

# SPOTLIGHT

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Each child  
an individual

A new Health  
Centre opens





## Let us do something wonderful for this world!

This is the appeal of 'Hand in Hand', the organization for humanitarian aid, which operates successfully in the North East of India and, specifically in the Balashram Residential School where, together with Prajnana Mission, it has created something wonderful: 480 underprivileged children were given a home, education, schooling and a dignified life.

Simple practical solutions and relatively low investments assure a sustained future to the children. Every cent that is being donated is invested properly. The administrative expenses of 'Hand in Hand' are kept low, thanks to the many volunteers helping out.



## EDITORIAL

Dear Friends,

Through the years – and still ongoing, our organization 'Hand in Hand', has provided tangible assistance and aid, especially in the North East of India. This has been possible thanks to your wonderful support that has also allowed history to be written at the Balashram Residential School in Arua. A story of laughing children, of trust and appreciation, of love. Here something wonderful is allowed to happen: underprivileged children are feeling welcomed and are given a chance in their lives. A chance they are utilizing fully.

For these children we have now expanded the school by two classes in order to give graduates the possibility to access further training in sciences, technical subjects and economics. During that time they will continue living at the Residential School. The other students, who leave Balashram to continue their education in colleges, are followed and assisted by our project "Chrysalis". Read about this project in the present edition of our magazine "Spotlight" where you can also find an article by our Principal Dr. Sunita Devi, who describes her expectations of communal living and learning. The school building has undergone some changes: a new kitchen has been built, the dormitories have been extended and new quarters for the teaching staff have been created. The Residential School now has also a new Health Centre which will offer care not only to the Balashram children and teachers but also to the surrounding population in need.

It is thanks to your help, that this is real and wonderful. We all know that we can change the world if we unite in our efforts. This world needs reliable people who care. Let us do something for this world – something wonderful!

Yours truly,



Peter von Breukelen  
President of 'Hand in Hand'



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## Interview



Since October 2016, **Dr. Sunita Devi** is the new Principal at the Balashram School in Arua, which accommodates 480 children. Before that, she has worked in several educational institutions and has accrued lots of experience whilst working with underprivileged children.

**QS:** *What impressed you about the Balashram School that prompted you to accept to direct it?*

**Dr. Sunita Devi:** What impressed me from the start was that quality here was put before quantity, that the school classes are not oversized and that, at the forefront, there is the honest and consequent endeavour to provide the best possible education to each child.

**QS:** *How is that put specifically into practice?*

**Dr. Sunita Devi:** According to laws in India, a child is not allowed to fail up to class VIII. However, even at the Balashram School, there are some children who have developed less abilities and skills in some subjects. For these children some individual development and assistance plans were created to make them reach the required level. This represents a great challenge for the children and the teachers as well.

In the future, there will be, for each student who cannot fulfil the requirements of the class, a 3-month support plan to correct the deficiencies. The teacher of the following year will be aware of this and will focus the attention, from the start of the school year, on the specific requirements of the child.

**QS:** *Are some children more privileged then?*

**Dr. Sunita Devi:** It is Balashram's philosophy that the children's rights go hand in hand with obligations. There are rules and procedures. We want, however, to look at each child holistically and see him or her as an individual. When we notice that a child is overburdened or unable to cope, the child will not be required to adapt to that structure. Individual desires, however, have their limits where they destroy the community. All this requires precise observation of the young people and an examination of the causes. This allows a specific planning for each child.

**QS:** *Your tasks at the Balashram School are educating and forming. How do you combine the two?*

**Dr. Sunita Devi:** As a teacher our first obligation is to improve constantly, step by step, the children's skills and abilities. Compared to other schools, our Balashram children have the advantage that they do not have to drag themselves through traffic to reach the school. They also do not have to endure pressure by the parents. Here the challenges are different, of higher quality: they can be related to the study matter/subject or to social togetherness.

*„We see each child holistically and as an individual“*

It is about life within a group while adapting and adjusting,

it is about the development of leadership qualities and about the relationship with same age children and with adults. The young students learn to accept responsibilities and how to deal with the temptation of power. Each child should develop self confidence and should be of example to others as well as being able to shape his/her own life confidently.

My goal is to successfully complete within the next years, classes XI and XII. During that period of time, the strength of each young student will be identified and supported: that can be dance, music, sports or arts. I support the teaching of classic Indian culture at Balashram, which includes meditation, yoga and Sanskrit.







## This is how free time is organized at Balashram

Intensive studying is important at Balashram but equally of value is the compensation.

The schooldays at the school in Arua run from Monday to Saturday. The children's day starts always at 4.00 am with morning exercises, yoga, or taekwondo. Mornings are dedicated to classes, and after lunch the children can rest, or engage in their hobbies like drawing/painting, or playing the tabla. Besides classes, in the afternoon before and after dinner, children attend sports activities like soccer, basketball, or volleyball. Physical exercise is deemed very important. Teachers take the children to tournaments and competitions where they compete successfully.

