

CHOKI TRADITIONAL ART SCHOOL



NEWSLETTER, SUMMER 2016

Message from the Principal

Kuzuzangpola! It has been another progressive year for the CTAS family in terms of its growth and future prospective. Many events have passed during the first half of this year of which most notable ones are mentioned in this newsletter. First of all, it pains me and the entire CTAS family to realize the loss of one of the most loving persons in CTAS' entire growth history, whom we loved dearly and who was instrumental to bring CTAS to where it is today - Mr. David Bidwell or just 'Apa David' as we used to affectionately call him. We know that no words or deeds from us could ever repay for his love and for what he has done for CTAS. Yet, with a strong belief that all revolves around the nature of causes and effects and that everything is interrelated, the least we could do was to erect a Jangchub Chorten (the Stupa of Enlightenment) in the school's campus which will always stand in his loving memory. We also believe that consecrating a sacred stupa such as this would ease one's soul to gain rebirth in higher realms in his or her next lives.



This newsletter highlights the usual recurring annual events but more importantly, it presents some noteworthy events and progresses and in all spheres such as new admission where we welcomed 33 new students (18 boys & 15 girls), infrastructure related development, improvement of the overall management and administration of the school, timely revision of available courses and participation in various exhibitions both in and out of Thimphu.

The school was also lucky to welcome several important guests and supporters such as Venerable Lama Kuba from Thailand and Alan Bickell and Patricia from USA.

CTAS would like to thank for the continued and undying support from individuals, companies and well-wishers both within and outside Bhutan, particularly the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (RGOB), Mario & Elsa Fontana (Fontana Foundation), Mr. Koenraad & Leila Foulon, Lynne Fourie, the Capital Group, the Nakadai Inc., Gunma, Japan, Bernina International AG, Switzerland and all other individuals.

With this, I wish you a happy reading of our newsletter.

With love and regards,

Sonam Choki
(Principal)

Introduction of New System

Starting with academic year 2016, we are implementing small changes in the duration of the course. Currently the course is very long and our research has shown that this long duration is the main reason for students to drop out before completing the course. The students leave school to pursue job opportunities, which allow them to work and earn money. Students also have to leave school to earn money to support their families. Previously, students leaving school before the completion of the program (5 to 7 years) did not receive a certificate to discourage them from dropping out. Leaving school without a certificate has a negative impact on their chances in the job market or if they want to go through further training later in their life.

Furthermore, the old system did allow new students to only enroll in the first year of any course. First time admission to any other levels was not allowed. As a result, we only have very few students in our advanced classes. These advanced classes are not fully utilized. Therefore, we had many meetings within ourselves and many well-wishers and friends, formal and informal, on how to address this problem and how to move forward. We agreed on the following changes.

Objective:

1. Divide the course into 3 different levels: basic, advanced and professional level to reduce the drop out rate.
2. Students who do not want to move on to the advanced level can leave the program after completion of the basic studies with a basic completion certificate, giving them better opportunities in the job market.
3. If, later in life, these students wish to upgrade their skills they have the opportunity to enter the advanced class, by paying a nominal fee. Additional income received from students entering the advanced level classes will help in the sustainability of the school.
4. The school can offer more to interested students and the school will have more committed students in all levels.
5. A lot of unnecessary works with drop outs and management works will be reduced.

New Admission - CTAS Enrolls 33 New Students

This years' CTAS new admission interviews were held on the 10th March 2016 in the school premises. A total of 115 students came for the admission test, applying for 28 vacancies (13 boys & 15 girls). Due to lots of pressure from the students especially those coming from very far away places the school admitted 5 additional students, making it a total of 33 students (18 boys & 15 girls) for 2016. Now we have a total of 145 students (96 boys & 49 girls) studying in our school.



