

Friends of Dhrubotara : Reg No : 1202364 Annual report 2023 – 24.

Friends of Dhrubotara (FoDh) was registered with the Charity Commission on 16th March 2023 as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

The 4 trustees are Sharon Whitfield, Rachel Douglas, Samuel Ellis, Jonathan Ellis.

The object of FoDh is to provide supplementary education to underprivileged children in Hugli / Hooghly District of West Bengal, India. Before becoming registered as a CIO it was an informal group which supported a small, village education project known as Dhrubotara (Pole Star) in 2 villages of Hugli District for about 20 years. In order to transfer funds legally to this project FoDh has used the services of an Indian NGO local to the project called Athmik. Athmik are co-operative and take only a small fee to administer the project. It is possible that FoDh may support other education projects through different NGOs in future.

Dhrubotara consists of 2 small supplementary primary schools in the villages of *Makhalpur and Joihoripur, with associated tuition classes for children who have moved on to attend the local government high schools.* A majority of Dhrubotara's students belong to one of several 'tribal' communities in the area, and all are of poor families of the labouring class.

At Makhalpur in December 2023 20 children were enrolled in the primary section and 16 in tuition classes. *(figures are approximate as accurate data is awaited).*

At Joihoripur in December 2023 46 children were enrolled in the primary section and 34 in tuition classes. (data supplied by teachers from registers)

The primary section teachers at Makhalpur are Tapasi (Chompa) Dey and Sobhan (Sumon) Das. Tuition classes are taught by Paromita Das.

The primary section teachers at Joihoripur are Nando Maheli and Puja Bag. Tuition Classes are taught by Tumpa Mudi, Sikha Mudi and Nando Maheli.

Wages of the staff were increased by approximately 15% from January (after 2 years) to compensate for local price inflation running at 7 – 8% pa.

Cultural and sports events were suspended due to Covid and have hardly restarted. In Jan / Feb 2024 several groups totalling 42 students visited the city of Kolkata for an overnight stay and visits to the Zoo, Ecopark and Dakshineswar Temple.

There is one working laptop at Joihoripur. A second hand or donated laptop is sought for Makhalpur so that students there can learn computer skills in a group. All staff now use smart phones and communication with and among them has become straightforward.

The teachers and community at Dhrubotara are seeking to register Dhrubotara as an NGO locally so that they can buy a small plot of land on which to build a new school room at Joihoripur. The existing structure is too small and is borrowed, not owned by the school.

A trustee (JE) made 3 visits to Dhrubotara during Jan / Feb 2024 to see teaching and meet teachers and students. He found all to be working well and with a good spirit. *There is a small concern about the low number of students enrolled at Makhalpur. This is in large part due to the small size of the 'tribal' community there and the fact that other children are unlikely to associate with them.*

Former students of Dhrubotara, most of whose parents were field labourers and illiterate, are moving into other kinds of work (mostly boys) such as driving tractors and other vehicles, building trades and gold jewellery making. The marriages of girls do not happen at such an early age as previously (but this trend was interrupted, anecdotally, by the Covid period when government schools were closed for almost 2 years). *More information is requested from teachers at Dhrubotara about the future lives of former students.*

FoDh has applied for and obtained Gift Aid status in the UK so as to maximise income from donations. There is regular income from several individuals in the UK and (usually) an annual donation from a small charity in Australia (Uthana Mission) and one in the USA (Bill Cook Foundation). There is currently a shortfall in regular donations to FoDh of about UK£.2,000 on expected expenditure of about UK£.6,000. This may be overcome by 'one off' donations.

The website 'dhrubotaraschool.org' is on line again after a period of restoration, and updating is nearly completed. JE has paid the costs associated with the website.

The trustees of Friends of Dhrubotara are satisfied that the funds raised are being used appropriately and to good effect by the NGO Athmik in India, and by the staff teaching at the village level. We thank them for their commitment and achievements.

This is the financial statement of Dhrubotara for 2023 -24 :

Year 16/03/23 - 05/04/24	Acc opened 10/07/23	Opening balance £
		0
income (donations)	expenditure (grant)	Closing balance £
9995.26		
	3035	6,960.26

FoDh held 2 online meetings during the year 2023 – 24. One of these included the teachers at Dhrubotara. The AGM is a face to face meeting on 6th April 2024.

END

Year 16/03/23 - 05/04/24	Acc opened 10/07/23	Opening balance £
		0
income (donations)	expenditure (grant)	Closing balance £
9995.26		
	3035	6,960.26