



«My holiday job? A real adventure !»

How can you best employ 200 dollars in a poor village so that as many people as possible benefit from it? This was the question that Dinesh and Furba asked themselves in the springtime. The two of them used the long vacation after graduating from college to undertake an assignment in a small village in the Kathmandu valley. This project is just one of the many challenges the young people of the Sertshang Orphanage Home are faced with outside of the school day, which are becoming increasingly numerous. For when Tashi Sertshang began to look after the small, poor orphanage about fifteen years ago, he not only wanted to ensure that the children got healthy food, a safe home and a good education, but it was also important for the Tibetan doctor that they got the opportunity to work for others. His plans included the creation of jobs around the orphanage. In Nepal, a country with high unemployment, a good education does not guarantee a job: Nepotism and corruption often prevent the most qualified candidates from being considered for jobs. This leads, amongst other things, to the fact that not only simple workers but also well-trained professionals often migrate abroad.

Tashi Sertshang's ideas are still being pursued today by his son, the monk and meditation teacher Choegyal Rinpoche: By undertaking assignments in different places, young people are now also gaining important experience outside of the orphanage environment.

Water for the village school

«My holiday job? A real adventure!» beams Furba. He always carries with him a little book in which he notes the questions he wants to ask the next time he goes to Kavre. The 19-year-old starts his training as an environmental engineer in the autumn. Together with his friend Dinesh, he is starting the new long-term project that Choegyal Rinpoche has designed for college graduates. The young people are given 200 dollars, and the mission to invest the money into a project that benefits as many people as possible. Furba and Dinesh have decided to use the money in Kavre, Dinesh's home village. In order to establish what the village desperately needs, the two of them conducted conversations with its inhabitants: «They were both delighted and very interested, because with 200 dollars - as much as a teacher earns

in a month – all kinds of things are possible.» During the course of these conversations it was quickly agreed upon that the most important thing was to restore the water supply for the village school which is attended by some 200 children. During the 2015 earthquake the rainwater tanks, the pump and pipes were all damaged, and have not been repaired to date. «We are just in the process of establishing what spare parts are needed, and whether we can get them in Katre ourselves or whether we will have to buy them in Kathmandu», says Furba. The repairs are being carried out with the help of volunteers from the village. He estimates that the clarifications and preparations will take a few weeks. «We will start the work in July, and hope to be able to restore the water supply within a week.» The entire work process is being documented with photographs and Furba and Dinesh are also writing a report about the whole project, for which they will also interview the villagers. «A presentation is also being planned», says Furba. The project has model character and will serve as an example for further assignments: «We want to show how much can be achieved with very little means.»



Around the table with foreigners

Sonam Dolkar is reminded on a daily basis just how much building is going on in Kathmandu. Two, or even three times a day she has to clean the fine dust off the garden tables of the little guest house situated next door to the orphanage. The 19-year-old has still to sit her final college examinations; Hotel management is one of the subjects she will also be tested in. Even before the exams are over, she has started her holiday job in the reception of the small «Sahti» guesthouse. «I am really happy to be able to work here during the holidays. It helps me to find out more about what really I want to do in future.» She enjoys her job as a drawing teacher. «I like to teach children, and I am very interested in art history», she says. But she also finds the hotel business very exciting. «At the beginning I was very unsure of myself, and found it difficult to approach all the foreigners that came through.» But that changed very quickly. Sonam says goodbye to a group

of Bhutanese monks who are leaving. She cleans the rooms, the toilets and showers, and makes sure that the fruit tray on the table in the small lobby is full again.

«Now I really enjoy meeting the guests, and I am always fascinated to hear what they have to say», she says. For example, there is the woman from Russia who came to Kathmandu for meditation, or the student from America, who is looking forward to paragliding in Pokhara. «Then, in the evening, they all sit around the table here and eat noodle soup together.» Sometimes they also ask Sonam about her own story, and then she realizes that the guests are just as astonished to hear her stories as they are about the mobile phone photos from all over the world that they show to her.

A milk-foam heart for visitors

Hari Baladur has plenty of experience with visitors. He is currently working as a waiter in the small café which is housed in the orphanage, and whose profits benefit the disabled workshops established by Choegyal Rinpoche two years ago. The clientele in the café is amazed at the perfect cappuccino with the milk-foam heart served by Hari, and sometimes shower him with questions. Hari really enjoys providing them with information in his almost flawless English. «The harder the question is, the more I enjoy it», says the 21-year-old. «If the whole terrace is full and we manage to ensure that no-one has to wait a long time, then it is particularly nice when we can all sit around together in the evening after the cleaning and cleaning up, exhausted but content.» His initial nervousness that he might do something wrong quickly vanished. «„When people are happy and return speedily it's just wonderful.» Hari realized what profession he would like to pursue when he accompanied some guests on a three-day trip to Pokhara. He has decided that he wants to become a tour guide and, as the next step, he is planning to do an internship in a travel agency. «Traveling with people from other countries is exciting. Because when you travel together, they reveal so much more about themselves», says Hari. He hopes to be able to travel and discover other countries in future too. Since

a guest gave him a picture book about Switzerland, he has become more interested in Europe. But first he wants to learn a lot more about Nepal. «I am particularly fascinated by stories and places that cannot be found in any tourist guide», he says. «And I would really like to create exciting surprises for the visitors.»

