



SPOTLIGHT

The HAND IN HAND magazine 2021/22 · www.handinhand.at · info@handinhand.at



**JOY FOR A
HEALTHY LIFE**

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**NATURE AWARENESS
FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE**

PAGE 8



**We can be the first generation to succeed
in ending poverty, just as we may be the last to
have a chance of saving the planet.**

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations

“To build a better future for all people” – this was the resolution adopted by the United Nations, in September, six years ago. Could its representatives have imagined that just four years later, a pandemic would unhinge the world? That a virus would oppose their goal and become a powerful adversary in the fight against poverty and suffering in our world?

Could we, dear friends of HAND IN HAND, have imagined a situation that would result in the temporary closure of our Balashram Residential School, and the children having to return to poverty? That our Health Centres would have to partially cease operations? That Prajnana Mission helpers would not be allowed on the streets to help people in need, and instead of distributing food and blankets, they had to help supplying local hospitals with oxygen tanks? What happened? Did the United Nations’ call – “action to change

our world” – come too late? Were 20 years of HAND IN HAND ultimately no more than the proverbial drop of water on a hot stone? Or quite the opposite? With the Corona pandemic and the catastrophic consequences of climate change, is humanity gaining new, unprecedented strength for a sustainable turn for the better?

Every human being is a world within the world. Every single child, whose hopeful gaze reflects the help received by you, represents a better world. The gratitude in the eyes of a person in need who received medical help, marks a turning point for the better. For each family that you, dear friends of HAND IN HAND, are giving the chance of a new beginning, there is no doubt:

**A better future for all is possible:
HAND IN HAND, together with you – Now!**

EDITORIAL

Dear Friends of HAND IN HAND,

Since the founding of Hand in Hand, we have overcome many challenges. So much more than we dared to dream has become possible.

Hopeless cycles of poverty are being transformed, day by day with HAND IN HAND, into a world full of unfolding potential.

For the children of Balashram and for the countless people whose needs are being fulfilled thanks to your support, the world has become a better place – even now.

Especially at this time, when the present crisis we are facing surpasses anything we have been able to overcome in the past 20 years.

The reports from Balashram make our hearts heavy (p. 4) and so does the helplessness with which we stand before the closed doors of some of our Health Centres (p. 10). But the children and all of us carry in our hearts the experience of 20 years of effective help – of helpfulness that makes a decisive difference. This fills us with courage and hope.

Let us – like the children of Balashram – celebrate humanity in the midst of crisis (p. 6), and carry joy into the world with all our talents and gifts for a better and more prosperous future (p. 8). Your commitment, dear friends of Hand in Hand (p. 7, 9), proves once again that the past 20 years have armed us with everything we need to overcome this crisis as well: With the belief that every contribution, no matter how small, makes a difference, with the joy of shared commitment for a better world for all, and with the love for life!

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Yours, Peter van Breukelen
President from HAND IN HAND



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BALASHRAM IN THE SHADOW OF THE PANDEMIC

A report from Dr. Malaya Nanda,
Director of the school

The Corona crisis has had a serious impact on the school. Due to the pandemic, the school was closed from 17th March 2020 onwards. Following the instructions of the government, all parents or relatives were asked to take their children back home. Our hearts grew heavy with worry as one child after another left the school. One lockdown followed the next and with each one the challenge became greater. How were we going to stay in touch with the children? How were we going to keep them on the ball with their learning? How were we going to take care of them?

After the children were not allowed to stay in the school, we tried to find at least one person with a cell phone in each village and asked them to help us. We regularly sent encouraging messages to the children and submitted schoolwork to them. As time went on, it became increasingly difficult, to almost impossible, to stay in contact with them this way, let alone to continue the lessons. We feared losing sight of the children and visited them as soon as possible. It was really a hard time. Some of the children had no home, no relatives, and were never picked up. Others came back to Balashram after a short time because their relatives were unable to take care of them. The authorities allowed students of classes X and XII to come back to the Balashram earlier due to the fact that the higher

classes were supposed to take board examinations in 2021. They were brought back in groups and received health care before classes resumed after the quarantine.

We worked to develop and maintain effective and strict hygiene and quarantine measures throughout the school campus. This impressed the authorities and in early January 2021, we did not receive their explicit but their tacit approval to welcome the children back to the school. After a challenging procedure for the children as well as for the Balashram staff, in which we brought the students back to school one by one in groups and under strict hygiene conditions, the joy and relief was indescribable when almost all students of classes I to XII were back with us at Balashram in early February 2021.

