

SPOTLIGHT

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A new hospital for all



BALASHRAM

Children tell us about themselves



YOUR DONATION COUNTS!

The wonderful seed

The Yoga Friends in Poland are supporting with enthusiasm and joy the HAND IN HAND aid projects. **Ania Szczesna** reports on some activities in her country.

The wonderful seed of Yoga was planted on Polish soil more than fifteen years ago by Paramahansa Prajnanananda and Peter van Breukelen. Since then, many people in Poland have gained more awareness and consciousness of both body and soul, thanks to the healing effects of Yoga. As a sign of gratitude, many friends have supported the **aid projects of HAND IN HAND**.



Some of us went to India to visit the Balashram Residential School and were impressed by the love and care with which the children were looked after. The pictures of laughing and happy children have inspired us to engage even more in providing help and



Petra Helwig and Ania Szczesna

support. We are very grateful to be part of this valuable project and to be able to help people in such a wonderful way.

Following the example of the Yoga Centre in Tattendorf, we have been offering, over the last few years during the seminars in Poland, **special events in favour of the children in India**. Objects, such as paintings, which were donated by the seminar participants or books signed by the Yoga teachers, were sold by auction. We enjoy participating at such events because we know that the proceeds go to the children of Balashram.

We also opened a **special account** in 2013, in order to avoid the complicated money exchange from Zlotys to Euros. That has simplified the whole donation procedure and the results can be seen: a total of **3700 Euros** has been collected for **HAND IN HAND**. Many of us support the HAND IN HAND projects with **regular money transfers** according to our individual financial means and possibilities.

A charity event at the garden centre

On the occasion of "the week of the roses", on 1st June 2014, the garden centre Gebhardt in Aachen, organised a charity day in favour of Balashram. It was already the second time that **Wilma and Markus Gebhardt** had organised this successful event.

"I have visited the Balashram School in India several years ago. The children deeply touched my heart with their happy spontaneity and I could witness how every-

thing there was organised and put into practice with deep love", says Wilma who, together with her husband, would like to continue supporting this project.

On that Sunday, open for trading, 15% of the income was donated. In the afternoon **the six member ensemble Blockkult from Cologne**, performed a recorder concert under the guidance of Wilma. They performed music from Händel, Beethoven, Kreisler and other composers. Markus, the owner of the centre, recited several pieces of literature which presented the "rose" theme in a variety of ways: for example, the rose culture of the Romans, the cultivation of roses in the castles of France and from the book "The little prince" by Saint Exupéry.



A large cake buffet was available before and after the concert and the readings: the cakes had been baked by the musicians and the garden centre staff. Coffee and refreshments were offered as well. The proceeds and the donations collected after the concert were devolved to Balashram as well and amounted to **1000 Euro**. The information material and the **flyers on Balashram** attracted the interest of many visitors. Who knows, maybe new memberships and sponsorships will arise from this event!

It was a successful and cheerful day, also made possible by the many enthusiastic volunteer helpers, for instance, those who worked at the cake buffet.



from left Nada Steinmann, Uschi Schmidtke, Annemarie Ackerl, Peter van Breukelen

Dear Friends,

Since the foundation of the Aid Organisation HAND IN HAND, in **2000**, many projects and relief operations have been accomplished. Over the past years, more than **800 000** people have received medical treatment in the Health Centres, which are supported by HAND IN HAND. It is thanks to donations, that **440 children** have found a home and have received a good education in the state-recognized Balashram Residential School.

In June 2014, HAND IN HAND received, during an official ceremony, an award marking the **10th anniversary as a bearer of the 'Austrian Donation Certificate'**. The 'Donation Certificate' is a guarantee of a rightful utilization of the donations and a high transparency of the organisation, on all levels.

In the last financial year, HAND IN HAND Europe was able to deploy **93%** of the donations for humanitarian and aid projects. Our administration and fundraising advertising costs were kept at less than **7%** only, thus allowing us to give **232.000 EUR** directly for the projects in India.

I would like to thank you for your generous donations so far and I would be really grateful if you could continue to support HAND IN HAND in its endeavor to give needy people a dignified life.

