

Towards Nirvana

for Children, for the Community, for the Environment

NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2016



We think that we have finally sorted all our technological gremlins out and hopefully you will all start receiving a regular newsletter twice a year again from now on. So the first thing we would like to do is to thank our very loyal supporters. We really could not function without you and we need you all, never more so than now because this year will be extremely challenging for us financially.



Nirvanavan Foundation is now the proud owner of a new school bus, based at Advaita Garden School

Each morning the bus sets off before 7.00 am to pick up the teachers, most of whom live in the nearby city of Alwar. When they have arrived the bus sets off again to pick up those children who live in the more outlying villages of Lapalla, Hajipur, Dhanni and others. The bus is also invaluable for maintaining contact between the Foundation's other eleven schools in the wider area of Alwar District in Rajasthan. This allows children and teachers to visit each other and to attend events held in different schools.



▶ To find out more go to towardsnirvana.org or visit our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/towardsnirvana/>

Fundraising news



We have had a great year of fundraising events that helped pay for a new school bus at the Advaita Garden school.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed, whether by actively taking part or by donating. So much time and effort goes into making these events happen and it really does make a difference when your support is added. Here are some the events that have taken place over the year.

Krishnadhyanam (Richard Roberts), our founding member held a 'sound bath evening' raising over £300.

Joanna MacDonald hosted two wonderful dinner parties raising nearly £2000. The guests seemed very happy to pay £50 each to have a four course, home cooked meal including wine, good company and the knowledge that the money was going to a very worthwhile cause. A recipe for success!

Satvikananda and Kathy McEntee organised a raffle for a Reiki treatment donated by Kathy. More recently Kathy held a Reiki 'taster' day, where all donations went Towards Nirvana. Both events raised over £200.

Mrs Edge regularly knits our Towards Nirvana bears which have raised hundreds of pounds over the years.



The wish list of towards Nirvana is hopefully slowly being ticked off. Certainly they now have a bus for the use of the teachers and children making everything more accessible and easier for them to go places. Some of the children have to walk several miles to get to school so now attendance should improve.

The average salary for an Indian, is £2000 per annum. So a little goes a long way over there!!



Making a difference

As most of you know, 'Towards Nirvana' exists to support the work of Nirvanavan Foundation, an NGO (Non-Government Organisation – basically, the Indian equivalent of a UK charity) based in the city of Alwar, Rajasthan, India. The Foundation runs 12 schools, eleven of them in the countryside surrounding the city.

The 'flag ship' school, Advaita Garden, is situated just outside the city between the three villages of Dadikar, Dhani and Hajipur. It has eight classes, now with two teachers to each class, which has made a massive difference to the quality of education provided. There is one school in the slum area of Alwar and the other ten schools are in the small villages of the Nat and Kanjer communities scattered across Alwar District. These communities are traditionally into prostitution.

In these schools there is mostly just one class catering for all ages. These classes are divided into two or three smaller groups and run successfully with a couple of truly dedicated and committed teachers for each class. More than five hundred children now have the opportunity to have an education where previously there was none. (Most government teachers do not want to teach in these villages.)

Our Towards Nirvana team in the UK is made up of twelve volunteers. As well as providing money for the running of the schools, paying the teachers salaries, etc., our money also helps to fund the Childline telephone service, run by the Foundation, so that it can be manned twenty four hours a day. That way every child in need or distress has somewhere to call for help at any time of the day or night.

The Foundation also offers support to the local communities, helping to keep the environment clean, developing awareness of environmental issues in general and working towards wild life conservation in the area.

We even managed to provide most of the deposit for a big yellow school bus last year. Now both children and teachers who sometime live many kilometres from school do not have to walk the long distances to get there – either in the bitter morning cold of winter or the scorching heat of summer. The bus also allows everyone to go on educational visits to widen their knowledge and appreciation of the surrounding areas and, importantly, allows easy access between the schools themselves, which are spread over a large area of the countryside.

Once again in November 2015 my husband and I, together with Krishnadhyanam (Richard Roberts), were privileged to visit the Foundation again, providing an opportunity to see how our money is being spent. Nothing is wasted or squandered on unnecessary projects – all is spent wisely. Apart from a few donations from other well-wishers, 'Towards Nirvana' is the sole provider of regular funds for this amazing organisation and without us (you) it could not survive in its present form.

We visited the main school at Advaita Garden. The children are happy, healthy and enthusiastic. We even had a ride on the new school bus! When the children go home each day there are several boys who stay on and live in one of the classrooms. They are well cared for but eventually the Foundation wants to provide a children's home providing a safe haven for those who need it, both boys and girls.

We also visited five other schools – Dhobi Ghatta, which is in the slum area of the city, and Gajuki, Hatundi, Teen ki Rudi and Pipalgarh, which are in the prostitution villages. The age of the children ranges from five or six years up to about fourteen and the classes are mixed. I was privileged to be able to work with these children – once again making a fool of myself making animal noises, hoping that they would recognise and name the different animals – in English!