The most important thing though is that it is fun and that the children can develop social skills, so that they learn to

assert themselves to be goal-oriented, and are able to act confidently all the time. On Sundays there are no classes but there is a schedule as well: wake up is still at 4.00 am followed by morning exercises and sports games. The children are allowed to watch TV or videos for one hour during the morning.

In the afternoon an idyllic scene presents itself: girls play badminton or volley ball, and stand together in small groups. The boys run after the football. Everywhere on the Balashram premises one can see children play, relax and enjoying the free day. Most of the time, Sunday ends with a video. However, even on Sunday, homework needs to be done and four hours are spent in studying.











# A new Health Centre opens

## A Health Centre for Balashram

The new Health Centre will provide free medical care not only for the Balashram children but for all the needy people living in the area.

In a newly-constructed building, on the premises of the Balashram Residential School in Arua, our partner organization, Prajnana Mission, in collaboration with 'Hand in Hand', have established a new Health Care Centre, in February 2017.

Balashram children, teachers and staff are receiving medical care, as well as the people of the surrounding villages, who cannot afford a visit to a doctor. The villagers are allowed free medical treatment twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays. On those days, more than 100 people usually register for free medical treatment.

A dentist offers free dental care twice a month. All doctors are working on a voluntary basis and are receiving only a contribution towards the expenses they incur. Two apothecaries, two nurses and a medical assistant are working at the new Health Centre as well.

An apothecary is always available for the 480 Balashram children. A doctor looks after his young patients almost every evening and in addition, a homeopathic doctor provides assistance once a week. In case of emergencies, an ambulance is available which allows a fast admission in the nearby hospital.

Altogether, including this new Health Centre, Prajnana Mission and 'Hand in Hand' are now running five such stationary establishments. The other four are situated in the poor quarters of Jagatpur in Cuttack, in Balighai, in Arthakant and in Bishindipur.



## “Chrysalis” eases the step into life



More than a year ago, the initial students of year 2004 of the Balashram Residential School successfully completed Year X and left the school. Via our “Chrysalis” project we are accompanying these young people on their path. This is a review of some successful months.

All 39 have found either a high school or a college, or professional/vocational training. Thanks to your financial and ideational support, these young people were able to continue their education according to their abilities and skills, and chose further training whether artistic or technological. “Chrysalis” is the Greek word for gold; we have named the ongoing support and mentoring “Chrysalis”, the development of the caterpillar into a butterfly. We want to be of assistance during the flight into life.

Our young boys and girls are now able to fly alone. Despite that, they eagerly keep contact with Balashram and ask for advice when they need it. We believe that the biggest challenges they are facing, is how to handle the freedom they are experiencing and how to deal with the seduction of the modern world – both being situations or states they had never experienced before. They have to learn how to set priorities and not to neglect their studies. They are also experiencing a society with its classifications and differentiations, something they did not have at Balashram where all are equal, independently of their caste, or financial means.



After one year, we can say: most of our graduates are actively engaged in their education and demonstrate a higher degree of self discipline compared to other young people and, therefore, are gaining academic success. Besides the State colleges, which qualitatively need some improvement, most students also attend afternoon, fee-based classes in private coaching centres.

Balashram graduate Meghanad Gahir, tells us about his experiences: “I am attending the Bhubaneswar Art College, one of the best in Odisha. Myself and ten other Balashram graduates are accommodated at the affiliated hostels. Initially, because we were split in different accommodations, I was afraid of being lonely and of not being accepted by others. I was prepared to leave college and the hostel. My mentor from Balashram, however, whom I was calling almost every evening, convinced me to stay and not to give up. He was right: by now I have many new friends and I feel happy here. Balashram prepared us very well for college and, now that the teachers know from where we come, they have great respect for Balashram.”





## A new school career in science and economics is now available



Since July 2017, the possibility of an extended school career in our Balashram Residential School has been introduced and students can now absolve the 11th and 12th class at the Balashram. We also added new rooms to the school building and a new kitchen was built as well.



With the foundation of our Balashram Residential School in 2004, we had established a school system of ten grades. Step by step, the number of students has grown to 480 children, who come from underprivileged and poor families or who are orphans.

The first school graduates left the Balashram in March 2016 after the 10th grade. Since July 2017 we have been able to offer our graduates the opportunity to continue their school career at Balashram until class XII. The main subjects on offer for the higher classes are science and economics.

For this purpose, new rooms have been added to the old school building. The equipment needed for the classrooms in which science is being taught, is quite elaborate and different laboratory equipment and new microscopes represent a high cost factor for us.

Moreover furniture is needed for the dormitories of 80 teenagers, as well as living space for more teachers and their families.

After the graduation exam of class X, which takes place in the month of March, the students will be able to choose their main subject. If they have an inclination for science or economics they can continue their studies at the Balashram and do not need to go to an outside college like they were doing up to now. For graduates who would like to begin an apprenticeship outside Balashram or who choose to attend the College of Arts, we offer support and guidance through our “Chrysalis” project.

