

MANAKAMANA SCHOLARSHIPS UPDATE November 2020

Namaste dear friends of Manakamana Scholarships,

Many of you have written to ask how to make donations to the Manakamana scholarships. Please make checks payable to Manakamana Fund (we are a 501c3) and send them to PO Box 5, Pt Reyes Sta, CA 94956. Thank you! Here's the original email again:

Since I wrote about Nepal's lockdown and the closing of schools in April, many things have changed. Nepal has had a record number of new cases each day recently (4364 yesterday), and the death toll is rising (now 590). The government has opened and closed everything several times, and flights in and out of the country are still very restricted.

The good news is that many schools are carrying on with distance learning classes on tv, radio and Zoom. Most of our recipients have cell phones and are able to access Zoom for a fee of Rs. 350 (\$3) per month. Schools are requiring students to pay full school fees (not including room and board, which is always billed separately anyway), and Geeta will send money to those students who inform her that they are continuing their studies, as soon as it is safe to go to the bank. The Board exams which come at the end of degrees will be taken online according to the government. So most of our continuing students are managing to study.

Planning for the soon-to-begin new school year is more problematic. The Nepali government has suspended most 18-month duration degrees after the current batch of students finishes, to be replaced with 3-year degrees. For example, the ANM (Auxilliary Nurse-Midwife) will be replace by Staff Nurse, CMA (Certified Medical Assistant) will be replaced by Health Assistant, and Lab Assistant will be replaced by Lab Technician. Of the degrees we fund, only I.Ed. (primary school teacher) and JTA (Junior Technical Assistant in agriculture or livestock) will continue.

Our philosophy has always been to fund girls' education in degrees that will encourage them to return to their villages to work, and we've been quite successful in this based on continued contacts with alums. The problem is that

these longer degrees, besides being MUCH more expensive, will encourage young women to seek employment in Kathmandu or abroad rather than to work locally. After lengthy discussion, we have decided that we will fund only 2 degrees for the next academic year: I.Ed. and JTA. This will allow us to continue helping girls without other resources to access education that makes them eligible for work mainly in their communities.

Even this will be difficult, because the entrance exams for the I.Ed. and JTA degrees have been announced for 20 Ashwin (October 7) but it is not yet clear if students will be able to take the exams online. Also, we have previously accepted applications only in writing through the mail, and the Nepali postal system is not functioning well. (Sound familiar?) So we have decided to allow applications as email attachments, but because we normally get 150+ applications, Geeta will have to figure out how to get them printed so that we can make decisions on which ones to grant.

Our basic message is that we will continue to operate and that we still rely on your donations. If you are able to donate this year, please do so. We have very reluctantly decided not to expend the time and effort to make our fund-raising calendar this year because we sold very few for 2020 and we can't think that sales will be any better for 2021 given the total absence of tourists in Nepal. We fully intend to resume in 2022 if we can.

Thanks so much for reading this lengthy report and for supporting girls' education in Nepal. Take good care, Pam & Geeta