It was all the more painful when only a few weeks later in March, shortly before the start of the new school year, a second Corona wave hit India. None of us had expected it. It hit the country unexpectedly and with great harshness. Corona-positive cases were continuously reported at the nearby market, and many of the affected people could not be helped, they died. Going to the market became a serious risk. During this time, it was difficult to get enough food for all the children and the staff at Balashram. We all literally feared for our lives.



Dhanu Kisku with his mother

Dhanu's father died when he was a small child. His mother works as a day laborer. Dhanu is a good student. He loves maths, English as well as local history and biology. He is very active in games and sports.



Buduni Ho with her mother

Buduni Ho's father died when she was two years old. She does well in school and shows great talent in classical dance.



Ghasiram Tudu between his father and his younger brother

Ghasiram no longer has a mother. His father is a seasonal worker. Ghasiram is a very intelligent student and is particularly good at English, maths and drawing – and he enjoys sports and games.

From the second week of April 2021, a complete lockdown was again imposed on Odisha. Again, the school had to close, again we had to watch helplessly as most of the children were taken away. Many of the residents in the village fear that the children might spread the virus. We therefore have to proceed with extra caution so that at least those children who are still with us, are allowed to stay. At present, (May 2021) there are 210 children at Balashram. We are not allowed to let them go outside to play. It is a huge challenge to care for so many children around the clock indoors in the living quarters.

Meanwhile, our concern is growing for those students who have been taken home.

We know that many of them have no real home. Where are they spending the night? What are they eating? Are they healthy? We do our best to be ready to take the children back at any time and to take good care of those children who are with us. And we are still able to do this – with your support!

Thank you from the bottom of my heart!



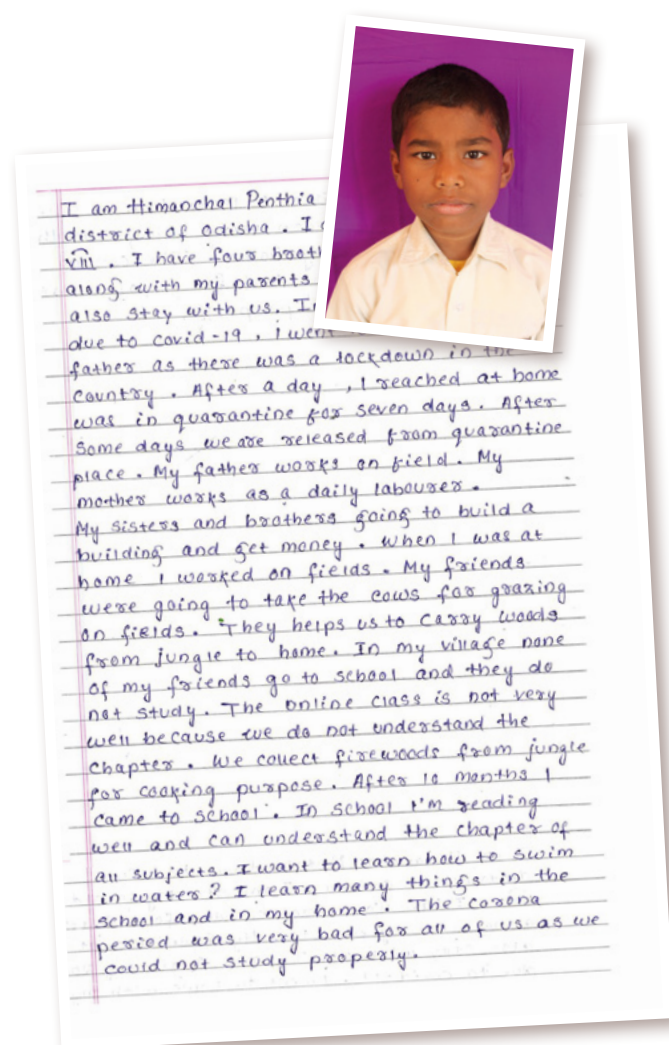
CORONA AND THE LOCKDOWN FROM A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

By Himanchal Penthia

I am Himanchal Penthia from Karaput district in Odisha and I am attending 8th grade. I have four brothers and four sisters who live with my parents and grandparents. On 5th April 2020, due to Covid-19 and the lockdown across the country, I went back home with my father. We reached home in one day and we had to quarantine for seven days, after which we were free to move.