In the name of HAND IN HAND

Peter van Breukelen (President)



An example for all

At the age of 85, he is the oldest voluntary member of Prajnana Mission.

Every morning, shortly before the opening of the clinic at the Health Centre in Balighai/Puri, one can see **Swami Nergunananda** walking erect and briskly toward the centre.

It is difficult to establish his age. The loving Swami registers, in his fine and neat handwriting, the names of all the patients arriving each day at the Health Centre. Even his handwriting does not disclose his age. He would ask the person concerned about his/her ailment or complaint and would then direct them to the doctor. In the past, he had declined leaving his job for a younger volunteer helper and humbly said, **"As long as I have two eyes and two hands, I will help."** **Swami Nergunananda is a great example for us all.**



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IMPRINT

Publisher:

HAND IN HAND
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Pictures: Private Archiv

Layout and Design:

www.colors4life.de

Print: Hart Press

Publication: Once a year

Learning with fun and joy



Hariharananda Balashram is a residential school for underprivileged students of Odisha, situated in an area of 9 acres of land in the village of Arua, Kendrapara district. The school was established on 29th July, 2014 with the objective to advance the poor and destitute children of society to the main stream of society. **Report Br. Anandananda**

Presently, there are **440 students, 25 teachers and more than fifty other staff**. Mr. Pramod Prasad Singh is leading the school as principal. He has experience of more than 35 years, serving in the Central

School and other schools of India. The school is going to be affiliated **with CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education)**; the school follows the CBSE pattern of curriculum. Besides school subjects, the students are learning art/craft, dance/music/tabla, as well as computer skills, etc. In order to keep the students mentally and physically strong, games and sports are part of their daily schedule.

Selection of Students

Every year, forty most needy children are selected from different districts of Odisha. A team was formed which visits the houses of the children on the basis of his/her socio-economic condition. They submit a report before the selection committee and based on these reports, the most needy children are selected. Before admission into the school, the students undergo a medical check up by the expert doctors. The selected students get admission into the nursery classes where they learn, with fun.

Infrastructure

The school comprises three campuses. School buildings, girls' hostel, nursery building, dining hall and staff quarters

are inside the main campus; cowshed, football field and vocational training centre are in the second campus and, lastly, the boys' hostel and staff quarters are in the third campus. In the cowshed, **76 cows and calves** are accommodated and give around 230 litres of milk which are used to feed the children.

Vocational Training

Since May 2013 Vocational Training (VT) has been introduced for the **2004-05 batch of students**. The students of Std-IX participate in the VT. Initially, four trades have been introduced in the VT i.e., plumbing, tailoring, DTP/ computer and life skills. In life skills, students are taught the basic life skills like bicycle repairing, hair cutting and cooking.

This is only a short overview over the activities of Balashram Residential School that offers a new perspective to many children.





Live your dream

Each year, 40 children who are orphans or half-orphans, are selected for the Balashram Residential School. In this school, we strive to provide the children with nourishment for the heart (love and understanding), for the mind (values and knowledge) and for the hands (vocational training and practical skills). We hope to educate these children to become young men and women who, later in life, will themselves help and support people in need.

Our school's motto is: "Let your dreams become true."

We value a holistic and integral development for the children and encourage them to discover their innate abilities. We also aim to transmit to them moral values in order for them to become good citizens who, later in life, might engage themselves for the betterment of our society.

The children's day starts early in the morning with physical and martial arts exercises. This strengthens and invigorates their bodies and empowers them to defend themselves. After prayer, they eat cheese, cereals or pastries and then the children go to school. There, they congregate at 6.40am and share their intentions for the day. This is followed by a presentation on a specific subject (or a song), offered by one child of each class. Another child presents the most important news of the day, which are selected by the pupils themselves, who regularly read the newspapers. The school director then addresses them all by explaining how one should behave in the right way in order to avoid mistakes. On the occasion of someone's birthday, they all sing a serenade. Finally the congregation ends with the national anthem.

