



Dear Members, dear Friends, dear Donors, dear interested Parties

After a long break, we would like to inform you and all others, who enable and support the Second Bridge project or who are simply interested in it, about the current status of the project's development in the slum of Shalimar, Howrah (West Bengal, India).

Kolkata, November 2024

Newsletter Second Bridge NGO, November 2024

Second Bridge was founded in 2019. It has the task and the goal of enabling children in the slum of Shalimar in India to use the state school system: especially children of primary school age who have never been to school and children who have left school early for various reasons. To this end, we offer the most needy children in Shalimar a safe place where they can be encouraged and experience fun and holistic learning through play. The children and their families should experience that they are important, that they have rights and that other people - including those outside their community - are interested in them and stand up for them - so that they have access to education and therefore have more opportunities to shape their own lives.

For the children's parents, the project is a sought-after point of contact where they can receive support and help through a wide range of services to accompany their children on their journey and exercise their rights - as well as their own.

Large sections of the community are now benefiting from the project and its services.

It is impressive how the project has developed: how it ensured survival in the slum through food donations during the pandemic and how it has blossomed in the five years since it was founded.



The *Second Bridge center* now cares for 120 children and their families. In the morning 60 children are prepared for visiting the public school. In addition, two further groups with a total of 60 children are supported, who for one year were prepared at Second Bridge to attend a public school and who now go to the nearby public elementary school.

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These children receive intensive homework support in the afternoons at the Second Bridge Center: so-called *coaching*. (Without such support, it is not possible to achieve the learning goals in the Indian school system).

The regular parents' meetings, which unfortunately have so far mainly been used by mothers, make a particular contribution to this.



Second Bridge is in close contact with the public school that these children now attend and continues to support them in this way.

This support is supplemented by a wide range of play opportunities and small snacks that the children receive daily at the project. This maintains contact between the staff and the children and their families.

The employees also receive valuable direct insights and feedback for the improvement and success of their work.

For the families of these children - their parents and *caregivers* (*guardians*) and for their siblings - the Second Bridge staff are and remain reliable contacts who, as part of the community, take care of their concerns and worries.

The children, who are prepared for school every day at the center, enjoy learning through play, the attention of the Second Bridge staff and being together - and not least the regular hot lunch.

They are taught in a trauma-sensitive way by two very empathetic and attentive teachers. One of them, Gulafsha Avreen, comes from a village near Howrah. Her colleague, Priti Kumari, comes from the Shalimar slum community itself.

Both know and feel particularly well what the children need and what moves them. In 2023, both teachers successfully took up the offer of a one-year accompanying introduction to Montessori education for themselves and the children.

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The teachers are supported in their work by the project's social worker, Yasmin Kartoon. She takes care of the psycho-social needs and requirements of the children and their parents and siblings. All family members can visit the social worker with any concerns they may have - be it personal problems or difficulties with government agencies - and receive advice. (Unfortunately, this service has so far been used almost exclusively by the women in the community). Domestic violence by the fathers and other consequences of their alcoholism unfortunately often are the reasons for seeking advice...

The staff and the management of the project are actively supported by a very committed assistant, Irfan Tahir, who is always on hand to help when it comes to doing something for the children and the staff and for the success of Second Bridge.

Another stroke of luck is the sustainable and helpful cooperation with *Don Bosco Outreach Kolkata*, which was could be started last year. *Don Bosco* works in an education-oriented manner at an international level to sustainably improve the living conditions of marginalized people

Most of Second Bridge's measures to improve housing and living conditions in Shalimar have been driven forward thanks to the material and mental support from 'Don Bosco' and the organization *Hoffnung auf einen besseren Morgen, Südtirol* (Hope for a Better Morning, South Tyrol, Italy)

The employees of these two organizations were very concerned about the extent of the need in the slum of Shalimar and decided to support Second Bridge in fundamentally improving the living conditions there.

With their support, under the leadership of Second Bridge, the supply of drinking water in Shalimar is now also being established and sanitary installations have been built - in addition to toilets that previously were not existing. This has led to a place for women where they can wash themselves at any time, protected from prying eyes by walls.

Many families in Shalimar live in improvised huts made of bamboo sticks and blue plastic tarpaulins. A so-called *Low Cost Houses Fund* does enable them to build stable accommodation.

As far as the *center* in Shalimar is concerned, the staff and the director of Second Bridge India, Fahimuddin, have succeeded in adding a large second classroom to the building financed and constructed by these cooperation partners. An adjacent open space - a part of a wasteland right next to the center that had long served as an open toilet for local residents – has been cleaned up and prepared by Fahim with the help of volunteers from the community with a great deal of effort and dedication.

