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"The poor won't come to us, it's up to us to go to them."

DONATE

Letter from Father Laurent

Dear friends,

For the past few years, September has become the month of excursions at HSP. All the children from our centers in Howrah, Asansol, and Jalpaiguri leave their homes for a few days to discover their beautiful country — even without going very far. In a way, these are HSP's own "green classes."

For these children who have rarely seen the mountains when they live in the city, or rarely seen the sea when they live at the foot of the Himalayas — who have traveled little, who have never or rarely taken the train — it is a true moment of wonder. This sense of wonder is the treasure of these children, still relatively sheltered from the civilization of screens, and something we wish to protect and nurture.

This excursion is not only a time of wonder, but also one of discovery and learning. It is a time when the walls of our homes fall as they go out to explore other worlds. A time when the walls of ignorance, prejudice, and indifference can also fall — encouraging encounters, community life, and shared service. A unique moment when new friendships are born, so essential to the building of each child's and teenager's personality. A unique moment as well for the didis and dadas, who can meet and discover how the spirit of HSP is lived in other homes.

We are happy to share this joy with you.

Thank you again for your prayers and unwavering support.

Lots of love,

Fr. Laurent +

Events

Excursion

Every September since 2021, the children of HSP have been going on an excursion! This year, the children from the Howrah homes went to Jalpaiguri for six days. It's quite a unique moment for our children, as, apart from HSP, going on holiday is simply not possible for them. The main reason is financial, but for children with disabilities, it's also a practical one.

After a 10-hour train journey, the children visited all the centers in Jalpaiguri, where we witnessed beautiful moments of connection and togetherness. Moreover, it's not only the children who get to enjoy a break — our staff do as well! While they accompany and supervise the children, they also get the chance to enjoy the visits and the change of scenery.

Although many of our young people have been with HSP for several years, the centers of Howrah and Jalpaiguri have met only a few times. Once the tour of the centers was over, they visited historical landmarks in the region, such as the Raja's Palace in Cooch Behar. The excursion ended with a safari where the children were thrilled to see the majestic Bengal tiger.

Furthermore, in October, the young people from Jalpaiguri will travel to Asansol to discover, for the first time, this center that holds such an important place in Father Laborde's work.

Baksara boys in Mogradangi (left) and Ashaneer boys (right)

Lalkuthi and EPN girl's at the safari

Similarly, **the girls from Asansol came to Howrah to visit Kolkata.** They had already come last February for HSP's anniversary celebration. This center, which had been closed for four years and reopened last October, is still in its restarting phase. Indeed, many renovations are still needed in this home, such as the refurbishment of the boys' dormitory.

Unfortunately, our partner who used to support Asansol decided not to continue funding the project when it reopened. As a result, the number of girls currently stands at 26, but we plan to welcome 35 by the end of the year. However, to run the center at its full capacity (a total of 75 children), **we need long-term financial support. We are therefore still actively looking for a donor for this home.**

Asansol's girls visiting Kolkata's zoo

Administrative Changes

At the end of September, our administrator for the past three years, **Sabita Jana, retired**. Having joined HSP in 1994, she was mainly based in Jalpaiguri, where she spent most of her career. After serving as the administrator of the Jalpaiguri center, she became the overall administrator of HSP in 2022. Her experience, humility, and deep concern for the poorest have greatly contributed to strengthening the stability of our organization.

Beyond her professional skills and her profound understanding of HSP, **it is truly one of the pillars of HSP who is now leaving.**

We are deeply grateful for all the work she has accomplished. Of course, our bond with Sabita di will remain very strong.

Moving forward, **Dr. Bidyut Majumder,** who joined us last November, will take over as administrator. He spent 11 months alongside Sabita di, during which he learned not only the duties of an administrator but also the vision and spirit of HSP. With the upcoming Golden Jubilee, his task is immense, but we are confident in his ability to meet the challenge of leading and organizing HSP.

Having already reached retirement age three years ago, **Devi di had remained the administrator of Jalpaiguri.** However, in July, her role changed: she is now a member of the HSP Board of Directors — a body she knows extremely well, as she has been part of it for most of her time at HSP. Despite her new position, which means she is no longer an internal staff member, she continues to live in Jordighi to stay close to the boys. Her dedication is remarkable: she has been with HSP for 44 years. Beyond her great professional competence, she possesses a profound knowledge of HSP and remembers vividly all the challenges our organization has faced over the decades.