Each child owns a diary, where all the daily tasks are recorded. The class schedule/timetable, the monthly test



By Br. Premamayee

results, the objectives, the motto, the daily prayers, as well as the civic rights and duties, are registered and recorded in the diary.

In each school room hangs a blackboard which is covered with pictures, communications or other contributions on different subjects, chosen by the children and teachers.

The school offers a variety of activities which may lead to a profession: sewing, cooking, hair cutting, informatics and plumbing. The aim is to enhance the children's self-esteem and, at the same time, to preserve and pass on traditional and manual skills. On the other hand, the relationship with modern technology is enhanced as well. Outside classes, the children are encouraged to engage in and help with house chores, gardening and looking after the cows.

From time to time, the school organises games and competitions, in different sectors, open to all children. In order to improve the awareness on sanitary and health issues, courses on hygiene and first aid are offered to the children as well. Once a year, the school organises an excursion within the scope of education.

During the holidays, many children return home to their parents or guardians. Those without a family, stay at Balashram. They will have more time to play or to engage in other activities like handicrafts. They feel at home here but, despite that, it is important that they do not forget their objective in life.



Children tell us about themselves

Hanneke Drost conducted some interviews with the young boys Saras Kumarprahan and Ompraash Perey

Saras Kumarprahan is 15 years old and the youngest of five children. His father was a farmer who owned a small piece of land but the income from this was not enough to sustain and look after his five children. Some of Saras' brothers and sisters are married now and one brother moved away and works elsewhere. Once a year, Saras visits his family where he does not feel completely at ease anymore. He, therefore, always happily returns back to Balashram. His desire is to become a **cardiologist**. Doctors once saved his life during an appendectomy (surgical removal of the appendix) and he is convinced that being a doctor is the right profession for him.

Ompraash Perey is 14 years old and is the eldest of three children. His brother and his sisters are all going to school. His father is a labourer in a steelworks far away from home and cannot look after his children. His mother visits him at school three times a year. It is his desire to become an architect. Ompraash loves football and is captain of his football team which has entered the finals of his age group in the State of Orissa.

The teachers regard the two young men as very intelligent and believe that their professional dreams are realistic. Here at the Balashram Residential School, Saras und Ompraash feel at home and consider their schoolmates, teachers and carers as their own family. The familiar environment together with the solid education they receive, contribute in making them self confident young men who are able **to realize their dreams**.



Hanneke and Peter with Saras, Ompraash and teacher

Annemarie Ackerl had a chat with the 14- year old girls Sumitra Mandal and Bismruti Nayak



Sumitra Mandal has been living at Balashram since its foundation in 2004. **She is the youngest child of five**; her mother, a widow, lives in a small village close to Cuttack. Sumitra has two brothers and two sisters.

Sumitra is tall, wears glasses and is of serious nature. She reflects carefully before answering my questions concerning her aptitudes, disposition and interests. **She cares about nature**, especially about forests and talks about environmental protection. It is her wish to help others to be happy. She likes gardening, cycling and sports. At school, she belongs to the girl Scouts. She is really happy about having the opportunity to take part in **Scout camps** and competitions because she considers them as excellent opportunities to see the "outside" world.

She is a serious and excellent student, studies with ease and would like to go to university. Her mother would like her to become a doctor, but Sumitra's deepest wish is to be either an **aeroplane engineer or a pilot**.

At the end of the interview, Sumitra writes the following sentences into my notebook: „**I like to live alone, because I love exploring the nature alone. I love listening to music and reading stories. I like small children as they are cute and always happy.**“

Like her friend Sumitra, **Bismruti Nayak** has also been living at the Balashram Residential School since its opening. Bismruti comes from the village of Adala which is 10 km from Cuttack. She was a half-orphan when **Prajnana Mission** gave her the opportunity to live at Balashram. Her mother was a single parent and could not rely on any support from her family, which made it difficult for her to feed her children.

Every time I meet Bismruti, I see her smiling, and her cheerfulness is contagious. She likes sports, however, cycling is not one of her favourite activities. An **excellent dancer**, she has been thinking of using this talent for her professional life. Now, her thought of becoming a **teacher** surprises everybody. She likes her **mother tongue Odia** very much and would like to perfect it at university.