The children flourish in many art mediums, including drawing, painting, model making, clay sculpting. An Art Mela is held every year when the children from all the schools meet together, and at the end of the three days there is a competition with various categories and prizes. Once again we felt very privileged to be with these children and very grateful to all the Towards Nirvana team in the UK for their invaluable help in keeping the project going.

I can personally assure you that every penny of the money which we raise here is being well spent. The Towards Nirvana team do this, voluntarily, because we care passionately about these children and their future. We will continue to work for this cause, ensuring that every donation is well spent.

Your money DOES make a difference. A big difference. You are welcome to visit the Foundation yourself to see.

Swami Satvikananda, Trustee

Revisiting some of the Towards Nirvanan Schools

My visit last year to Aviata Garden School near Alwar was a short one but productive.

In the two years since my previous visit more classrooms have been built using local materials, also the guesthouse has been finished offering people visiting the school basic accommodation but with a toilet and bucket washing facilities. When I first went to the main school in 2009, where Nirvana the founder of Towards Nirvana lives all year round, I slept on the floor in a shared room cum office during the day and had to walk to the cowshed half a kilometre away to use the only inside toilet at that time.

Now they have a toilet and (bucket) shower facilities in the school and in the two new guest houses. The children have separate toilets and washing facilities.

Previously food was cooked on a small wood fire in the open air, often by one of the teachers, a helper or often one of the children. Roti (chapati) Dahl, and on special days, veg curry with produce from someone's garden or the local market. Now there is a kitchen complete with running water and a gas ring and one of the women from the local village comes in every day to cook. Life is simple but good.

They have also built an impressive amphitheatre, using traditional methods of the region, mud and stone, and they hold the annual wrestling match there. I am sure this prominent area is much used for games, performances and dance at other times.

There is definitely less litter as the children are taught to be tidy and are provided with bins near each classroom. Often there is a child chosen to tidy up the area if litter has blown about.



Every day starts with a period of silence followed by a period of joy.

There are 4 geese, 20 cows and 3 dogs who are part of the 'big family'. And there is a large vegetable garden which was suffering as there had been a huge storm the night before our arrival and everything seemed bashed down. Some helpers were mending a damaged fence that keeps children, goats and dogs out of the garden.

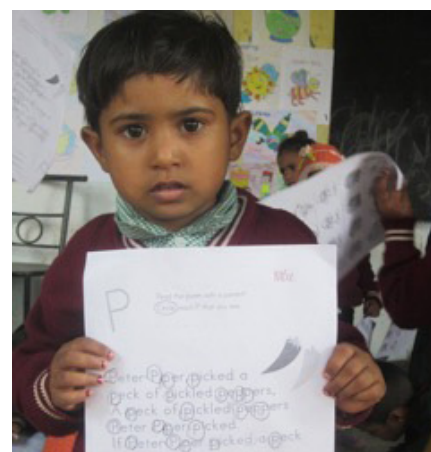
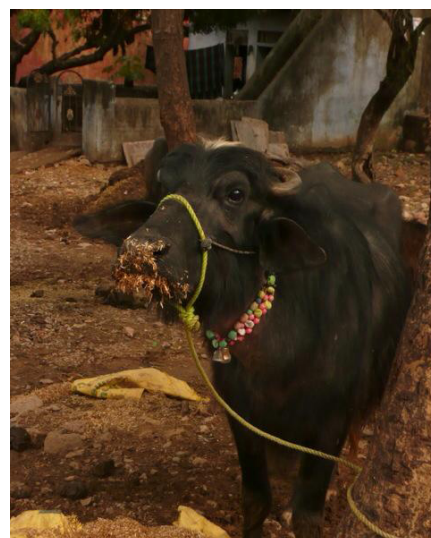
The composting seems to be done seriously and all our veg peelings were put in it. And we ate some of the carrots and beans for our delicious lunch we were given by the school.

So progress has been slowly but wisely made. The ethos is to fall in line with the environment and use natural building methods, solar power, plant trees, dig ponds, preserve tigers etc...

But money is needed for transport, paying the staff, new builds, workshops, etc... in order to continue to improve standards of teaching and hygiene.

Nirvana took us to visit a Migratory school in a village where children are left for 9 months when their parents go off wandering looking for work, to return for Divalli and then stay a few months before going off again.

Without the school that provides lunch and dinner every day, clothes and a mattress to sleep on and lessons they would have to provide for themselves and run wild in the village.



There is only one teacher at present but Nirvana is keen to install another teacher to raise the level of teaching and help with commitment of being 'open' every weekday for lessons.

The children we met, were keen to connect and looked respectable and happy. One or two on the side lines were too shy to join in for whatever reason but looked on.

The visit was an interesting example of what Nirvana is creating on very small funds. A local farmer donates lentils and wheat so they can feed the children. However it is a fragile system which could be made more secure with a little more money.

I will try to return next year if possible as continuity and encouragement is important to support this wonderfully dedicated charity.