ren from the orphanage to the cinema.» In addition, during the holidays, Kelsang also helps out in the café doing the washing-up and cleaning vegetables, and likes to give a hand to the two cooks. It is only when the Laving dough is made that she is not there. «Because the dough, that is the most difficult thing to make.»



In the Tibetan street kitchen

Thirteen-year-old Kelsang took on adult responsibilities when she was very young. She had to take care of her two little brothers and cook for them while her aunt, with whom the orphans lived, was out at work. Now she helps with the sale of Laving during the school holidays, a noodle speciality from the Tibetan street kitchen, which has suddenly become very popular in Kathmandu. «We can do that too» said a few of the older girls, and they began to produce this delicious snack and offer it on the terrace of the café. Kelsang already knows a few of the customers, and also knows the ones who like it spicy and the ones who are in a rush and want to take their portion home with them. One serving costs 30 Rupees, which is just a bit less than 30 centimes, and between 25 and 30 portions are sold in an afternoon. The money is saved to be able to spend it on things the group has decided are important. «We also consider how we can make other people happy, like the disabled, or whether we want to invite all the child-

In the disabled workshop

The dough is prepared by Lhapka Choecky. She gets up at half past five every morning to prepare it before she goes to work. She is 20 years old, has already graduated from college, and would really like to work as a photographer. She learned the craft from a photographer who helped out at the orphanage for a long time, as well as in various workshops. «Sometimes I get small commissions», she says. But building up an existence as a photographer in Nepal is very difficult. «I don't have any illusions about that.» She always carries with her the camera the photographer gave her, even to where she is doing her internship. She works in the exhibition space of Choegyal Rinpoche's workshop for people with disabilities. «At the beginning it was not easy», says Lhapka. «I have realized how paradisaical and how much protection there was in our everyday life at the orphanage.» It was not easy for her to find her way in the outside world. «The traffic in Kathmandu frightened me, the buses are always overcrowded, and

Brigitta Niederhauser
Kathmandu,
Spring 2017

Sertshang Orphanage Association

The association supports the Kathmandu-based orphanage founded by Tibetan medic Tashi Sertshang. All donations flow entirely into the Orphanage project whilst all administrative costs are covered by the members of the association board. The association is registered in Bern, Switzerland, where donations are tax-deductible. Donations to the association's accounts in Germany and Switzerland are also deductible from taxes in these countries.

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sometimes they get stuck in traffic jams for hours on end.» She was even a bit scared of the disabled people at first. «I had no idea how I should behave towards them.» But the young people really welcomed her, and had explained a lot of things to her. «And they're so happy when I photograph them, because no one has ever done that before.» But what does not leave her after work are all the destinies she has witnessed. Because in Nepal, there are hardly any institutions that take care of disabled people. There is the paralyzed Mandip, who was locked up in a room in the village for almost the whole of his life. «It was only at the age of 18 that he finally got a wheelchair», says Lhapka, «and also it is the first time that he is experiencing living in a community.» The young man is now painting 'thangkas', scroll paintings showing the Buddha. Lhapka already knows a lot about this special painting technique, just as she is able to explain exactly how the magnificent Pashmina scarves are produced. If a customer from China then orders two dozen of them, Lhapka immediately goes to the young women with the crippled feet who weave them on special looms. «Their joy is even more overwhelming than my own», she says.

The orphanage in 2017

52 children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 22 are currently living in the Sertshang Orphanage Home. 26 of them attend primary school (kindergarten to the 10th class), 19 are at college or studying for their Bachelor, 7 are working or are doing an internship. In addition, 8 young people are studying abroad and spend their semester holidays in the orphanage.

Personal Sponsorships

Despite the rising cost of providing education, the sponsorship contributions of 40 francs (35 euros) a month have not been increased to allow the circle of patrons and sponsors to remain as large as possible.

Single Donations

The association is dependent on additional donations for school fees, childcare and the maintenance of the children's home. Even with one-off donations, a great deal of pleasure can be provided for the children: A sum of 20 to 60 francs (18 to 54 euros) allows the library to offer a wider range of books. A good-quality football costs 20 francs (18 euros), and 200 francs (180 euros) is enough to provide a picnic in the countryside or an excursion to the swimming pool for all the children.