We can only express our deep gratitude for her immense contribution. Even today, she holds close to her heart the words Father Laborde told her shortly before his passing:

“Do as much as you can for HSP.”

This shows that even more than four years after his passing, Father Laborde's spirit continues to live on within HSP, and it is our heartfelt desire to carry on his legacy.
Another key figure from Jalpaiguri, **Dalyia Dhara, has now taken on the role of administrator of Jalpaiguri.** We are very happy that Dalyia di has accepted this position, as her deep commitment to finding new beneficiaries for HSP represents a crucial aspect of our mission.

Computer Training

In August, our Class 9 and Class 10 students (equivalent to 9th and 10th grade in India, or 3ème and seconde in France) **took part in five days of intensive computer training.** This program was funded by the Pernod Ricard Foundation and held at the Don Bosco Ashalayam center. During these five days, our children learned the basics — creating an email address, using the internet, and working with Word.
Being able to use a computer is essential for their future and their professional life. Today, it is our duty to provide them with a quality education, as job prospects at the beginning of their careers are unfortunately far from bright. **Indeed, more broadly speaking, 45% of young people aged 20 to 24 were unemployed in December 2023,** according to the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). It is therefore our responsibility to help our young people pursue and achieve their dreams.
Finally, we hope to continue sending our students to these computer training programs so that they can develop more advanced skills, such as the use of artificial intelligence.

Celebrations in West Bengal

To complement the previous Anuprerona article about festivals in West Bengal, here is what we were able to celebrate at HSP during the past quarter:

- **On August 4**, **we celebrated Rakhi,** a Hindu festival that honors the bond of brotherhood and sisterhood between men and women — whether they are siblings or simply close friends. It is common, for example, to call one's best friend a "brother," which can sometimes lead to amusing confusion about the apparent size of families. Likewise, in everyday life, people affectionately refer to others as dada (big brother) or didi (big sister), reflecting the strength of family ties in Indian culture. During this festival, girls tie a bracelet (rakhi) around the wrists of boys as a symbol of affection and protection. After a short blessing, the boys give gifts in return to the girls.
- While in France we celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary **on August 15**, in India this date holds a very different meaning — it is **Independence Day**. India's independence from the British Crown was proclaimed on August 15, 1947, bringing an end to the British Raj, which had been established in 1858. This date also marks the partition of India into India and Pakistan, which led to massive population movements. The partition remains one of the root causes of the ongoing tensions and armed conflicts between the two countries.
- **On September 3, we celebrated an Adivasi festival**, more specifically a Santali one. The word Adivasi means "original inhabitants" or "first dwellers" in Hindi. It refers to the indigenous peoples of India, those who lived on the subcontinent long before the arrival of the Aryans, Dravidians, and other ethnic groups. The Adivasis comprise numerous tribes, among which the Santals are prominent — they are found in West Bengal and the neighboring states. Many of our children are Santali and take part in these tribal celebrations. In fact, the Baksara center was originally opened to welcome children from these tribal communities.

Independance day in Ashaneer

Rakhi Celebration in EPN

- On **September 5,** the state of West Bengal observed a public holiday for Eid-e-Milad (Milad-un-Nabi), which commemorates **the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.**
- That same day, **we also celebrated Teachers' Day** — a wonderful occasion for all the children to express their gratitude to their teachers. The teachers received small handmade gifts prepared by their students as tokens of appreciation.
- On **September 17, we celebrated Vishwakarma Puja.** Vishwakarma is the god of architecture, engineering, mechanics, and craftsmanship. He is regarded as the divine creator of the universe and the builder of the gods' celestial palaces. For this festival, each center built a small altar and gathered to pray before it.
- **At the end of September, the great festival of Durga Puja began**. This festival honors Goddess Durga, one of the most important deities in Hinduism. In each temporary temple (pandal), one can find statues of six Hindu gods and goddesses: Durga, Ganesh, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartik, and the demon Mahishasura. During this time, the entire city of Kolkata, as well as the whole of West Bengal, transforms — countless pandals appear on every street corner. After a week of festivities, the temples are dismantled, and the statues are immersed in the Ganges River. **Moreover, Durga Puja is inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List.** As this is the most important festival in West Bengal, our children returned home for the holidays. On this occasion, we also held awareness meetings with parents at the start of the vacation, addressing the same topics discussed during the summer holidays — namely, the needs of children and the various dangers they may face.