My father works in the fields and my mother works as a day laborer. My sisters and brothers are helping to build a house to earn some money. I have worked in the fields. My friends let the cows graze far out in the fields. We collected firewood for cooking and the cows helped us to carry the wood from the jungle back home.

None of my friends in the village go to school, they don't study. After ten months, I came back to Balashram. The online course was not very good because we didn't understand all chapters. But in school I read well and I can again understand every chapter in all subjects. I would like to learn to swim. I learn many different things both at school and at home. **Corona time was very bad for all of us because we couldn't learn properly.**



India is a country where many festivals are celebrated.

Especially for our children, the holidays always bring great joy. Joy that they so desperately need right now. Firmly believing in the health-giving power of joy, the school, while adhering to strict Covid guidelines, organised small celebrations throughout the school year, which brought confidence, cheerfulness and laughter to Balashram.

In September 2020, we celebrated "Teachers' Day" followed by "Youth Day" in January 2021. In February, we invited the parents of the children and held a "Parent-Teacher-Student Meeting", which allowed an enriching exchange about the children's achievements.

Festivals in honor of important personalities of India were solemnly celebrated. These included the commemoration of the great freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri on 2nd October 2020; the great yogi Paramahansa Hariharananda – who gave his name to the school – on 3rd December 2020, and Paramahansa Yogananda on 5th January 2021. In addition, the 72nd Republic Day was solemnly celebrated on 26th January 2021.

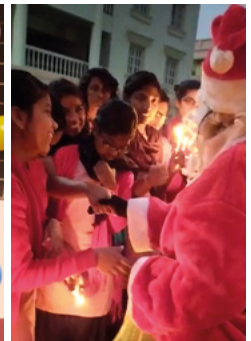
On 25th December 2020, a "real" Santa Claus brought joy to the faces of the children – we celebrated Christmas in Balashram. The meaning of Christmas was playfully introduced to the students through the Christmas story.

On 12th February 2021, the students and staff of Balashram solemnly welcomed Paramahansa Prajnanananda, the founder of the school. The programme opened with the welcome song "Gita Govinda" and a "Lighting the Lamp Ceremony", then the students gave an artistic performance on the theme "The Cow in India".

In the presence of Paramahansa Prajnanananda, the new school website and the new main library were inaugurated on 16th February, and the release of a CD of bhajans sung by Balashram students was celebrated. We cordially invite you to visit our website and meet our children at

www.hariharanandabalashram.org

JOY FOR A HEALTHY LIFE



HAND IN HAND JOY PROJECTS

By Peter van Breukelen

We all wish for more joy in the world.

The great challenges that Balashram Boarding School as well as HCHC Health Centers faced during this extraordinarily difficult and worrying year, triggered an overwhelming wave of willingness to help. You continued to support our projects financially, contributed more than ever your ideas, talents and skills, and gave us your valuable time.

In September 2020, the joyful report of the Hand in Hand fundraising walk in the UK reached us. Only a few weeks later, full

of delight, we held the first Joy-CART in our hands, as a symbol of support to alleviate world hunger, shining in all colours of joy. In January and May, the united willingness to help from India to Germany, Switzerland to Holland and Austria, made the first Hand in Hand Joy-Concerts possible, to counteract the pandemic and its consequences, with the power of meditative music. And in February, beginning in Switzerland, Joy-Fasting for Hand in Hand was launched in many European countries. Renunciation as a path to abundance? Less can undoubtedly be more for all of us – and especially for the children in India.

A big and heartfelt thank you for your contribution!



*to share joy,
to share love*

ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURE AWARENESS IN BALASHRAM – FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

By Dr. Malaya Nanda

At Balashram, we take nature and the environment seriously. From first grade to fifth grade, specific times are set aside to promote environmental and nature awareness among the children. Students discuss environmental issues and their social implications, in class or at outdoor gatherings. In hands-on lessons, they learn how to care for seedlings, herbs, and other plants. To do this, each class is assigned a specific piece of field or garden where the children grow and care for various plants.

All students learn to garden in the Balashram School. Together with the children we plant seasonal flowers, such as this year, sunflowers from October 2020 to March 2021. It was so beautiful to see flocks of birds come and perch on the sunflowers to pick seeds from the inflorescences. Watching the birds gave us great joy.

