

Ongoing Education The 'Senior' Programme

SMD is too crowded to offer Classes 11 & 12. Schools that offer "plus two" are urban and for-profit; Himalayan kids can't afford tuition, let alone the cost of living in the city. A School Leaving Certificate (SLC) issued to Class 10 graduates is useless. About half the country is unemployed; among school-leavers, unemployment must be about 80% or higher.

For anyone who wants to finish high school or go on to other training, there is no other option but to stay on at SMD, even though we are over-crowded.

Who Can Become A Senior?

Actually, students select themselves! How?

After the government publishes the results of Class 10 national exams (SLC) we start the sifting process, but we've been watching the students since they were in Class 6. We look for specific things: Thrangu Rinpoche's aims are to preserve the language, culture and Buddhist way of life of Himalayan people. We see which students try to carry out these aims. The most important thing we look for is bodhicitta (altruism = helping others) as the Buddha taught. In particular we look for

- * leadership skills
 - * students who give their best in helping others = 'giving service'
 - * students who try hard in studies
 - * involvement in the cultural life of the school
- * After the SLC exams are finished, the students go home to their villages to renew their ties with their own culture and to experience life at home. Most have only been home 1x in a dozen years - the trails are too dangerous for them to go home until they are 14 or 15.
- * After 3 months, the SLC results are published. older SMD seniors and 'homecomers' (scholarship kids home from overseas) are canvassed for nominations which are anonymous. Reasons for the nominations must be provided and must be related to our founder's aims.

After selections for Seniors are made, some are kept with some of Thrangu Rinpoche's institutions (SMD, SMD Branch School for young monks, Thrangu Tara Abbey nunnery & Satek Monastery) to give service.

- * 4 boys go to SMD Branch School at Namu Buddha (this year, there were 5 - Sartek monastery in Nar, Manang was damaged - the young monks were brought down to SMDBS)
- * 2 girls go to Thrangu Tara Abbey nunnery to teach the young nuns
- * next year (if no more earthquakes) we will send one young girl to Satek monastery in Nar, Manang - there is an older woman living at the monastery that she can stay with
- * some are kept at SMD School
- * in the past, we sent some to their villages to teach (government teachers take their pay but don't turn up). If Nepal stabilizes from the EQs, we'll start doing this again.

While they are outside SMD, the kids' needs are looked after and they get a little pocket money so they don't need sponsorship that year, but if they stay at SMD, we cover all expenses (and they do need sponsorship). After a year of service, they come back to SMD and we do our best to help them go on with their education.

Track 1: finish high school in Nepal - generally, these students aim at becoming health workers and teachers

Track 2: some Seniors stay on a Gap Year (this is a gamble - it depends on the offer of a scholarship) they have a chance at winning scholarships overseas so they can finish high school overseas at independent schools. This is an excellent solution, because it frees up beds and if the scholarship winners do well they can also qualify for scholarships at university.

SMD has 44 students overseas thanks to scholarships awarded by some of the finest schools & universities in the world. The high schools offer all expenses, along with annual return flights.

Life as a Senior at SMD

A few Seniors who have family near the school can be Day Seniors, but most live at SMD. The boys stay in their own room in the Boys' Hostel and the girls, in the Girls' Hostel. The Seniors also have a kitchen and small dining room of their own. The Seniors are somewhat autonomous. According to Rinpoche's direction, they are with us to learn life skills: how to shop, budget, cook, clean, pay the electricity bill (they give 10% of the small stipend SMD pays them) and negotiate with each other about how the flat should be run.

While they do all this, they work at SMD. We move them about a bit: jobs include working in the Big Office (word processing, preparing exams, answering the phone, running errands for the Academic side of the school), working as the Principal's assistant or in the Director's Office, (the hardest job there is...a lot of multitasking, handling PR, sponsors, publishing, etc.) working in the school's Stores, (inventories in 3 languages...this is where all the supplies for children and live in staff...clothing, soap, etc. are issued) running the Science Lab, (inventories, supplies, scheduling) keeping inventories for the Stationery Stores, AV equipment, films and CDs, supervising in the Computer Lab, working as a classroom aide, etc. All the Seniors also work in the Hostel, supervising at homework time ('self study') and at morning or evening Tuition. They supervise wakeup, lights out and washing time and on holidays, they offer activities for the smaller children to do. They take turns cooking dinner 6 days a week and they run the flat according to dinnertime group decisions, good training in communication, critical thinking and problem-solving.

All Seniors are given Reading Angel training so they can help younger kids and so they can help in the classrooms. (Reading Angels is flash training in early skills acquisition, psychology, classroom management and phonics)...older Seniors are the trainers...they offer the training programme for adults from other Kathmandu schools and for our SMD staff. Of necessity, our Seniors do many of the tasks that teachers normally do, because they speak Tibetan as well as Nepali and English - and they work from their hearts, out of devotion to our founder. SMD could not run without them.

While they are "giving service", the Seniors are also expected to go to daily prayers and to all Dharma teachings as well as Friday Night Group, (meditation and exploration of ethics and conduct) and a Saturday meeting where they learn critical thinking and solve school problems.

Ongoing Education in Nepal

Some Seniors went on to join our staff and are working half time and going to university half time. At the moment, we have 4 who are working as teachers at SMD while finishing their degrees. They live in the school and work as Hostel (dorm) teachers.