Teacher's day in the non formal school of Shikarpur (left) and celebration of Vishwakarma Puja in Bakuabari (right)

New Volunteer

In this beautiful (and rainy) beginning of September, **we welcomed a new volunteer sent by the MEP for a one-year mission! Her name is Catherine Khun**, and she comes straight from Paris. Catherine is an emergency nurse, and she has joined the SMCS program. As part of this mission, she will go into the slums with the didis to support mothers and their babies (up to the age of three, as a reminder). Her SMCS work will take place three days a week.
In parallel, she will live in the girls' home in Baksara, which forms the second part of her mission: to be an older sister figure for the children in our homes and help them grow up in a healthy and caring environment.

HSP Visits

Also at the beginning of September, we had the pleasure of welcoming **Mr. Thierry Morel, the new Consul of France, and Mr. Philippe Kéribou, the Deputy Consul General**, for a full-day visit at Ashaneer. We were very happy to host them, especially since the Consul had taken up his post only two weeks earlier.
Although we did not have relations with the previous Consul, the one before him was deeply involved with HSP. We therefore hope to rebuild a strong connection with the French Consulate in the near future.

We also had the pleasure of welcoming **Tania Bessonnet, a longtime friend of HSP** who used to work at *TDHA* and was our main contact there for quite some time. She came for a three-day visit, during which she spent time discovering, among other things, the SMCS program, which TDHA has supported since its very beginning.
We were truly delighted to have her with us!

Two journalists from the French television channel TF1, Michel Scott and Antoine Pocry, spent six days at HSP to produce a report about our organization. They visited both Jalpaiguri and Howrah, exploring our various programs and filming many scenes from daily life at HSP.
This report came about following the publication of an article in Le Figaro, which caught the attention of TF1's news director. The report is scheduled to air on TF1's 8 p.m. news in the coming weeks.

News of the quarter

- At the end of August, **we organized a big sports tournament with LP4Y and Don Bosco Ashalayam** — two NGOs based in Howrah that also have French volunteers. More than 120 young people took part in the event: 80 from HSP, 20 from Don Bosco, and 20 from LP4Y. The program included football, kabaddi, relay races, ultimate frisbee, and dodgeball. It was an intense and sunny day! We were lucky to have the support of three young professionals from Decathlon, who helped us with the organization, while LP4Y kindly provided lunch for everyone. It was a beautiful example of collaboration between NGOs, which greatly benefits our young people. The day ended with a medal ceremony.
- In addition, **four children from Jalpaiguri came to Kolkata to undergo surgery.** The operations took place in early September, and they will stay a few more weeks at Ashaneer to recover and receive proper care. Later on, these three young patients will move to Bakuabari for their post-operative treatment and rehabilitation.

PORTRAIT

Sandjip da, staff 24h/24h for Baksara boys

Before joining HSP, he worked in various fields, including hotel management. His first experience with HSP dates back to 2011, when he spent two months in Jalpaiguri. However, due to poor living conditions and health issues, he had to leave.

Later on, through a Sister from the Missionaries of Charity, he was put in touch with Elena di, our current secretary. After an interview with Father Laborde, he joined Baksara in 2014 as a home supervisor.

The early days were challenging, especially with the students of Classes IX and X. But when Animesh da joined him, the home began to run much more smoothly. Today, Sanjip and Animesh form a highly effective team, working in close communication for the well-being of the children.

Sanjip's motivation comes from his own childhood: from Class I through university, he himself lived in a children's home. Having benefited from that experience, he now wishes to give back what he once received. Through his experience and dedication, he has become one of the key dadas at HSP, deeply committed to the education and well-being of every boy, striving to offer them the best possible childhood.

Today, Sanjip is also the main support for his family, as his father is retired. His wife was also part of HSP, from 2007 to 2018.

Action et Partage avec Calcutta

Aidez-nous à prendre soin des pauvres parmi les plus pauvres et des enfants en situation de handicap

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