

On both sides

Schule macht Schule Newsletter August 2026

Dear supporters and friends of the project, dear students, parents and teachers at the Musisches Gymnasium,

Schule macht Schule's last newsletter is long since history: since its publication, a great deal has happened on both sides. The children have celebrated Christmas, gone on hikes, danced and done gymnastics, taken part in community life at the Children's Village in Bhakunde, moved up a school year, spent six weeks' holiday with their families and are now long since back in the new Mustang House in Phalyak.

There's so much to report – so let's jump straight in!



1. Living life to the fullest	1
2. Two special women, and a young man who has forged ahead	3
3. From the trees, over the fence, onto the (carpeted) floor	3
4. Wonderful young people of today...	4
5. Newcomers: five children and a true-blue Mustangi	5
6. (Life's) Journeys	6
7. Thank you and: till next time	8
Appendix	
Why I wanted a godchild	9
Video reflections of a journey	9

1. Living life to the fullest

For most followers of Tibetan Buddhism, the **Dalai Lama's birthday** is more important than any personal celebration. For this year's birthday celebration on 6th July, the men of Phalyak shaded the courtyard of our school with tarps, while the women prepared food for everybody, and our children and staff organised the accompanying events. And then everyone celebrated together ...



Above left: Early in the morning the women from the village begin preparations for the shared meal.

Far left: All participants bow before the portrait of the Dalai Lama and lay a ceremonial scarf as an offering.

Left: The children perform Tibetan and Nepalese dances; later, anyone who wished to dance had the chance.

Right: A blessing-bringing ritual is performed on the open space above our building – participants hold tsampa (roasted barley flour) in their hand, which is ultimately thrown into the wind.



When somebody reaches the age of 84, according to local custom, they enter a new phase of life. It is marked with special ceremonies in a "Celebration to honour a long life" and the greater the social status, the greater the celebrations. Mutik Gurung from the neighbouring village of Dagarzong was honoured recently and our children were invited to perform traditional dances at the celebration.

The children were given 15,000 rupees (90€) as a thank you, a pretty sum, which has been pledged to a joint venture. What will that be? The children will certainly have a say.

By the way, every house in Phalyak now has its own drinking water tap. The children danced at the inauguration celebration for this grand community project too: they're gradually becoming a cultural institution in the neighbourhood!



Part of our successful dance team, dressed in their costumes for a traditional Nepalese dance, which has as its theme young men courting the favour of girls.



About 4km away and another 500m higher than Phalyak is Lumbok cave, an important Buddhist shrine, which is reachable on foot via a mountain pass. For our mountain children, even the six-year-olds, it's a little Sunday outing with the teachers and volunteer Elisabeth. And Nyima, the cook, provides sufficient food as well as tea around the bonfire.



Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava is said to have meditated in the huge Lumbok cave on his journey through Mustang – you can even see his footprint. The shrine dates back to the 8th century.

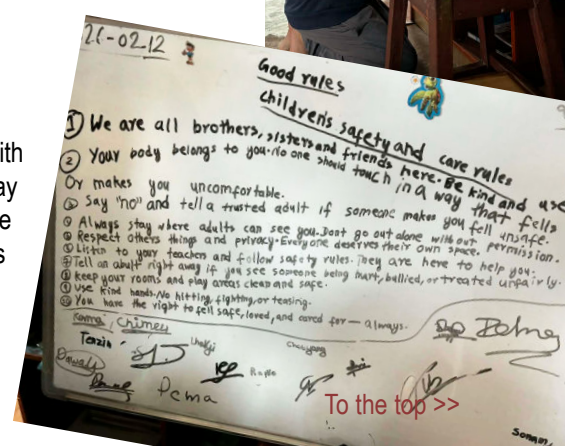
To foster a positive environment for everyone, the children worked very seriously with Basanta Subedi, developing a set of rules for life together in the project. These rules were then written out and presented with great pride.

1. We are all brothers, sisters and friends here. Be kind and use nice words.
2. Your body belongs to you. No one should touch in a way that feels wrong, hurts or makes you feel uncomfortable.
3. Say „no“ and tell a trusted adult if someone makes you feel unsafe.
4. Always stay where adults can see you. Don't go out alone without permission.
5. Respect other's things and privacy. Everyone deserves their own space.

...

10. You have the right to feel safe, loved, and cared for – always.

Basanta Subedi has been allied with our project for a long time. He is a play therapist and manages Nepal House Kaski in Pokhara, which rehabilitates traumatised children.