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In a 'night-and-fog operation', a foundation was poured - the walls and roof were erected - the floor was tiled - and finally the windows of the new 'learning room' were installed. The whole community center got a fine stone floor, new doors, new wall paint and new electrical installations. All this was financed by *Hoffnung auf einen besseren Morgen* and performed by *Don Bosco Outreach, Kolkata*.



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Directly behind the wall of this new second classroom, a play area will be created, which the children in the community will be able to use between the teaching and coaching times to play and run around in a well-protected space.

The project's kitchen, which previously only consisted of a gas stove and two large pots on the floor in a corner of the first classroom, has been separated off. Now the two cooks Geeta Devi and Anju Devi, who also come from the community, can finally prepare their daily (vegetarian) lunch in a separate kitchen space.

And there is now even a large fridge, which was donated by an Indian supporter. A filter system will also be installed thanks to a German donator to ensure that the water in the *center* is finally of drinking quality.

Second Bridge endeavors to respect the rules of ecology and sustainability in all its projects and to communicate them to everyone involved. The NGO *Green Village*, which is active in India, helps Second Bridge with this.

Another helpful cooperation has been established with the humanitarian organization *Life Project 4Youth*. *LP4Y* is an international organization that supports young people (via local partners) in developing viable career prospects. As part of this program, young adults can work as interns at Second Bridge on a weekly basis.

Older young people from the Shalimar community can receive several months of free pre-vocational training at the *Life Project 4Youth* center on the outskirts of Kolkata.

While basic knowledge in computer operation is already provided to the mainstreamed children by the teachers of 2nd Bridge, further professional computer training will be provided soon in collaboration with the partner *LP4Y* for destitute youths.

Second Bridge also endeavors to help people with disabilities: For example, it has been achieved that people with walking disabilities in Shalimar receive three-wheeled bicycles (tricycles) financed by *Don Bosco Outreach Kolkata*.

A particular difficulty in achieving the goals of Second Bridge is that children and young people in India are only assigned to a specific class level according to their estimated age (birth certificates are rarely available) and not according to their level of education when they are admitted to a state school. As a result, ten-year-olds, for example, are enrolled in the 4th grade even though they can neither read nor write.

In order to avoid having to deviate from this practice, the state has now launched a program to enable the young people concerned to pass the final examination after grade 8 or 10 by means of officially approved teaching material (available for purchase) - i.e. auto-didactically - so that they can then start vocational training. (Without such a school-leaving certificate, the young people concerned are destined for precarious living conditions).

Second Bridge wants to make the most of this government program to give young people from Shalimar these opportunities. (The team has already managed to have Second Bridge recognized as an official *Study Center*). The only thing missing is the money for another teacher ...

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The presence and diverse support of Second Bridge is greatly appreciated and gladly accepted by the community of the *"slum under the second bridge"*. Almost every day we receive inquiries from parents who would like their children to be included in the project.

The members of Second Bridge e.V. Germany and the staff of the project in India, but above all the children in the project and their families, are very grateful to all people who take an interest in their work and in their lives and future in Shalimar and who stand up against poverty and injustice - in Germany, in India or elsewhere in the world.

Thank you for supporting the work of Second Bridge so generously with your interest and donations, some of you for

five years now, and for making it possible for the project to be so encouraging and successful and to reach more and more people.

We can achieve even more if we can deploy additional financial and human resources. Your donation is very welcome and in good hands: - because at Second Bridge e.V. there are no overhead costs whatsoever! This means that only the employees in India are paid salaries and only their expenses are reimbursed: every donation therefore reaches the people there directly and brings about positive and sustainable changes in the lives of numerous children and families.



Tax-effective donation certificates can be supplied at any time of the year - not only at years end.

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We are equally grateful to the donators in India, especially:

- Mr Mamoon Akhter, Founder of the Samaritan Help Mission, Howrah, who guided and supported us from the beginning.
- Mrs Susmita Chatterjee, who supports the center reliably and regularly and provides the children with monthly ration and clothing.
- Mr Manyak Lakothia, who not only donated the refrigerator, but also regularly supports the center with education material, equipment for computer courses and indoor games for the children.
- Mrs Sashi Nagori, who also reliably supports the work of Second Bridge by weekly vegetables for lunch.
- Mr Vinay Kumar Singh, the Ex-Councilor of Howrah Municipal Corporation, who is supporting 2nd Bridge regularly.



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