Starting in April, we plan to sow marigolds. Students have already begun preparing the soil for marigolds. In addition to flowering plants, the children and young people also grow vegetables in the school garden. Squash, cucumber, tomato, papaya, cauliflower and spinach are the main vegetables in

our school gardens, and herbs – such as mint and cilantro – are also not to be missed.

We also organise regular nature trips to nearby nature reserves (Bhitarakanika Wildlife Sanctuary), where the students gain a lot of knowledge and information about different plant and animal species. With a lot of enthusiasm and commitment, the children and young people also organise small events themselves, such as nature camps in the surrounding villages, in order to exchange ideas with the villagers and thus contribute to more environmental and nature awareness in their area. This also includes water camps to create awareness for the economical use of water.

For irrigation, we use recycled water obtained through the school's wastewater treatment process. In addition to a bio-gas plant, the school also has a fully functional solar power system. The children learn about the underlying concepts of protecting nature and the environment, and to appreciate and love nature's gifts. In this way, they begin to take care of their environment and protect nature as a matter of course

– all for a prosperous future.

FUNDRAISING WALK IN UNITED KINGDOM

By Hagen Rampes

Several UK Hand in Hand friends gathered on a beautiful summer day on the 22 August 2020 to raise funds for Balashram School. The 10 mile walk along the Saxons Shore Way in Kent was from Whitstable to Herne Bay and back to Whitstable. This is a gentle coastal walk between 2 attractive Kent seaside towns. The day was enjoyed by all who attended and it was an opportunity to spend time with each other during good weather and a nice sea breeze.

The fundraising walk was a huge success in many ways, not least that £ 2760 was raised as friends of Hand in Hand who were unable to attend the walk generously sent in donations. **As a result of the success, we are planning to make the walk in different locations in the United Kingdom, an annual event.**



"I really enjoyed the walk, thank you very much for organising it. It was great meeting up with familiar faces again and getting to know new people. The location was very nice and I definitely felt the physical effort the next day!"

"The walk for me was pure joy. I think it would be a lovely annual event and I would be happy to support it either in person or by donation. Thank you again for such a lovely day."



HEALTH CARE IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC

A conversation with Swami Achalanandaji and doctors at HCHC Jagatpur.

By Mette Koivusalo

HCHC Jagatpur is the largest of the now five HCHC Health Centres. Today, 10 to 15 volunteer doctors provide their invaluable services at HCHC Jagatpur. The day clinic is visited by about 100 to 150 patients daily. Many of them live in rural areas where medical care is not available. They often travel long distances of 70 kilometres or more, to get to the clinic. Doctors describe health care for the indigenous population as one of the current greatest challenges. "People often have no means of transportation to reach the clinic or to return back home," they explain.



Doctor Dhruva Charan Mohapatra works as a general practitioner at HCHC Jagatpur since his retirement. He is now 75 years old and cares for many patients daily "to the best of his ability."

He sees his main role as a doctor as "helping those most in need by treating them with courtesy and listening to them. When someone needs our services, we do our best to provide help," he assures.

Doctor Bhagawat Bal serves as a medical health officer as well as a general practitioner at HCHC Jagatpur. For more than 15 years now, he has been involved in the HCHC Jagatpur, performing minor surgical procedures very successfully. He is 70 years old.



The two doctors report that many of their colleagues at HCHC Jagatpur who are 60 to 70 years old, were unable to work as usual at HCHC Jagatpur during the critical periods of the lockdown. Nevertheless, the clinic remained open during the Covid crisis – except for a few days – thanks to the operational readiness of younger doctors.

"There was a time when the entire operation was maintained by just one doctor" recounts *Swami Achalanandaji*.

"Thank God, after some time, we succeeded in attracting new, younger doctors to work at the clinic. Incoming emergencies could thus continue to be treated on a daily basis, often villagers with skin burns or diabetes, but also children who had swallowed a coin or similar. However, the Health Centres in Balighai, Arua and Athagarh had to temporarily suspend operations due to the current situation." reports Swamiji.



Maintaining the emergency service requires a lot of additional organisation for adhering to strict covid measures in terms of hygiene and disinfection, or even keeping a distance while standing in a queue, explains Dr. Bal, who elaborates: "For example, people with cold symptoms are separated from other patients at the entrance gate and treated in dedicated areas on the first floor." Visibly grateful, Dr. Mohapatra adds that no one at the clinic has contracted covid.