New Admission Interview Session 2016

Parents-Teachers Meeting

The Parent Teacher meeting is held twice a year with the aim to build good relations between parents and teachers and also to update them on latest developments. The 1st Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM) was held on 5th March 2016. During the meeting the principal shared and discuss with the parents the schools' policies, issues and challenges and plans to further strengthen the school.

During the meeting the principal also informed the parents that starting with academic year 2016 the course structure will be more flexible for the conveniences of the students and the school. Parents welcomed this new set-up and everyone agreed that it will not only benefit the students who cannot study for several years, for personal or other reasons, but also help reduce unnecessary expenses for the school.

In the conclusion Aum Dema from Kuenga Rabten, Trongsa and Tsheten Dorji working as Royal Body Guard from Punakha thanked all the teachers, Dasho Choki and the principal for the support given to the children of poor families. "We will never forget the support given to the children by donors and financial supporters. Their help allowed the students to get an education and to lead an independent life. We will always be grateful and pray for their long and happy lives."



Capital Group Companies Supports Fencing, Drainage & CCTV

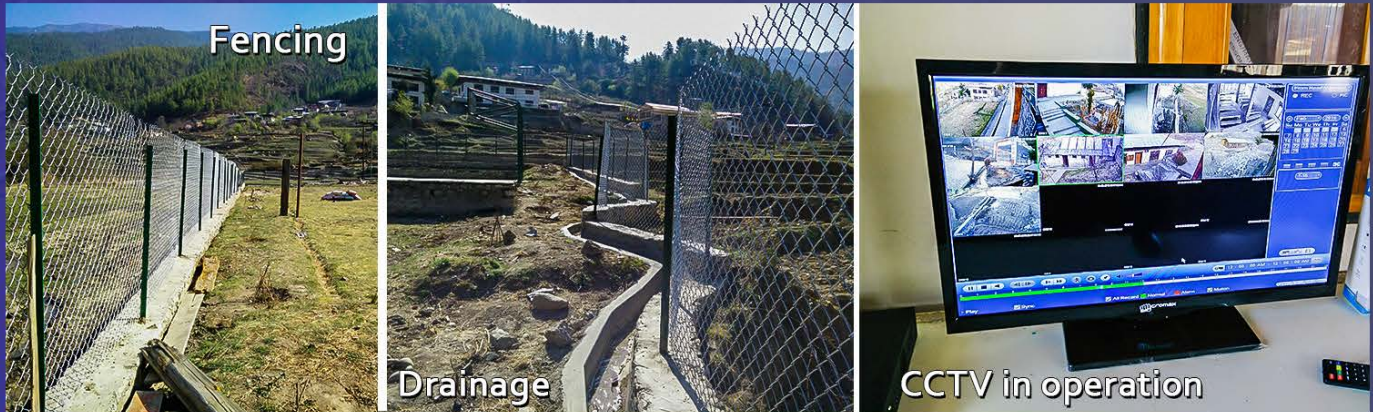
We are very fortunate to receive continued support from Capital Group Companies and Mr. Koenraad Foulon for their generous donation of USD \$19,228 for wire mesh based fencing, the improvement of the drainage system and the installation of CCTV at the school's campus.

The school's drainage system, especially in the lower area of the school, was in poor shape and under constant threat during monsoon seasons because of unexpected amounts of rainfall in the area. In addition, since the area is constantly filled with rainwater, no proper farming, like a vegetable garden, could be done in the area. Now, with the completion of this drainage, starting with the new academic year, we are able to plant a vegetable garden, thus adding another activity for our students.

This project was successfully completed in February 2016 and the total cost was \$ 20,929. The construction of the wire fence, the drainage and the CCTV installation (Dahua Technology installed a CCTV system with nine cameras at various strategic areas on the campus) have improved the overall security and help protect the school against stray animals and trespassers, students misusing the fence full of holes at their own will

and without proper permissions. They also help prevent serious soil erosion on the campus due to flood, especially during the monsoon seasons.