She writes about herself in my notebook: „**I like to help my friends in their work and also to be there for them if they need somebody to talk to. Watching Odia and Hindi films belongs to my favourite activities. I am happy and joyful in nature and love to play with small children.**“

I was deeply impressed by both girls because of their naturalness, their self-confidence and their openness. It was especially wonderful to observe their optimism when discussing their futures outside of the Balashram. And although both girls know that life might bring big challenges in the future, they both feel strong enough to take on this responsibility, when the time comes to "walk out into the world".



A new hospital for all

On 15th February 2014, a new hospital was inaugurated for the poorest of the poor in Jagatpur near Cuttack. A new building was necessary because the old one had been too small to accommodate all patients who were forced to queue outside also in the rain and bad weather. Two operating theatres, ten beds in two rooms as well as day-care facilities for children are available.

SPOTLIGHT: *In February you visited the new Health Centre in Cuttack, shortly after it opened its door to the public. Can you tell us your impressions?*

Peter van Breukelen: It is an establishment similar to a polyclinic. The consultation rooms, where doctors and medical specialists offer their treatments, are distributed on three levels.

SPOTLIGHT: *The Health Centre is financed by donations made to HAND IN HAND. How much did the construction of the building cost?*

Peter van Breukelen: The expenses for the building itself, totalled 340000 Euros, while the costs for the facilities, the appliances, the furniture etc. amounted to 60000 Euros. The Centre needed an x-ray apparatus for 15000 Euros, two dental chairs, and all the necessary laboratory equipment. The construction of the Health Centre building, from the first groundbreaking to the final opening, took only 15 months. Whenever possible, work was done manually

instead of using machines, for instance mixing the cement by hand. This was done on purpose, in order to reduce the costs but also to allow people living in the area to receive an income by offering them paid labour.

The new hospital is equipped with water recycling facilities and a solar powered system. On the roof of the building, a large rain water collecting tank was installed. The water is used for the sanitary facilities and installations as well as for watering the garden. Because termites (insects that feed on wood) are a huge problem in India, it was necessary to apply an anti termite treat-



ment as well. It is a beautiful and wonderful building. The highest spiritual dignitary of Puri, Shri Shri Shankaracharya Pujyapada Swami Nischalananda Saraswatiji Maharaj, participated at the inauguration ceremony. In Hinduism, Shankaracharyas are important spiritual people, who can be compared to the Pope in Catholicism. It was a great blessing for the people that the Shankaracharya of the East was present.

SPOTLIGHT: *Which diseases require more urgent medical assistance?*

Peter van Breukelen: Diabetes is a big problem - around ten percent of the Indian population are diabetic. Heart and circulation related diseases, as well as joint problems and asthma are among the most frequent problems. You have to add psychological disturbances as well: the first thing we saw when we reached the Health Centre, were patients working in the garden. The therapeutic approach for patients with psychological problems includes regular activity and, possibly, contact with nature. For these reasons, 50% of success in treating patients with psychological problems is due to therapy and medication, while the remaining 50% is related to the fact that these people are given a task. Medical staff includes general practitioners (doctors), internists, surgeons, cardiologists, as well as neurologists and psychiatrists. There is also a dentist coming to the centre who is always very busy.



SPOTLIGHT: *Do all the nurses and doctors come from India or are there also some from abroad?*

Peter van Breukelen: The majority are retired Indian doctors, who can come half a day each week to work on an honorary and voluntary basis. There are also some specialists from the West who, however, face some obstacles, such as the language barrier: the majority of the Indian population cannot speak English and this makes communication very difficult.

SPOTLIGHT: *Where do the patients come from? From the surrounding areas or from far away?*

Peter van Breukelen: They come from both near and far. Sometimes people have to face a 50 km or 70 km journey - which means many hours by bus. Patients who need longer treatments, are sent to a hospital. Treatments and medicines are free. Only for those who can afford it, a registration fee of 3 rupees is requested which corresponds to the price of one banana in Orissa. Nothing is due from those people who do not have the means to pay.