Scholarships Overseas

Fifty-one SMD students have won scholarships overseas. Many have finished or are finishing high school at independent schools in Japan, Australia, Norway, Canada, Switzerland, Portugal and the US. These kids are studying in the most rigorous academic streams you can imagine: many are doing the International Baccalaureate www.ibo.org

The IB is the most academically challenging high school education possible. Universities waive First Year requirements if a student has excelled in the IB programme. We think the IB programme is particularly fitting for SMD kids. From the IBO mission statement:

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

A Word About the Future

Nepal cannot provide governance, security, electricity or sanitation even in the capital. 55% of the population lives on less than \$1.25 USD/year. 41% of children under 5 are stunted from chronic hunger. <http://feedthefuture.gov/country/nepal> Unemployment was 46% in 2008. It's worse now. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

The biggest export is Nepalis. Young people are abandoning their homeland...anywhere, even the Gulf is better than Nepal (and every day, three young Nepalis are shipped home in coffins). Of the privileged ones (those getting a foreign education) precious few return. Nepal is losing its young, the brightest and best.

Overseas Scholarship Students Will Return

We only help students who write a letter to our founder, Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche, promising to return to help their own people. We do not ask our scholarship students to stay in Nepal forever. We only ask for a year or two of service, then they are free to do what they want.

Kids Need Help To Finish High School In Nepal

In order to go on to higher education, kids have to finish Grades 11 & 12, but such schools are for-profit, expensive and urban. Annual tuition tends to be about \$800/year, and as high as \$1500. It costs us roughly \$1500 to \$2000/year to keep each Senior while they are in Grades 11 and 12 in Nepal.

Of the Seniors who stay at SMD, we move them around in the school quite a lot. While they are working, everyone they work for or with observes their performance. I work closely with Seniors and am also tracking how each one is doing. IF they do really well, we consider them for scholarships overseas...and IF SMD gets a scholarship offer, we nominate a Senior. IF the school accepts our nominee, we start working on documents (citizenship card, passport, guardianship papers, translations and notarizations, etc). This is very time-consuming because

1. The kids have to go back to the mountains to district headquarters to get papers
2. Translations must be done by government agencies here in Kathmandu
3. All translations need to be notarized
4. Corruption in every contact with the government (slows things down and ups costs)

After all this, we start the process of applying for a visa. This takes at least 4 months and often longer. I tell the kids you can never believe you're going overseas until you're past the corrupt scoundrels at the Immigration counter in Kathmandu airport and actually on the plane.

The whole process takes about 6 months on average and costs us \$600 to \$800 in pre-travel costs (documents, translations, notarizing, travel gear, clothing, etc.) Visas and medical costs vary, but most are several hundred dollars. Pre-travel costs for Australia were almost two thousand dollars, money I had to raise. We do not tell any of the kids they're in our sights for scholarships until we are certain of the student and ready to start the process.

In offering scholarships for SMDers to finish high school, these independent schools have been extremely generous.

The International School of Asia, Karuizawa, Japan

Phillips Exeter Academy, NH, USA

Appleby College, Oakville, Canada

Atlanta International School Atlanta, USA

The Bavarian International School

Bishop Strachan School, Toronto, Canada

Hotchkiss School, Connecticut, USA

Inter Community School, Zurich

Instut le Rosey, Rolle Switzerland

Ivanhoe Grammar School, Melbourne Australia

Mulgrave School, Vancouver, Canada

Red Cross Nordic United World College, Flekke, Norway

St. Julian's School, Lisbon, Portugal

United World College of the Adriatic, Duino Italy

West Island College, Calgary, Canada

Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer, Canada

LTHS is a public school. In this case, financial support came from two families in Red Deer.

In addition to paying tuition, room and board, these schools cover school supplies, text books & laptops, medical & dental, clothing, and pocket money. Most of these schools also pay an annual return ticket. Very often, the host families contribute funding too.

The generosity hasn't been limited to scholarships...support flows back to SMD. Appleby College, West Island College, ICSZ and the Bavarian International School offered accomodation and help with travel costs when I visited. The Inter Community School Zurich and the Bavarian International School sent teachers to give inservice training to our teachers. The ICS community sponsors many children and they and the Bavarian International School both fundraise for SMD.

Costs

Grades 11 & 12 in Nepal

It costs \$600-\$800/year for tuition at the 'plus two' schools in the valley which means we can keep a student with us, and send her/him to another school, which means we can keep a Grade 11/12 'Senior' with us for roughly \$1500 to \$2000/year.

University in Nepal

On average, tuition costs about \$400/year to finish an undergraduate degree at Tribhuvan University (three or four years' study in Nepal). By the time our students get to university, we hire them as teachers and they pay their own way through university.

General Medicine to become a Health Assistant (HA = paramedic)

Tuition for this 3 year programme costs upward of \$2500 and doesn't include texts, transportation, uniforms, exams, equipment and costs rising out of field work. Students should finish 11 & must live with us while they are in the programme. When they finish, they can run health posts or lead a casualty ward team of ten. Health Assistants are, in essence, barefoot doctors who can do almost anything except major surgery.

This training is particularly useful at altitude, where there is no healthcare at all. It is also possible to work in private hospitals with this certification and it also allows for further study at Bachelor's level in Public Health or in Health Education, or two more years of training to become a physician.

This course is very challenging. Experience has shown us that finishing Grades 11 & 12 in the Science Stream is a necessary prerequisite.