We express our appreciation and gratitude to Capital Group Companies and Mr. Koenraad Foulon for providing their generous support to successfully complete these important constructions and CCTV installation on our campus.



CTAS Starts Growing Vegetables on Campus

With proper fencing and a water drainage system installed, we are able to grow organic vegetables in the school. On 23rd March, a talk for two hours was organized to teach students and staff how to plant and tend a vegetable garden. Aum Tshering, local farmer and expert in growing vegetables and fruits, was invited to share her knowledge and experience with our students and staff.

Aum Tshering said, in modern Bhutan, most young people nowadays look down on the job of growing vegetables and are not interested in gardening. She said if the students have some basic idea and knowledge of growing vegetables for their own home consumption provides many benefits. Knowing how to grow vegetables in season will not only provide a nutritious variety of organic food but will also promote good health which will contribute to lifelong happiness.

The program helped answer many questions the students had and together with Aum Tshering the representative of the house members and leaders made a vegetable growing plan for the year. Aum Tshering volunteered to provide her support and guidance by visiting the school thrice a year. The students have now started supplying the school kitchen with vegetables like spinach, coriander and radishes. They are very proud and excited to see first successes in their garden.



CTAS Plants 35 Cypress Trees

To celebrate the birth of our Gyalsey (Crown Prince), a national celebration was held all across Bhutan on 6th March 2016. To mark this joyous occasion people from all 20 Dzongkhangs (district) planted a total of 108,000 trees in just one day. The planting began at 10 am with His Holiness the Je Khenpo (Head of the Religious) reciting the prayers following which approximately 108,000 Bhutanese planted the trees simultaneously.

The 108,000 trees were chosen according to Tendrel Initiative, as the number “108” in Buddhism denotes the cleansing of 108 defilements that impede beings from attaining enlightenment. “Therefore, we have 108 beads in rosary, 108 Chortens. The act of planting 108,000 trees thus equates to invoking and soliciting all the aforementioned blessings.”

The species planted differ from dzongkhag to dzongkhag depending on the climate and soil. It was a very special moment and all the students in CTAS also participated in this joyous occasion by planting 35 cypress trees on the school premises.



“Stay Clean” - Keeping our Campus Clean

To make our school a beautiful, green, clean and healthy learning environment, Boonserm Tours and Travel, Thimphu donated 10 dustbins to the school. The school teaches the students the purpose and importance of cleanliness in our daily lives. Cleanliness makes us healthy mentally, physically, socially and intellectually. Cleanliness is absolutely necessary to maintain our healthy lifestyle and standard of living.

To further strengthen this initiative, Boonserm Tours and Travel donated 10 big plastic dustbins to place in every corner of the school premises so that students develop a habit to dispose the waste properly and thus prevent infections from spreading. We thank Boonserm for their support and commitment to help raise awareness and promote cleanliness.



Bhutan Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Collaboration with Shopkeepers

The School, in collaboration with shopkeepers of Choki Khangzang building, organized an arts and crafts exhibition from 15th to 25th March 2016, at Kawanjangsa, Thimphu. The objective was to promote the schools crafts and to provide a networking opportunity for our students with professional craftsmen. It was a successful event and our work received lot of admiration from the people who visited the exhibition. Among the exhibitors was a consortium of ex students from the school.

The shopkeepers agreed to contribute 2% of their sale proceeds to the school as their kind gesture towards the school. With the sale picking up in CK building, we expect some sale proceeds coming to the school.



Freshers' Welcome Night

This years' Fresher Night program was held on 19th March 2016. As usual this event is organized to welcome all our students and to create a platform for students to get to know each other. The new students introduce themselves while the senior students welcomed them by organizing a cultural program. The program included dances (modern, traditional, English and solo songs). Choki families, staff and students attended the 2-hour program.