Interview with Peter van Breukelen, President of 'HAND IN HAND' by Nada Steinmann and Kristin Mosch

Health Camps around Puri

When a Westerner participates at the Health Camps in the villages around the city of Puri, he or she can understand why doctors do not want to practice in those rural areas. In the majority of the locations far from the cities, one finds poor roads and almost no infrastructure. **The weekly Health Camps project, which was brought into life by Prajnana Mission, has already improved the situation in many places, in a radius of 60 km around Puri.** An ambulance, carrying a medical doctor, a pharmacist and some helpers, makes regular visits to the villages. Every year, around **51 000** free medical treatments are given and medicines dispensed also free of charge.

The village Kantasila, "only" 20 km from Puri, is a classical example. Annemarie Ackerl has visited the village and she describes her impressions:

It is difficult to imagine that in India one needs one hour and a half to travel 20 km. After finally reaching the community centre where the **Health Camp** was set, the other visitors and I were surprised by how little is needed in order to help people. The house built, sparingly, **with bricks and covered by straw**, had a surface of **20 m²** - without furniture. The eldest of the village were sitting on the loamy ground, as is custom in that area. Tables, chairs and all other means are usually brought in by the ambulance.

I was eager **to know more about the people** living there and, with the help of a retired teacher who spoke English, I engaged with the villagers. I asked an **84 year-old paddy farmer** about how sick people were helped and cured in the past. He told me that, before, there were natural medicine practitioners who knew all about herbs and roots but, unfortunately, most of that knowledge had been lost over the years. The paddy farmer explained, furthermore, that it was only **the second time that the ambulance had been in the village**; before that, **he had never seen a doctor** in his life.

I noticed **a woman** on the village road who I was later told was **75 years old**. She was not able to **walk straight** anymore and her upper body was bent forwards in a right angle. She had been working in the rice fields all her life. She was coming to the **Health Camp** because of her **strong back pain** and it was only **the second time in her life that she was seen by a doctor**. She was given into marriage at a very young age. Now, in old age and being illiterate, she is even more dependent on outside help. The old woman, marked by the hard work, had been a widow for the past 20 years and was living with one of her six children.

She was very happy that **her three sons had received a school education**. Since her childhood, the woman had been chewing **betel nut leaves**, a habit many have in that area. Her denture was deeply affected by it: it was coloured in dark red and the quality of the teeth had deteriorated. Despite the **simple and difficult life** in the village, its inhabitants were **serene, cheerful, smiled** at us and brought us coconut milk. Some of the older children were happy to be given the opportunity to practice their **English skills**, while chatting with us.

The Health Camps are also held each week in another village. However, for some villagers, the wait till the ambulance returns, is sometimes too long and they take the bus to the Health Centre at Prajnana Mission in Balighai, which is 60 km away, in order to receive follow-up medical assistance.



A visit to BALASHRAM

Report by *Sabine and Rolf Aeppli*



For several years now, we have been collecting money for the Balashram children in India. Although we had always been convinced that we were supporting a worthwhile project, we had decided that we wanted to see it with our own eyes.

Full of joy on 4thth November 2013, we start our journey to Balashram. The chaotic trip across bumpy streets, gives us the first insight into Indian life: rarely a house is made of solid bricks; they are mostly simple huts made of waste material

and tarpaulin. Humans and animals are living together in tiny spaces and in unhygienic conditions. But, despite this poverty, one can feel a certain serenity and peace. The women, wearing their colourful saris, are radiating a confidence one would not expect.

The journey seems endless – then finally we are standing in front of the gated entrance. It is 4pm in the afternoon and there are lots of activities in the courtyard. Some of the children observe us newcomers from a distance, while others approach to examine us at close range.