2. Two special women, and a young man who has forged ahead

Browsing through our files, a special photo came to light: **Karin Inmann** with children from Jharkot in the late 90s. At that time Karin was a geography and sport teacher on unpaid leave from Musisches Gymnasium, and had worked for years with the Salzburg NGO Ecohimal in Nepal. There she came upon the child monks at the Buddhist monastery in Jharkot. The children's living conditions and lack of educational opportunities broke her heart.

A cooperation was developed with the monastery: (slightly more) modern lessons for the monks were made possible, and a small information centre for traditional Tibetan medicine was established. When the monastic leadership in Kathmandu withdrew the child monks from Jharkot, lay children took their place — including, for the first time, girls. The story of how the project shifted from Ecohimal to *Schule macht Schule* and grew from there would fill many more pages. But one thing is clear: without Karin there would be no Mustang House Bhakunde and no Mustang House Phalyak.

Thank you, Karin, for your initiative and for your many years of support for *Schule macht Schule*!



Karin in her element: mountains, children and a challenging task; circa 1997



Claudia in 2010 in the Jharkot monastery courtyard. At a meeting of the village committee and parents, she explains how the premises could be improved for the monastery and project school.

While the project wouldn't exist without Karin, without Claudia it would certainly be standing on shakier legs. We met architect **Claudia Canz** during our first stay in Jharkot in 2008. We were just volunteers back then, who intended to devote ourselves to other things once the three months had passed (how wrong you can be!) Claudia was the chairperson of the newly founded >> **Förderverein Freundeskreis Jharkotprojekt e.V.** in Murr, Germany. It didn't stop at that one encounter; from our shared interest in the people and culture of the region grew a lasting friendly cooperation.

The tangible results of this cooperation over the last ten years in numbers:

Total project expenditure 2016-2025: 503,880 €. With this we have been able to finance:

- continuous boarding school provision for 20 primary school children (up to Year 5)
- ongoing accommodation and school fees for up to 24 children and adolescents in good secondary boarding schools (up to Year 12)
- construction of Mustang House Bhakunde (winter school) and Mustang House Phalyak (summer school)

During this period, 76,350 € came from Claudia's organisation – a full 13%.

This is really substantial — and so is our gratitude to Claudia and all her fellow campaigners!



Sonam Tsering from Dzong came to the project in Jharkot in 2009 as a ten-year-old school starter. He was an incredibly reliable, hardworking, and interested boy. Six years later, he started studying traditional Tibetan medicine in Kathmandu.

This lengthy degree course, as well as catching up on school exams in parallel, was made possible for Sonam by the Polish association >> schoolsfaraway.org. Now he has not only earned his doctorate but also published a comprehensive book on the disease patterns in TTM (Traditional Tibetan Medicine), which he presented when he graduated.

CONGRATULATIONS, Dr. Sonam Tsering!



Sonam Tsering in 2010 on a multi-day expedition to collect medicinal herbs with our then Amchi Nyima – and now in 2026 as a graduated Amchi.

3. From the trees, over the fence, onto the (carpeted) floor

The little apple trees have survived! It wasn't a foregone conclusion, since the dryness and scarcity of water in Phalyak meant that they needed both continual care and luck. Now the children are proud of the achievement and looking forward to the first homegrown apples – perhaps there will be a first taster next autumn!



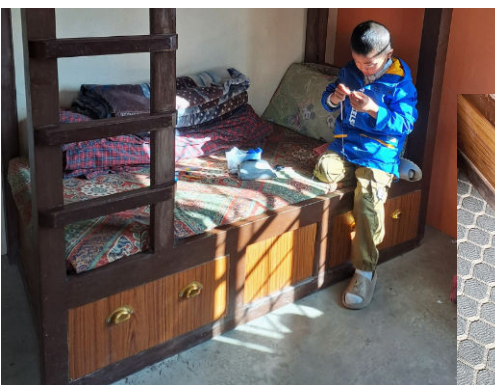
The photos give us a clue of how difficult it is to work the dry ground – and the stiff wind from the Kali Gandaki Valley blows relentlessly, day after day, from ten o'clock

We asked for donations for the planting last year and since the villagers gave us plants and goat dung as manure, we've barely needed any of these special donations so far. So, we've been able to increase the scope of the greenery somewhat.