In the midst of the pandemic, however, encouraging stories always occur: "Often very poor, seriously ill people came to HCHC Jagatpur who had been turned away by other hospitals. When these people can be helped and we can send them back home free of ailments, it is a great gift for the patients and for us. One such success story was when a lady from the village came to the Health Centre with severely swollen lower legs. She could barely walk, but with the right treatment and the appropriate medication, she was cured and able to return home pain-free," the doctors tell us.

In view of such experiences, they look full of hope and trust into a better future: There is a plan to develop the Health Centre step by step according to its needs. One of the next projects will be to build a diagnostic laboratory centre, which



would also attract more specialized doctors to help patients, for instance, with thyroid problems. "My main goal is to serve people. As long as I am physically fit, I will do my best to serve here at HCHC Jagatpur," ensures Dr. Mohapatra.

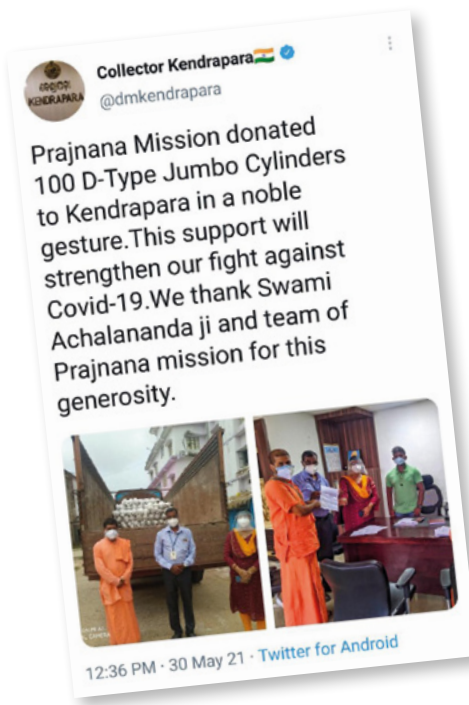
However, financial help is urgently needed, in fact more than ever, stresses Swamiji, adding with commitment but also with a bit of concern: "We have to find a way to get all our medical supplies through donations." For Swami Achalanandaji and the doctors who have been working at the clinic for many years, the pandemic is once again a call for solidarity and helpfulness and ultimately "also an ,opportunity' for more humanity and selfless service to others – and thus for a better future for all."

EFFECTIVE CORONA MEASURES

AT HCHC ARUA –
THANKS TO YOUR
DONATION

Thanks to your help, the HCHC Health Centre in Arua, on the Balashram compound, was able to effectively protect the residents of the Residential School from Corona infection. The entire school building and living quarters were disinfected daily and were closed to outsiders. The school management organised food deliveries to avoid anyone having to leave the campus. Among other things, the children received a daily tea made from Ayurvedic herbs to strengthen their immunity defences, while they also practised invigorating yoga exercises, sports, music, dance and art, in small groups. **And, thank goodness, it has indeed been possible to keep the school Corona-free to this day!**

With your support to Hand in Hand, even an emergency depot in the Balashram Health Centre, with medicines to be used in case of infection, could be set up. In addition, 100 oxygen concentrators were donated to the public hospital in Kendrapara, the district where Balashram is located. **Your donation truly and literally saved and still saves lives!**



NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ALSO PROVIDED DURING THE PANDEMIC

In India, the worst sufferers during the Corona pandemic are undoubtedly the poor and the migrating population. The confluence of increasingly severe natural disasters, the pandemic and severe poverty, are having a drastic impact on the achievements in the field of humanitarian aid worldwide, and threatens to set development back by years.

Your donation allowed the provision of rapid and effective relief even in this extraordinarily challenging time, when the Brahmani River in Kendrapara district of Odisha overflowed its banks and flooded the surrounding villages. Relief supplies such as mustard oil, pulses, cereal powder, blankets and much more were distributed to about 300 people in the affected villages. Fodder for about 3000 cows and help for agricultural requirements, could also be provided. Stay on the ball with us: **Hand in Hand, together with you, we can take action against the increase of hunger, poverty and suffering in this world!**



*One drop can make
a difference*

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.

MORE DETAILS CAN BE FOUND AT

HAND IN HAND – Organisation for Humanitarian Aid
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