

# Enfants des Etoiles

Une école pour enfants  
avec autisme & trisomie 21

à Varanasi (Inde)

OU Taaro ke Bacche

तारों के बच्चे



## Newsletter – December 2020

### A message from the President

With this "exceptional" newsletter, I send you warm greetings!

We are living in a time of crisis that is most unsettling. Its impact is having more or less dramatic and profound consequences, depending on the region, on the health of the economy, and social and cultural life.

### The situation in Benares

The current situation has demanded of us more effort and creativity so as to continue supporting our families and children, a task that is all the more necessary when faced with problems and disruption of daily routines that jeopardize normal family life, both practically and psychologically.



Anjel : Colouring with her Mum



As we announced in the March 2020 newsletter all schools, including the Taaro ke Bacche Rehabilitation Centre and School, were ordered to close on March 24. We do not know when we will be allowed to re-open.

For mainstream schools, teaching is online. For Taaro ke Bacche, Marie-Françoise (Mary), together with the professional staff, has set up a system of remote follow-up of the families thanks to WhatsApp and the internet. The exchanges consist of checking on the child, communicating activity

proposals and, more generally, discussing each person's circumstances. These measures also allow for fruitful exchanges amongst all concerned via photographs or videos.



Kartik describing illustrations



*Our staff preparing material for the children*

The professional staff have been working partly from home. Since September 1, 2020 they have been working at the school premises on a curriculum established by Marie-Françoise and preparation of materials for the children, as well as on improving their own command of English.

We have also collaborated with the not-for-profit organisation, Learn-for-Life and the Ramakrishna Hospital, which

have been distributing food in the villages around Benares. We have also been providing food to one of the families at the school.



*Distribution of basic food products*



*Food distribution*

In order to protect the livelihood of our employees, we are paying the salaries in full. However, there will be no salary increases for the next two years.

Marie-Françoise is very happy to be back in Benares since November 28 - at last!



*Atharva : Painting activity*

The situation is still critical in India and Benares. There are far too many cases of Covid-19 in hospitals, a food crisis affecting the most vulnerable, a climate of anxiety, suppression of freedom of expression, a significant increase in poverty, hunger, and difficulty in accessing education for hundreds of millions of children due to Covid-19 (global figures provided by UNICEF).



*Om : sorting activity*

The progress achieved worldwide, at the cost of enormous efforts, to extend access to education, could slow down with the prolonged closure of schools. The alternative solutions, such as distance learning, are not accessible to all, due to a lack of means of connection.



*Krish :  
Painting activity*

Our projects are affected by this pandemic... We have had to redefine priorities and adapt our activities, which have been limited by health restrictions. We have not been able to pursue our mission in optimum conditions, as we have suffered from the physical absence of children and families, the suspension of autism awareness events, as well as the lack of meetings between autism professionals in Benares.

Having been in daily contact with staff and families of Taaro ke Bacche, Marie-Françoise is also affected by the dramatic living conditions they face and empathises with them and their fears and anxiety.

It is important to help develop positive attitudes without denying reality, to promote solidarity and confidence in a better future, and to develop a sense of togetherness.



*Aryan Seth sorting vegetables  
with his brothers*



*Aryan Yadav*



*Nishant : counting  
activity*



*Atharva*

## News from the Association in Geneva

Despite the current situation, our association in Geneva is working hard on fundraising and developing communication channels.

Our General Assembly took place on June 30, 2020, at which a new six-member committee was elected. We take this opportunity to introduce them to our readers, as well as Corinne who, though not a committee member, does a terrific fundraising job for the association.

We continue to actively seek new public or private donors, as well as individuals who would like to volunteer in one way or another.



On September 26, 2020 our association participated in the annual event known as "The Meal, un repas pour notre avenir" (*"The Meal, a meal for our future"*) on the Plaine de Plainpalais in Geneva (an open space in the heart of the city). This moment of sharing at an event supporting projects around the world and emphasising the necessity to prioritise the availability of food for all, allowed us to increase our visibility.

The weather was gloomy and cold but the atmosphere warm and lively...

## Introducing our committee & Corinne

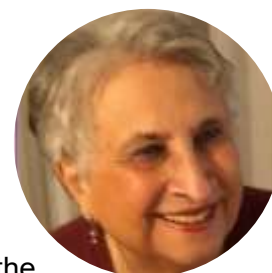
### **Marie-Françoise (Mary) Bisson** (President)

I worked for 20 years with the *Office Médico Pédagogique de Genève* as a psychologist and special-needs teacher for children with autism and Down's syndrome. I had always dreamed that when I retired in 2009, I would live part of the time in Benares so as to share my knowledge and experience of autism and to create a place where such children would be welcome. The adventure began in 2012, with various "facets" including that of a great human adventure that enriches any project.



### **Patricia Bell** (Vice-President)

I was born and raised in India, which holds a special place in my heart! I am also the mother of an autistic son named Stephen who trained as a cook and works in a restaurant where he is highly appreciated. I am glad to say that he has made incredible progress over the years and leads an independent and happy life, succeeding in everything he undertakes. The understanding of autism is still lacking in India and I wholeheartedly support Taaro ke Bacche because of the wonderful work it does for children with special needs.



### **Ena Singh** (Secretary)

Even though I left India at an early age to pursue my studies and career in the west, my connection with my home country remains strong. I am committed to and involved in a number of initiatives promoting social justice and inclusion. My love for children, especially those facing challenges in today's world, drew me to Taaro ke Bacche.



### **Jo Hayoz** (Founding Member)

I find it very brave of Marie-Françoise to embark on such a project which brings hope to children who are not always well understood.

Thanks to my professional background, I am happy to assist her with administrative tasks.



### **Solange Demole** (Member)

I have always been passionate about natural medicine. My four children having left the nest, I opened a seminar centre in the mountains of the Valais so as to devote myself to it. Because of my attachment to India, I called it the Ganesha Centre (<http://chaletganesha.com>). I am happy to be a member of the Taaro ke Bacche committee, an association founded by my friend Marie-Françoise, because I know that it is important to be at her side and to support her professionalism and her commitment to the cause of children with autism in a country where still too little is known about this disorder.



### **Jhilmil Bahl** (Member)

I was born and raised in India and have lived in Geneva since 1997. I work for the World Health Organization and have been involved with Taaro ke Bacche since 2016. I believe that every child should be given the opportunity to develop to his/her potential, which is what has attracted me to Taaro ke Bacche. I hope to help with fundraising, event organisation and networking in India and Switzerland.



And last but not least:

### **Corinne Grand** (responsible for identifying potential donors and submission of funding requests)

I am 72 years old and a former secretary in the humanitarian field. I live with my little dog Julie and love animals. What I enjoy most, apart from walks in the countryside, are meeting with friends, humour, board games, reading, handicrafts, films, and good restaurants. In short, I love life!

#### **Our address**

ENFANTS DES ETOILES ou Taaro ke Bacche  
1224 Chêne-Bougerie – Switzerland

#### **Our internet pages**

[www.enfantsdesetoiles.ch](http://www.enfantsdesetoiles.ch)  
[www.taarokebacche.in](http://www.taarokebacche.in)

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