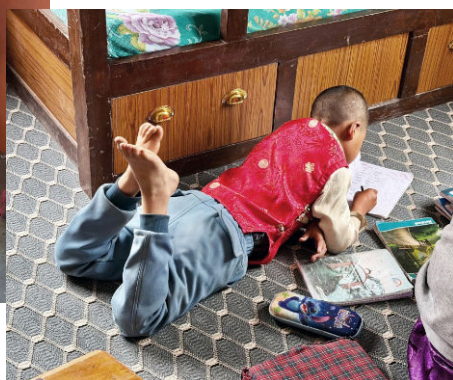


Twice last year, wandering cows on the search for food stripped our young, promising vegetable and herb garden bare. Project management therefore wanted to fence off the 1600m² plot. That way, the children would also know exactly how far they could gallivant without needing special permission...

The author Frank Herrmann (FAIRreisen: Das Handbuch für alle, die umweltbewusst unterwegs sein wollen (FAIR travel: The handbook for environmentally conscious travel)) financed this fence with the profits from his lectures. The villagers pitched in so that the materials, transport and labour costs came to just under 2000 €. **Thank you to everyone – especially Frank!**



Before – after: the children can now lounge comfortably on the floor



When our summer quarters were terminated unexpectedly in 2023, right after the construction of the winter school, the new summer school had to be built and equipped extremely economically.

So it had very spartan beginnings, but is slowly becoming more comfortable: Marianna Armanska from Warsaw and her friends, who financed the bunk beds last year, are helping once more and donating flooring for the hitherto bare concrete floors.

Carpets are already laid on insulating mats in the children's dual-purpose bedrooms and classrooms. We're planning hardwearing WPC (wood plastic composite) surfaces for the dining room, entrance hall and guest rooms.

Thank you so much, Marianna!



4. Wonderful young people of today...

Baking for the good cause

Once again, the Wals confirmation group, led by Agnes Gerl, has gone all out and, following their baking marathon, during service they told the audience about the children in Phalyak. They were so persuasive that they managed to raise €1,800 in donations with their delicious baked goods. Their wonderful donation will be used for the dining hall in Phalyak: it is now to be fitted with half-height wooden panelling so that the children can lean against the walls without catching cold.

[To the top >>](#)



If you want to light so many candles, you need to be strategic and take great care not to accidentally puff out the flames that are already burning

Butter lamps

play an important role in our children's ritual life. Every day, during morning and evening prayers, a small (odd) number of them are lit in front of the altar. On special occasions, however, there may be a few more: 108, a sacred number. Ngawang Thupten lived in our project at around the same time as Sonam Tsering, and like him was subsequently supported by our Polish partners at schoolsfaraway.org. He moved to France some time ago and recently donated the butter lamps for the altar in the winter school to his 'project family'



In 2008, we got to know Ngawang Thupten as an incredibly attentive and conscientious boy who took great care in everything he did – just as he does here whilst painting.

Musenkuss & co

Time and again, pupils at the Musisches Gymnasium work alongside their teachers for the benefit of the project children through activities such as the class 1m charity concert, or a buffet at the grand opening of the annual art exhibition, the sale of hand-crafted felt and acrylic glass objects, or the notorious 'Musenkuss' (Zotter chocolate in ever changing styles, designed by the students)... In the 2025/26 school year, this raised a good €1,800

One of the stylish bookmarks, and a glimpse of the annual exhibition where items were sold to raise funds for the project



5. Newcomers: five children and a true-blue Mustangi

Mohan left his post with us last summer, in order to completely focus on his seriously ill son. We have known Mohan since 2008, back when he was an English teacher and manager at the project in Jharkot, which was still small at that time. Although he hasn't been a permanent fixture in the project for some years, he still played an important role as an external project manager. It is such a shame to lose him ...



Mohan with his son Ngodup in 2021, back when everything was a bit easier.

Since January, Mohan's responsibilities lie in new hands: social worker Sonam Dorjee comes from Jharkot and, as the new project assistant, is acting as a liaison between us Europeans and the partners in the village. It's not always easy to understand each other: linguistically, but also in terms of mindset. Sonam knows both worlds and can mediate. He is responsible for organisational operations in Nepal and provides advice on administrative matters as well as on the further development of the project.

Right from the start Sonam has taken care of making the intake process for the new children more transparent. He has held interviews with the parents, enquired as to their economic backgrounds and verified the details. Those who were eligible for acceptance were then able

to take their child to the winter school for a school readiness test. The final decision was then made in agreement with the board of the association in Phalyak.

During his interviews Sonam also asked parents why they wanted to send their children to us, and how they would be able to contribute to the project themselves. A small selection of the answers, translated into English:



Sonam Dorjee during an intake interview with parents in one of the classrooms at the winter school

"We are both uneducated and would not want the same fate for our children."