A few construction projects add to the development of our school. In the newly built kitchen, a steam-cooking plant has been installed, which is run by gas originating from our own biogas plant, fueled by the cow dung of 200 cows. Up to now we have been cooking daily for 600 people with fire wood. Now, we can save the money for the wood and at the same time contribute to a cleaner environment. The new school extension means we will be cooking, daily, for around 700 people.





A group of about ten children of various ages are standing outdoors in front of a chain-link fence. They are dressed in casual clothing, with some wearing traditional Indian attire like saris. To the right, a man with a shaved head and a light blue t-shirt is smiling at the camera. The background features lush greenery, including several tall palm trees, and a paved path leading into the distance. The overall atmosphere is bright and positive.

David Green

## Balashram – a shining star is rising

David Green, former Kriya Yoga centre leader and author from the UK, reports on his recent visit to Hariharananda Balashram residential school in March 2017.

Hariharananda Balashram represents a dream that has fast become a beautiful reality. I found myself back again at the school which I first visited in 2004. Witnessing how the children are developing into beautiful human beings, radiating joy and developing with confidence and trust. Young adults are being nurtured to enter the world without fear and with trust in themselves.

Around the world governments, teachers and parents argue about the best way to educate children, constantly fixing and unfixing the curriculum. But have they missed the point?

Western schools could perhaps pick up a leaf or two from Balashram. Whilst the curriculum surely matters, Balashram shows that the key factors to create shining stars of the future is to surround the children 24/7 with love, encouragement and understanding.

Balashram selects the poorest children often as young as 4 years old, many who arrive with illnesses, malnutrition and traumatic pasts, and then seeks to fill their delicate hearts, bodies and minds with purposeful activity. Good food is not only digested through the mouth but as importantly through the eyes and ears. No mobile phones here and TV only a few hours per week for educational programmes. Healthy environments encourage sincere effort which is the core therapy and foundation to a successful education to create the bright model young adults for the future.

When the school was just an idea, I asked the founder of Prajnana Mission, Paramahansa Prajnanananda, how we in the West could help. He replied he wanted to build the whole infrastructure of Balashram. This was smart, as labour and raw materials were climbing rapidly each year so if this approach had not been taken the school would have needed to raise 50% more funds for the same result.





## from the sust in rural India

I also asked many detailed questions on how the funding would be spent and how the materials would be purchased to get the best value. From that moment on many countries and donors worldwide went into action. I can report to all those who have donated that it has been a great investment and your money has been spent wisely.

On my five day trip, what struck me the most was the atmosphere of love as I walked around the school. What was apparent was the gentle care given to the children by the matrons and monks responsible for the welfare of the children, the enthusiastic team of teachers and other supporting staff all doing their important jobs to keep the school ticking over. An atmosphere of support and harmony with elder children playing with the younger children. The new Head described it as “cosmic”.

Starting at 4:00 am, the kids have a jam-packed day of exercise, taekwondo, yoga, school, rest, art, dancing, music and many other activities until their heads hit the pillow at 10 pm.

I also went to boarding school at 8 years old and the secret recipe of a residential school is to keep the minds, bodies and hearts positively active and happy. Anything can grow in a fertile environment.

What I witnessed was an environment where the children have confidence and they really already appreciate the value of the opportunity given to them.

Balashram has become a home for many children. A former student who left last year and is now studying at an art college comes back most weekends to help out at Balashram. He expressed it directly: “This is my family”.

The positive sense of pride is overwhelming on what has been created through the dedication and love of the many who have helped this project. So much good is going on here. The school is still expanding, developing and improving, so please keep supporting Balashram and go visit soon to see for yourself.



Our Balashram children say „THANKS“  
in a poetic way to all donors and supporters.

**Mitali:**

Oh my Balashram, a lovely one, how can I forget you?  
You are like a garden full of roses which teaches me how  
to spread miles of fragrance. You are like the world of  
joy for me.

**Prabita:**

Send your last feelings of thanks.  
They are good to grow in hearts. You have given the in-  
spiration to me. The motto “make your dream a reality”.  
And you have given me knowledge of purity.

**Sonu:**

When I was a child, I was afraid of the wild. Balashram  
brought me here, now I have no fear. You nourish me like  
a mother, as well as a father. You gave me everything.  
You gave me love and affection.


**Arobinda:**

O Balashram, I thank you a lot! When I was child, you  
brought me here. I was sad, you wiped my tears. Years  
passed away, we became a family. All the sadness went  
away.

## One drop can make a difference



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Please make that difference with just **1 Euro a day** for the Balashram children! Give the children, from the poorest of cir-  
cumstances, 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](http://www.handinhand.at) (sponsor a child) or [secretary@handinhand.at](mailto:secretary@handinhand.at)

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