His Holiness Lama Khuba Rimpoches' Visit

His Holiness Khuba Rimpoche from Thailand, Bangkok visited CTAS on 24th March. Rimpoche was very proud of the school's achievements and was very impressed by the development that has taken place since his first visit to the school in 2005. He was very happy to meet all students and some people from the village. Rimpoche said it's very important that students follow the basic principles of noble truth such as not to lie, not to kill, not to steal and not distract the relationship of others and to help each other in all possible ways.

A short cultural program was organized by the school as a gesture of our appreciation. Later in the day Rimpoche offered lunch to students and the local community and donated with his blessing a fund of US\$ 3000 as his contribution to the school's sustainability fund.

On 1st April His Holiness Lama Khuba Rimpoche along with Lama Ven Vicitta, Doctorate in Philosophy from Oxford University USA visited CTAS for the second time. During this second visit His Holiness Lama Khuba and Lama Ven Vicitta gave a brief talk on Buddhism and shared their wisdom with all students and staff. Everyone felt very blessed and enlighten by their words of wisdom.



Participation in "A New Perspective Event"

In collaboration with Le Meridian Paro, Riverfront hotel "A new perspective event" was organized on 2nd April 2016. 9 students and 4 staff members, including the Principal, participated in the program. The Principal gave a brief presentation of the school while the students demonstrated their skills and the staff sold some of the items to the visitors.

The purpose of the visit was to collaborate and then learn from the exposure and interaction. The 2-hour program provided the opportunity to interact with the people from the hotel, some local performers and tourists. This was first time we collaborated with hotel and was a good exposure and experience for the students and the members of staff.



Mario Fontana Visits CTAS

Mr. Mario Fontana, President of Fontana Foundation visited CTAS twice this summer on 3rd April and on 6th July 2016. In Mr. Mario's address to the students, he stated that to be productive citizen one should obtain the knowledge and make use of the resources available at CTAS. One should aim to make CTAS as the model school, he said.

During his visits, Mario visited all the classrooms, the wood production unit and exhibition room. Another highlight of his visit was to oversee the successful installation of leased-line Airmux-based Internet in the school, especially for the staff and computer class.



CTAS Alumni Association Meeting

The CTAS Alumni Association meeting was held on 2nd April 2016 at our Assembly ground. 18 alumni participated in the 3-hour meeting. The meeting was held to discuss issues and plan the activities for the year.

During the meeting it was also discussed how the communication between the school and the Alumni could be organized to improve the running of the Association. Following some members' suggestion to include additional focal persons to cater to a growing number of alumni living across the country now, five additional vice chairpersons were appointed (two males and three females) to function as focal persons.

The alumni also expressed their support by giving short talks to the students on their experience and by sharing their success story. It was a very successful meeting and we hope this good spirit will encourage our present students to follow their footstep.



Alan Bickell and Patricia Visits CTAS

Alan Bickell and Patricia are one of the generous supporters of CTAS. They visited CTAS on 8th April 2016 together with their daughter Valerie.

It was a very good opportunity for all the students and staff to welcome Alan and his family after their last visit in April 2012. All the students and staff were happy to see them and welcomed them with a traditional welcome ceremony.

In the welcome address the Principal thanked Alan, Patricia and Valerie for their visit to CTAS and for their continued support. The Principal also gave a brief update on what is happening at the school. After the visit of all the classrooms and exhibitions, students performed a short cultural program. The day ended with Tashi Labay (Concluding dance to bring good luck, health and happiness).



School Rimdo (Buddhist Ritual)

The 2nd annual school rimdo (a Bhutanese ritual ceremony) was held on 20th April 2016 at our multi-purpose hall. This year's rimdo was presided over by Lama Karma, Vice-Principal of Tango Buddhist University.

These rituals are normally performed for the well being of all sentient being. At CTAS this ritual is especially conducted for the well being of our Country, for all our students, supporters, donors, well wishers and for our own school's future. All the students, teachers and a few local people joined the rimdo, which went very well to everyone's satisfaction.

