



ICDF Tsharka School Newsletter

August 15, 2015 – No. 3

Dear Friends of Tsharka School,

This summer, I traveled to Tsharka to visit our school. It was a challenging trek and I rode horses to the tops of the high passes we crossed. I was again impressed with how remote the region of Dolpo -- and especially the village of Tsharka -- are.



After seeing dozens of photos of the school as it was being built, and as it functioned through the last decade, this was my first chance to see it in person. The school is working very well.

Our philosophy has always been that the school is essentially the teachers and the students and the information that flows between them. We have an excellent team of teachers, led by Samdup, our school coordinator. Tsering, Ts'ang, Thukpen, and Samdup are all in their twenties and are energetic, enthusiastic, capable teachers. They are all

originally from Tsharka, so they have deep ties to the village. They all live and teach in Tsharka because that is where they want to be.



The school building is in reasonably good shape. Like any adobe building, it requires regular maintenance. Samdup is organizing needed roof repairs this year. While I was visiting the school, the teachers and villagers spent a full day whitewashing the courtyard and exterior of the school. In the courtyard, they created a dark wainscoting and outlined the doors and windows. The school looks almost elegant! With fresh clear plastic covering the windows, classrooms are brighter. A new project is to cover the dirt floors of the courtyard and classrooms with locally available slate stone. Once the roof is repaired, the classrooms can be whitewashed, too.

We have forty-seven children enrolled in school this year. The school building was designed for sixty students, and we will reach that number next year. Based on a survey of families Thukpen conducted last year, the seventy households in the village have one hundred and twenty school age children. Of those, about forty children are being sent to school in Kathmandu or India. So there are eighty children that could be enrolled in the village school. Reaching all the children in Tsharka village is our goal.



The Village Development Committee agreed to let the school use the two smaller rooms of the three-room community building this year. The community building was built on the school property. The two women teachers, Tsering and Ts'ang, and the school cook, Sonam, share one bedroom there. The other room is being used as a bedroom by six students whose parents approached the school and asked if the children could stay at the school temporarily while their parents collected yartsa gumba. The children eat their meals in a classroom at the school. Samdup put Tsering in charge of the hostel students. Sonam cooks their meals along with the teachers' meals. Other parents would like to leave their children temporarily in the care of the school, while they are away from the village. Tsharka School is a village school, not a boarding school. We want the children to live with their families in the village and grow up in their community. However, we may find that creating a temporary hostel will give more children a chance to attend school during the yartsa gumba season. Based on the experience we have with the temporary hostel arrangement this summer, we will be able to make decisions for next school year.

En route to Tsharka, I spent a few days in Dunai, the government administrative center for Dolpo. I met with officials in the District Education Office. Each year, the DEO is supposed to supply two teachers to Tsharka school. In the history of the school, only one teacher, Mr. Lamsal, who was designated Headmaster, ever showed up in Tsharka. This year while I was visiting, Mr. Kamal, currently designated Headmaster by the DEO, arrived. If Tsharka school can benefit from support from the Nepali government, that would be wonderful. However, the only reason we have a functioning school in Tsharka today is because ICDF pays the salaries of our four teachers. We need to continue to

support and encourage our teachers. We want them to excell at teaching -- and reach out to the community to encourage all the village children to attend school.



During my visit, I met with the parents and teachers one day, all interested villagers another day, and the School Management Committee my last day there. I emphasized ICDF 's commitment to paying the teachers' salaries, with the understanding that the community will contribute by maintaining the school building.



Before I left, Samdup and our teachers organized a gala celebration with students dances and presentations. Lama Pema, Amanda Christi (a Irish educator with whom I traveled), and I were honored guests.

We have a potentially strong school in Tsharka. We can continue to build on that foundation! Please help us with your contribution at the website for the International Community Development Foundation (ICDF) at icfdn.org.

With warm regards,
Barbara

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