"Also, with limited seasonal income and big family expenses are high. We cannot afford to send our child to a school with fees."

"Mustang House Phalyak gives education with local cultural experience and also Tibetan is taught."

"I tend the fields to make tiny income. I can support by providing apples and farm produce."

Our five new children have long since settled in wonderfully. For the time being, they are all placed in Class 1, as even the slightly older ones arrived with limited prior knowledge. Should someone turn out to be under-challenged and capable of more, they can skip a grade later.

And here they are:



*Tenzing Angmo, 8J
Her family came to Jomsom from Mukot (Dolpo). She has a phenomenal mind for new words. Dawa Sangmo in Class 5 is her sister.*



*Tashi Doma, 6J.
Her parents run a small-scale farm in Dagarzong (about 45 minutes on foot from Phalyak). Otherwise quite playful, Tashi dances with endurance, concentration, and grace..*



*Phurbo Ghyaljen, 8J
A passionate football player and a quick thinker. His parents (originally from Dolpo) now run an abandoned farmstead in Phalyak – as part of the lease, they have to hand over 50% of the harvest.*



*Tsering Choiten 7J
is the most laid-back and is skilled with all kinds of balls — for instance, at boccia. Her family also makes ends meet by running a small, leased farm in Dagarzong.*

Janika Linke from the Musisches Gymnasium, who worked in the project for 4 months in 2019, has now become a sponsor for young Tsering Choiten. In her vivid and relatable report, she describes her path to this decision: [Why I wanted a godchild >>](#)

We're still looking for sponsor(s) for the baby of the group, Pema Lhamo. If you you'd like to take on a sponsorship or would like to know more:

[>> here's](#) all the important information in German. In case that's useless for you, feel free to [>> email us](#).

*Pema Lhamo, 6J
is our youngest. She sometimes falls asleep at dinner ...
She misses her Mum, who has been working in France for a year.*

One solace: her brother Sonam Tsering is with us too, in Class 4. Their father is a small-scale farmer in Phalyak and lends a hand in the project where he can.



6. (Life's) Journeys

New children have arrived and others have moved on.

Dawa Lhazom, Choedup, Karma Tarchin and Pavi Jung have graduated from Class 5 and are now completing the sixth and seventh school years in Hemja, Pokhara, as usual. School money and boarding is funded by *Schule macht Schule's* donors and sponsors; the children and adolescents remain in touch with us and our Nepalese colleagues. The Mount Kailash School is managed by the Tibetan refugee community and continues the cultural work of our project: most people in Mustang are ethnic Tibetans and their language and culture are Tibetan. This identity should not be lost in the face of integration into the multi-ethnic state of Nepal and adaptation to a globalised present.

Dawa Tenzin, whom we featured in detail in the last newsletter, has now moved on to train as a Tanka painter and is clearly very happy at the Tsering Art School in Kathmandu. His sponsor Johannes continues to contribute to supporting him. We are delighted that these additional costs for Dawa (around 40€ per month) have been secured for the first year (thank you, Monika!) and hope that we will be able to find someone cover this for future years.

Please get in touch with us at team@schule-macht-schule.at!

Dawa Tenzin preparing a "tsak" or "tshang", a wooden board coated with fat and chalk, which can be drawn on for practice. Once checked by a teacher, the drawing is erased and the board is given a fresh coat.



Travellers with a purpose: Volunteers at Mustang House

Our teachers continue to tell us how important the work of our volunteers from Europe is. Paula, who finished her final school exams in June, is currently on site as our 78th volunteer!

However, you don't need to be a spring chicken to take a chance on such an adventure – life experience is valued! Inge is a good example, having spent 6 weeks helping to teach and supervise the children on three different occasions. She now organises the contact between the children and sponsors.



Above: Paula, shown here in the courtyard at House Mustang Phalyak during a break, has just sent us the wonderful photo from the crafts class.



Inge, the "repeat offender" at the winter school Elisabeth, who returned recently, surrounded by "her" children



And Elisabeth comes to mind too; she went to work in Phalyak in May and June this year, right after she retired:

Although it's ever so secluded here, I'm not bored. I'm getting involved where I can. The children are so lovely – and almost too well-behaved. I teach them in English, we make keychains, and at night I read them goodnight stories. A different room takes its turn every day (...)

Yesterday we walked to Jomsom: two girls, Gompo, Tsedol and me. A big shopping expedition. On the way back, there were six of us (including the driver) in the taxi, the suspension of which gave up the ghost long ago, over the bumpy track, egg cartons on my lap, wedged between sacks, bottles, and boxes (...)