Later in the evening, Lama Karma also gave a brief talk on the importance of being mindful of what we do in our life and that we have to be responsible for every action that we take. Such knowledge and wisdom from Lama has inspired all of us to be a better person.



A Token of Appreciation in Loving Memory of Mr. David Bidwell

A Jangchub Chorten was built in the loving memory of Mr. David Bidwell. It was inaugurated on 1st May 2016 in the presence of his wife Jennifer Bidwell, Lyn - the eldest daughter of Mr. David and her family.

Mr. David Bidwell was the first supporter and well-wisher of CTAS. He is a very important person to CTAS and his contribution to the growth of this school is enormous. He has always been the source of inspiration and provided immense efforts and support in every possible ways to make this school a success.



Jangchub chorten (Stupa) in Buddhism is the representation of mind and is considered a very powerful tool to help attain a better birth in a higher realm in the next life. May his soul rest in peace and CTAS will always remain grateful for his contribution.



The School Foundation Celebration

On the auspicious day of 18th May 2016, Choki Traditional Art School celebrated the 17th anniversary of its founding. This year we had His Excellency Hon'ble Nima Sangay Chenpo, Minister of Labor and Human Resource as our Chief Guest, other guests came from various institutions, handicrafts and alumni, private visitors and well-wishers also attended the celebration.

In the address by the Hon'ble Chief guest, His Excellency mention that to preserve our traditional culture, arts and crafts more such privates school should be built. As our visionary king fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuk said in his speech "today's youth is the leader of tomorrow, to fulfill one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness, one should study hard and uphold the country's cultural, art and crafts." His Excellency awarded the certificates to the 11 graduating students of 2015, an appreciation certificate to our outgoing alumni Chair person and vice chairperson. Certificates for the best teacher and students of the year 2105 were also awarded. After the visit to the classrooms and the exhibitions, students performed traditional and modern dances as well as mask dances over lunch. As usual, we concluded the day with the dance and song of Tashi Labay.



Teachers' Day

The 2nd day of every sixth month of a year coinciding with the Birth Anniversary of our Late Third Druk Gyalpo King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, is celebrated as the Teachers' Day in Bhutan. CTAS also celebrated Teachers' day in our own ways. The day began with the lighting of butter lamps. Our students took their own initiatives to make their arrangements and surprised the teachers and staff by giving small gifts as a token of their gratefulness.

Students also performed their dances and songs as their expression of gratitude to the teachers. Later the students surprised the staff by inviting them to do some dances with them. The program which was coordinated by students themselves was enjoyed thoroughly by both staff and students. May the relation of teachers and students flourish in all times to come!!!



Outreach Program on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

The Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education gave a talk on the following youth related issues on 4th June 2016:

1. Substance Abuse and Gang Fights
2. Teenage Pregnancy
3. Peer Education and its benefit

The awareness talk was very useful and eye opening for many of our students who come from remote places. They had very little knowledge about peer education and most of the issues covered in the awareness talk. Given the impact that this awareness provided, the Department of Youth agreed to provide another round of counseling sessions to our school and in particular to the school captains.



Leased-line Internet Connection

CTAS is now connected with a leased line Internet with a 3 mbps dedicated Airmux-based line from Bhutan Telecom. Until then, CTAS has been using a pre-package based broadband connection which was erratic and much slower. With this new leased line, the school hopes to provide a much more reliable Internet connections to the staff and students at the school. We are currently in process of developing appropriate Internet curriculum for the students so that the students use the Internet optimally and without been drawn to its numerous negative aspects. We like to sincerely thank Mario Fontana for the initiative to provide this wonderful facility for the school.

Alumni Speak to the Students

On the 25th June 2016, Sangay Tenzin CTAS Alumni chairperson 2015, Mani Dorji, CTAS Alumni chairperson 2016 and Yeshe Dorji, CTAS Vice Chairperson 2016 visited our school and shared their experiences and knowledge. The program was initiated by them to encourage our students to continue their full courses to have better opportunities later in their life. Their words of wisdom should also help bring down the number of drop outs.

