastery are doing their best to preserve and promote their ancient Buddhist cultural traditions. To promote an appreciation of *mandala* art, the



nuns at the monastery were given training in this richest visual aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. A *mandala* is a symbolic image of the universe. Under the supervision of Geshe Tsewang Rigzin, the nuns are learning about *mandalas* for peace, *mandalas* for wisdom, *mandalas* for wealth, and so on. October 19, the nuns took an examination on their study of *mandalas* to check their learning progress. All the nuns put forth their best efforts to present the beautiful *mandalas* they created and explain their symbolic meaning. This initiative helped to inspire and motivate the nuns and the local villagers to propagate the messages conveyed by each *mandala*.

With this, the year came to an end but plans for moving forward to discover more ways to benefite the monastery are just beginning. Just knowing that we are helping a neglected population make the world a more peaceful place is tremendously gratifying. It reminds us that “the best way find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others without expecting anything in return.” Believe me, you will definitely find a new and better version of yourself.



Nutrition Leads to Cheerfulness

by Mong Sano Marma

Vishakha Girls' School is an inspiring success story. In poor communities in Bangladesh, many girls join the family workforce at a very early age. Therefore, the school dropout rate for girls is generally very high. Before Vishakha Girls' School provided lunches for the girls, the school encountered this problem, like other schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Thanks to the school lunch program, the health, alertness, and cheerfulness of the girls is much better now.

Visakha Girls' School accepts girl students from five small villages surrounding the school. There are currently 130 girls ranging in age from 5 to 12 enrolled in classes from pre-school to Grade 5. The enrollment rate of girls of school age is close to 100% in the targeted villages because the school's teachers work closely with local elders and parents to enroll students. We seek funding to expand the school up to Grade 8.

The students' academic performance has improved greatly since the introduction of the school lunch program. In fact, despite the poverty of their families, the students at Vishakha Girls' School do much better than their counterparts at other schools in the Chittagong



Hill Tracts. Students at Vishakha Girls' School have a passing rate of over 90% in 5th grade standard tests while the average at other schools is around 65%. This remarkable achievement can be attributed to the nutritious daily meals the girls receive, as well as to the girls' diligent efforts.

In all aspects, Visakha Girls' School is doing great. We take pride in the fact that we have been able to attract female students from such remote, desperately poor, illiterate families to attend school and retain them until they complete their studies at our school. The school has become a symbol of how essential a regular meal program can help a rural community, both in terms of health and also education.

Frufrushi Marma tells her story: "My father's name is Usagya Marma. We live in Bagan Para. We are 7 siblings. My sister and I have three sisters and two brothers. My father is a poor farmer and day laborer. My elder sister completed 5th grade last year from this school and she got chance to attend a famous school in Manikchari. I am in the 5th grade and my sister is in 2nd grade. My two brothers – one in 3rd grade and the other in kindergarten – attend a different school. We are able to continue our studies because of Vishakha Girls' School. Once



my father wanted to send me for domestic labor in town, but he changed his mind because of an intervention and promises made by this school. Now I see that a nice building is being built here, which could offer me an opportunity to continue my schooling even after 5th grade. By the blessings of the Buddha, we are going to be the lucky ones.”





If you would like to help sponsor the education of a nun in the Himalayas or a Marma girl in Bangladesh, you may make a donation on the Jamyang Foundation website

<https://www.jamyang.org> or send it by check to:

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