



Help improve the life and prospects of people living in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, North East India.

## **DARJEELING RAILWAY COMMUNITY** **SUPPORT**

Objective: 'To raise money in support of the health, Welfare and Employment within the Darjeeling Railway Community'.

### How DRCS Helps The People Of Darjeeling

#### **About the area -**

We support people who live alongside the World Famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, from Siliguri on the plains to Darjeeling, which is 55 miles away and 6.800 feet up in the foot hills of the Himalayas.

The people are a mixture of Indian, Bangladeshi, Nepalese and Tibetan. A large proportion of the community have no running water, very poor sanitation, and in the smaller villages medical facilities are nonexistent. The state education is very basic and the schools are poorly equipped. Unemployment is high due to the decline of the railway and the closure of the tea estates. However, the good news is that £1 goes a long way and can make a difference.



#### **History of Darjeeling Railway Community Support. -**

A member of the 2006 DHRS Tour party suggested that 'we should do something to help the local people'. Upon our return to England a meeting was held and thus Darjeeling Railway Community Support was formed early in 2007.

Mr. Rajendra Baid, Chairman of the DHRS India Support Group, and his son Vivek Baid, offered support and advice to DRCS on appropriate projects in their area. While this partnership continues, we have also enlisted the help of NGO's in Darjeeling and Kurseong, who have first-hand knowledge of the needs of local people who live in the foothills.

Because members of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society visit the area regularly we can monitor how the money is spent.

## DRCS PROJECTS:

Initially we helped to fund health camps in Siliguri and Rangtong , purchased 2 sewing machines and helped to set up a tailoring project for the women of Gayabari village.

We have also supported local schools with equipment and funds for improvements to their buildings, such as paint, concrete for a new floor, a kitchen and a toilet.



Our most exciting project has been enabling Shishu Shiksha Kendra community school in Kurseong to move from an open-sided building into their very own school in May 2009! The children and teachers are delighted to be in their new premises.

DRCS have also supported Hayden Hall. This is a charitable organization which undertakes a lot of good work in Darjeeling. One of their many projects includes an after-school club which provides a meal and a space where the children can do their homework.

The Shankar Foundation, 'who protect and promote the rights of people and families living with hiv/aids' have also received money from DRCS.

The Planter's Hospital, which is an iconic building in the centre of Darjeeling, has fallen into serious disrepair over recent years, yet they still continue to provide low cost treatment for those in need. DRCS have sent a donation to the Director, Dr Plaban Das, to help with repairs to their leaking roof.

### **Fund raising:**

We have held tea parties, curry suppers, tombola stalls, baked cakes, and given illustrated talks to various groups. However, our main source of income is from donations and standing orders.

### **Volunteers:**

We are always looking for people who are willing to help in any way with fund-raising efforts, spreading the message or running the Charity. You can become a Trustee, set up an area group, give a talk or run a fund raising event. We can provide information and other resources to help. Please contact us if you would like further information.

Charity Status—

In 2009 we reached the minimum requirements to be able to apply for full Charity status. This will enable us to claim Gift Aid on all previous and any future donations and Standing Orders.

**If you would like to help the work of DRCS then you can do so in anyone of the following ways -**

- making a one-off donation (see details below)
- giving regular donations by completing the Standing Order Mandate.
- holding a fund raising event ( we can provide a presentation and material to help with this)
- helping to run the Charity

(N.B. if making regular donations by S/O please don't forget to provide us with your details)

**For further information please contact:**

DRCS  
c/o 43, Geraldine Road  
Malvern  
Worcs.  
WR14 3NT

Tel: 01684 562 571  
e-mail: [dracs.sec@talktalk.net](mailto:dracs.sec@talktalk.net)

Trustees:  
Moo Barrie (Chair)  
Val Mead (Secretary)  
David Mead (Treasurer)

# STANDING ORDER MANDATE

**To** .....(your bank or building society)  
(address).....

.....  
(Postcode) .....

**Please pay:**

Lloyds TSB, 48 Belle Vue Terrace, Malvern,  
Worcestershire, WR14 4QG, England.  
Sort Code: 30-95-41

**For the credit of:** Darjeeling Railway Community Support  
Account No: 01741396

**the sum of** £.....:..... (amount in figures)

..... (amount in words)

**Date and amount of first payment:**.....(date)

£.... : ....

and thereafter every ..... of the month / year (please delete as necessary) for 3 years / until further notice (please delete as necessary) and debit my account accordingly.

**Account to be debited:**

..... (your account name)

..... (your account number)

**Signature(s)** .....

Date .....

Address.....

.....

(Post code) .....

Contact telephone number .....

**When completed, please send this form directly to your bank.**

## YOUR DETAILS

I wish to donate/learn more about DRCS. Please fill in this section for our records, detach and return it to DRCS C/O Mr. David Mead, 43 Geraldine Road Malvern Worcs WR14 3NT or email me the details at [drcs.sec@talktalk.net](mailto:drcs.sec@talktalk.net).

I have enclosed a cheque payable to 'DRCS'/completed the Standing Order Mandate for the sum of £ ..... per month / year for the DRCS and returned it to my bank as requested. Date .....

Name/s .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Email .....

Many thanks for your support David Mead, Treasurer DRCS.

## LATEST NEWS FROM DRCS

### DRCS Report from Moo Barrie and David Mead



Here is our report on some of the DRCS projects we visited during the 'Darjeeling at Leisure' tour in February 2010.

#### Shishu Shiksha Kendra (Child Education Centre) Ward 18, Kurseong.

Although the children were still on their winter holidays, the two teachers managed to gather half of the children [10] together to meet with us at the school. Mr Bhanu Dikshit, the owner of the building we are renting for SSK was also present and took a video recording of our meeting. There are twenty children on role and two teachers, who trained at the Darjeeling College. They have the one room building to work in and use of a toilet in the main house across the way.