I like the food here! But buttertea and I will never be friends. And now I'm off to do morning gymnastics with the kids!

Anika and Sophie planned their stint so that they would experience both the summer school in the mountains and the winter school in Bhakunde.



In the starting blocks for an unusually long stint are Anika and Sophie, who graduated from the Musisches Gymnasium in June: they will travel to Nepal at the end of September and work in the project for five months. They are full of ideas and anticipation!

We have vacancies for volunteers from March 2027. Please spread the word as a matter of urgency!

Would you like to spend a few weeks or months as a volunteer in our family-run project, living, learning and playing with children in the Himalaya? Having exciting experiences and helping to shape the future? No matter your age or professional background, you can do just that at our small boarding school in Phalyak, 3150m above sea level, or at the winter school in Bhakunde (near Pokhara). Experience working with children and adolescents is an advantage, speaking A Level (B2) English is a must. The minimum stay in the project is 6 weeks. *Schule macht Schule* does not charge any fees for the placement and support of volunteers. Want to know more? Email us: team@schule-macht-schule.at

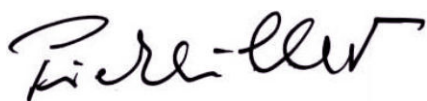
7. Thank you and: till next time

As we write this, we're seeing the upsetting images of the flash flood which wreaked devastation in Nepal on 26th August, particularly in the districts of Rasuwa and Nuwakot. That's quite some way east from Phalyak.
Thank God, it didn't hit us?

Nonetheless, we want to tell you that we're delighted that we can keep you up to date with *Schule macht Schule* via this newsletter. Thank you for your interest and trust in the project and of course a big thank you for your support on behalf of the children and everyone involved in the project!

Oh, and this isn't the last page of the newsletter: don't miss Janika's report in the appendix.

With kind regards



Wolf Pichlmüller



Christina Klaffinger

„Why I wanted a godchild“ >>

PS: From time to time, we hear that our newsletter has landed in the spam folder. This won't happen if you add our address to your address book or whitelist.



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Why I wanted a godchild

Janika Linke

Why did I want a godchild? A question for which I need to give some background in order to be able to answer properly:

I was a student at the Musisches Gymnasium and my class had a godchild as a group. So, the *Schule macht Schule* project and the topic of godchildren was a constant companion for me while I was at school.

After my final exams I took a gap year and went to Nepal for six months with my friend Mia. From January to May I was a volunteer in the project. It was an experience that still shapes me today.

One thing I particularly remember is the moment when I met our then godchild Tsering Yangdon for the first time. Suddenly, this happy, clever and unbelievably warm-hearted girl was in front of me. It was really touching to meet the person behind all the lovingly created letters and colourful knotted bracelets that we had received from afar for so long.

At the same time, many things occupied my thoughts: how would Yangdon have developed if she'd not had this chance? Would she have had the same openness, the same curiosity, the same joy in learning? I can't answer this question. But I had the opportunity to see that she was comfortable at the school, liked attending and had grown up to be an impressive young person. My ability to be a small part of that – as one of 25 sponsors – made me feel proud and grateful.

My time as volunteer showed me right up close what education can achieve. I was truly moved to see how it can open doors, offer new perspectives, and give children the gift of real freedom for their future.

So, why do I support a godchild? Because I've seen what it can change.

Note: Tsering Yangdon is now in her final year at the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Higher Secondary School Pokhara. After Tsering Yangdon's Austrian sponsor class graduated, Maggie – our most distant sponsor – took over.

All the best to Scotland!

Video reflections of a journey



In October and November 2024, Sigrid worked at Mustang House Bhakunde during a sabbatical. She has shared her experiences in a 13-minute [video >>](#) – a great watch!

Note.: It was 2024 when, due the termination of our lease on the monastery premises, classes had to be held year-round down at Mustang House Bhakunde, while Mustang House Phalyak was still being built up in Phalyak. Some activities during this period were conducted jointly with the Bhakunde Children's Village and the local Himali School – hence the footage from the big school

Sigrid surrounded by the children on the morning of her departure; the white katas, printed with auspicious Buddhist symbols, are placed round one's neck before a long journey and as a token of appreciation.



From top to bottom:

Mia and I are trying out the entrance test for the new children with Pema, Tsering Yangdon and Tashi Dolma.

Lunch during an outing to the wide meadow at Lhadup, to dance, play and enjoy the sunshine.

A farewell photo with our class's sponsored child, Tsering Yangdon.