After a short wait, we are introduced to Br. Anandanandaji, a very friendly monk, who is one of the people in charge and who will show us around the school for the next two days. Shortly afterwards, we are sitting in the office of the principal Shri Pramod Prasad Singh, who explains to us the daily routine the children are following and the school's philosophy. We are impressed by the overall discipline and order shown by the children. They keenly follow and, attend with joy and interest the classes and one cannot but notice their gratefulness for

the opportunity they are being given in attending the school.

At 8pm we have dinner together with the boys, while the girls are having their meals in a separate building. Meals always include rice as well as vegetables and fruits. In addition, there is **milk from their own cows** - something everybody is proud of.

We are touched by the fact that **some of the children have never seen fruits or vegetables before coming to Balashram;** they had been eating rice only. Meals are taken on the floor in a cross-legged position. Everything proceeds efficiently and effortlessly: the first ones get up in order to wash the plates, then the floor is cleaned and the eating blankets are folded. The children are well organised and the little ones are supervised by the older ones.



We are now tired and retire to our bedroom with a makeshift bed and a wooden plank and a very thin mattress. Our bones, spoiled by a flexible mattress at home, have difficulties adapting to the unusual sleeping place and we also keep hearing unusual noises we cannot decipher this late at night...

Unfortunately, we are not able to keep up with the children's routine who have already, at 4am, their wake-up call. At 6.30am we are in the school yard where children meet the teachers and carers.

We visit the youngest ones, the 4-years old who have been at the school for 7 months only. Our hearts open up





when we are surrounded by the small, animated and lively children. They are full of zest for life and are very affectionate. Br. Anandanandaji tells us that some of the children were living in the woods in families where nobody had ever been able to attend school and education. These children are often the first ones in a whole village, who have been given the opportunity to attend school. With dismay we hear about the difficult situations these children left behind them: a small girl had previously been living with

her mother on the streets - her bed had been a sand heap; a young boy was raised by his siblings because they had lost both their parents; a young girl was rejected together with her mother, because her father had died. **All are touching stories** which leave a deep impression, and there is sadness in our hearts at the thought of the pain and cruelties these children have experienced, previously, in their lives. Despite all of that, there is this light-heartedness of the children which gives it all a certain easiness.



We ask the Brahmachari if there are ever frictions among the children because of the different castes and religions they were belonging to. He denies this saying that the children are being treated equally, independent of their backgrounds. The aim of the school is to eliminate the caste-oriented thinking and to treat everybody fairly and equally.



A library offering a variety of reading material and an additional room with 45 computers are another pride of the school.

Immediately next to the school campus is the **Health Centre**. Not only children and staff of Balashram are treated there but also poor patients coming from the surrounding villages can receive free medical treatment.



We then visit the adjoining building where the older children have the opportunity to learn a profession.

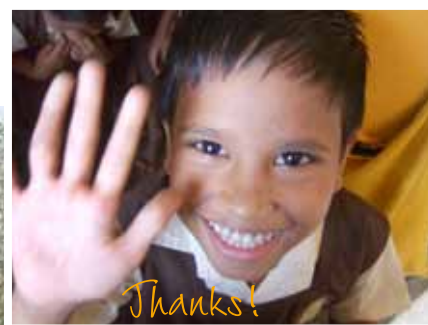
The next day when we leave, there is gratitude in our hearts for the loving and secure environment that is offered to the school children. At Balashram they can develop into independent individuals who, later in life, will be able to serve society.

After our personal visit to Balashram we are even more convinced that the money we are sending to India is used in a sensible and wise way.

We know that everybody there is giving their best for the wellbeing of the children. In one of the poorest areas of India, children are being given the opportunity to a better life.



The monies we are going to collect this year are again going to our sponsored class. It is our personal objective to be able to offer the youngest children a new playground, with some additional donations.





One drop can make a difference

A small input- a huge effect



Please donate directly through
our webpage www.handinhand.at
via PayPal

Please make that difference with just **1 Euro a day** for the Balashram children! Give the children, from the poorest of circumstances, a new chance for their life. With a **Class-Sponsorship of 35 Euro per month**, you can give the children both financial support and a secure future. **Thank you!**

More details can be found at www.handinhand.at (sponsor a child) or secretary@handinhand.at

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