The children were delightful. We gave them the book of photos, badges and 'Friendship Poster' made for them by the children of Walcott Primary school in Lincolnshire. They showed some interest in them, particularly the poster with the 'Hands of Friendship' drawn in the middle. The children were very keen to engage with us and showed us some of their written and maths work. The two teachers can speak English but were very shy talking with us. The oldest girl acted as interpreter for the teachers at various times when we were attempting to ask questions. They study: Nepali, English, Maths, Science, Geography, History, Environment, General Knowledge & Spelling.

We asked the teachers what items they would like – a wish list – if they had some money to spend. Immediately the teachers requested nursery rhyme books, English / Nepali Dictionaries, other subject books and exercise books. Some of the children also gave us requests: dolls, rulers, home corner items [these are normal items to be found in any English nursery or primary school!]

The government does give the teachers remuneration. They receive Rs 2,000/- each per quarter, which amounts to £27.40, thus giving them an annual income of £220 per year between them! Out of this they are expected to pay the rent, buy books and equipment. We are currently paying out £690 per year as rent for the one room school. Land, especially flat land for building in Kurseong, is scarce and thus valuable.

#### Visit to Hayden Hall, 42 Laden La Road, Darjeeling.

We found ourselves in the shop that sells the handicrafts made by the women who are supported by Hayden Hall charity. We were taken to see the ladies carpet making, spinning and weaving; then on up to the crèche where the children were on the roof top garden playing - except that



they had no toys to play with! Struck by this lack we were determined to go and buy some



toys. We located two tricycles, crayons, paper and some small footballs and took them back to the crèche. Hayden Hall is a rabbit warren of a place, housing working space for the women, a library, offices, shop, crèche, sick children's ward, nursery class and an after school class. There are various activities organised for the women and children too, ranging from health information, clinics, to handing out charity money to the below poverty line elderly and

sick. We learnt that the charity also organises paramedics to go out to the outlying villages giving medicines, vaccinations and advice. It is an amazing set-up, and although initially founded by a Canadian Jesuit Priest and linked to St. Joseph's school and college, it is now run by local people. The present director is a Priest, but we saw no evidence of religious fervour and proselytising.

We also met Noreen Dunne, a local teacher, born in Darjeeling and very passionate about helping her fellow country women. She has worked as a secondary school teacher for many years and helps with the running of Hayden Hall and its accounts. She explained that in theory, Indian state education is free for children up to the age of 12 years old, but in general the quality of the teaching is not good due to poor staff training and large class sizes, [67!] Although free, the child has to provide their own exercise books, writing equipment and often the text books, as there will not be enough copies for everyone in the class.

The handicrafts on sale were of a high quality, at very reasonable prices and we felt able to buy direct from the shop to bring goods back to re-sell here on behalf of DRCS and so raise more funds.

Hayden Hall also offers Geriatric Care and has a programme for feeding the elderly who are living below the poverty line, (BPLs.)

Noreen explained that the old ways and traditions of India were changing. In certain circumstances the elderly can no longer rely upon being cared for by their families, who may have moved away to the cities to find work and left them behind. There is no geriatric care in place and no homes for the elderly; they are becoming the forgotten people. Over the past year DRCS has part funded the giving of Rs 100/- each week to individuals who are recognised as living below the poverty line. Until recently the Indian government ran a scheme where rice and daal was subsidised for those living below the poverty line, however this is to be withdrawn. The charity would like to cover the gap that this creates by providing food for these needy people. She went on to say that there is a high rate of TB cases and malnutrition in the Darjeeling area. The average life expectancy is low – around mid 40's

and the people we saw looked old before their time. Hayden Hall needs £30 per person to provide this food for one year.

### **Dooars & Darjeeling Medical Association Hospital (formerly the Planter's Hospital)**

We were not able to meet Dr. Plaban Das, the medical director as he was on annual leave. We saw the repair work done to the roof and attic space. The general state of the building is poor. It is old and had not been looked after, as with most buildings in the area. The name Planter's is not used any more, giving the wrong impression. The Planter's association owns the building but now does not have funds to support it. The original Tea Planters had money to pay for their work force to be cared for and all their health needs were met at this hospital. However times have changed and funding is on a shoe string budget.



Local doctors can use the facilities at the hospital. There is ultra sound equipment installed and if a pregnant lady arrives requiring this then a local doctor has to be sent for.

They are also involved with training local people chosen from the villages who come to the hospital for 3 months training to become Health care workers / paramedics.

### **Siliguri Clinic – Siliguri Mission for Population Control (SMPC )**

Along with some tour party members, we were taken by Vivek Baid to see the clinic we had visited back in 2008. They have built an additional room at the side which is designated for the use of Mothers and children, like our baby clinics. They also have an on-going vaccination programme, and are introducing the MMR and hepatitis.



The clinic is situated in the Eastern part of the city, with a population of 50,000, it is based in a very poor district.

The clinic is now able to offer the following:  
X-rays, Phlebotomy, blood donation programme, path lab work, SMPC's population control ops, the Government immunisation programme and the

distribution of medicines bought from the Community Development Medical Unit. The Doctor is a volunteer and holds clinics early in the morning before his paid work at North Bengal Medical College Hospital. There are other volunteers doing the paper work, pharmaceutical reps with medicines and a young lady learning about dispensing. It was good to meet with them again and to see the progress they have made. It was evident that a lot of good work is happening there, with the help and support of Rajendra and Vivek Baid of the DHR India Support group.