Joanna MacDonald, Trustee

An update from KD

For the last three years our income has exceeded £25,000. This means that in order to comply with Charity Commission regulations, we need to have our accounts examined by an independent examiner. We are very grateful to Nigel Wood of Saunders and Wood Accountants for doing this for us free of charge.

We are pleased with the fact that we have minimal expenses and that we are able to send more than 97% of our income to Nirvanavan Foundation. (Given that this 3% is more than covered by a donation from one of the Trustees we can in fact state that 100% of your money goes to the Foundation in India.)

In 2008 we started off by sending £500 per month. We have been able to increase our grant each year to cover the expansion of the work, inflation, cost of living rises etc. until now, in 2016, we send £2,500 per month. However, our standing order donations only bring in about £1,800. Gift Aid and one-off fund raising events help to bridge the gap, but it is a gap that we do need to bridge!

This year, for the first time, we are not in a position to be able to increase our monthly grant. We simply don't have enough money.

We need to increase the number of monthly donors and to widen our data base.

100%
of your money goes to
the Foundation in India

Please spread the word about Nirvanavan Foundation. To your friends, to your students, to your colleagues, to your family, to your wealthy – and not-so-wealthy – friends, employers, employees, fellow church goers, people you meet in the pub, neighbours, and every Tom Dick and Harry who happen to pass your way.

As far as raising money goes, EVERYTHING can be done 'Towards Nirvana'. KD spent a day gardening and donated his wages for the day (when his employer found out he doubled the amount as a contribution!) Jill grew tomatoes Towards Nirvana and sold them to her friends. Karmal and Aeron cycled Towards Nirvana, Mrs Edge knits Towards Nirvana, Meibritt danced Towards Nirvana, Chrissy paid a fine Towards Nirvana, people sing and chant Towards Nirvana, yogis practise yoga towards nirvana, people can even sit in silence towards nirvana. There is **nothing** which cannot be done Towards Nirvana!! (apologies for missing so many people out!!). And every little counts. We can be contacted at towardsnirvana@gmx.co.uk

In the words of Nirvana Bodhisattva, the founder and director of the Foundation:

"We are a small organisation but the work we do is very important."



Committee news

Thank you and welcome

Here, for your delight, is a photo of the Towards Nirvana team of volunteers at our last meeting in May.

We say a big thank you to Adrian Wallace who has been our Treasurer for three years, and a big welcome to Laura Grant, our new treasurer.

A big big thank you to Satvikananda who is relinquishing her role as 'chair'. Krishnadhyanam (Richard Roberts) will be our new chairperson.

We have, in the past year also welcomed Natasha Stoner to our group. It is Natasha who is responsible for this newsletter and she has already done a great job with our new publicity leaflet. Juliet Willoughby is our new web-site person, who has already started work on improving our online presence.

Another welcome – to Aeron Miles, who has set up a twitter account for us. Yet another welcome – to Philip, who visited the Foundation with Joanna (see her article) and continued thanks to Karuna, our secretary, and to Meibritt and Karmal – all valued members of Towards Nirvana UK. Hrdaya continues to monitor our facebook page, so all you social media fans – please LIKE us and SHARE!!!

DONOR OF THE MONTH with love, gratitude and humility

Email received from one of our regular donors:-

I am making an additional donation this month to Nirvanavan Foundation for £40 and would like to share with you my reasons for doing this, which I felt you would appreciate:-

I was issued with a parking ticket at 7pm on a stormy Saturday night whilst parked in a car park serving a local business, which was closed at the time. The car park was ungated and unlit and my car was not causing any obstruction or inconvenience to anyone. Naturally I felt indignant that I have been treated unjustly. I used the Appeal procedure that was open to me to complain. I got a prompt reply to say the appeal was rejected. However, was offered the reduced fine of £60 if I paid within 14 days. I was offered another choice, if I still felt aggrieved, then that was to take my appeal to the Independent Appeals Service. However, if I decided to do this I would have to pay the full fine of £100. I was not prepared to pay the Parking Control people any more than I had to. Therefore, my decision was to pay the £60 and swallow my disgruntlement.

Now comes the interesting part:

I wanted to somehow find a way to pay this fine with 'grace & goodwill' – after all there is enough anger in the world. How could I do this?

I imagined that the £60 would go towards paying someone's salary, so they could feed themselves and their family. I felt gratitude for having the luxury of feeling indignant over such a petty incident. I felt gratitude for being given the choice to appeal against the parking ticket and for my voice to be heard and responded to. I felt gratitude for having enough money to pay the fine. Most of all I felt gratitude for living in a country where it is normal for people to roam the streets armed with automatic machines that fire bits of paper that harm my bank account, rather than bullets that harm my life.

I then thought I would affirm this gratitude by donating the £40 extra I would have paid the Parking Control people if I had continued on my 'disgruntled' course, to Nirvanavan Foundation. I felt real gratitude that I will contribute to providing the girls in the village a real choice of how they earn money to feed themselves and their family. You won't be surprised to hear that during the month of February I am practicing – the Itie of Humility. The Universe moves in mysterious ways!!