Mani Dorji (CTAS Alumni Chairperson 2016) an ex- Lhadi/painting student who did not complete his course shared that now he is lacking knowledge and experience in some painting work. "I left this school without completing the full course in painting and now when I get the opportunity to do bigger jobs I face difficulties. I would like to advice all my friends that it is very important to complete the entire course if possible to avoid these difficulties and challenges later in life."

An open discussion session gave students and Alumni ample opportunities to ask questions and share their views, to interact and increase the understanding of each other. Such interaction of both the present and past students has helped and motivated our young students to make good decisions and build confidence. The school would like to thank our Chairperson and vice chairperson for sharing their thoughts with the students.



Creativity Art Project

The school is now well equipped with the basic infrastructure and facilities to provide quality training in the traditional skills. However, we face enormous challenges to convert our products into marketable items, which are unique and attractive in the market. Students who are enrolled here have very limited exposure to innovation and creativity. Therefore, an introduction to proper creative designing will immensely help students to find new ideas and become more creative. Their work will be more diverse and add opportunities to their future income.

We would like to thank the Sir Peter Ustinov Foundation for implementing a Creative Art Program (CAP) at CTAS in the field of tailoring.

The aim is to purchase five additional sewing machines along with the service of two teachers/experts for a month's time. These investments will allow CTAS to implement a first year CAP. The students will become capable of producing new and unique tailoring products that can be sold in the market. This program will also enhance the sustainability of the school in the long run.

Under the CAP, the following three programs will be conducted:

1. Tailoring training by a local expert for the duration of two weeks (16th – 31st June 2016).
2. Tailoring training by Pia Welsch, Switzerland in Oct 2016 to help in developing design, teach quilt-techniques and combining weaving, embroidery and quilting.
3. Training by Judith Mundwiler & Gabi Mett, Switzerland in May 2017 in pattern creation and designing. They will help in souvenir development and creation.

The first 2-week tailoring training in June 2016 by local trainers was successfully completed. This program helped to further improve the quality of the traditional designs and assist explore new ideas and techniques of dress making and religious items. We were unable to achieved this before due to a lack of equipment and expertise.



Regent Lighting Inauguration

On 4th July 2016, in the presence of Mr. Mario Fontana, Fontana Foundation a small inauguration of Regent Lighting ceremony was conducted at CTAS Authentic Bhutanese Furniture showroom in Kawangjansa, Thimphu.

The school is very fortunate to received 11 high qualities LED lamps and eight tracks systems from the Regent Lighting Company, Switzerland. This lighting equipment was brought to the school by Mario and Lena during their visit to Bhutan in June.

The school would like to thank Regent Lighting for this wonderful gift. It is making our furniture showroom very attractive. It will definitely help to increase our business and ultimately support our school's sustainability.



Aum Singay Bidha, Mother of Sonam Tshering Shares Her Story

I am very proud of my son and what he has learned so far. Sonam is my second eldest son and I am very happy with his achievement. Since my husband cannot hear and speak, it was very difficult for me to bring up these kids in the village by myself. I couldn't continue to support his education after he studied class three and I had to take him out of the school to help me look after the cows. Fortunately, my son heard about CTAS and he really wanted to learn arts. He dreamed of doing something better for himself. We were fortunate that he got admitted and received support from the school.



My son did not only learn in school, but during his vacation he was able to earn some money and support our family as well. I am very proud that very soon he will now graduate and will be able to lead his life like any other decent person. Our family would like to thank the school and all the supporters for giving such golden opportunities to poor families like ours.

Sonam Tshering Shares His Story



As my mother said, my family and I are very fortunate to get this support from the school. I feel my life is very complete and I'm in a much better position now than I could ever have imagined. As my mother said, the most wonderful part of this education in this school is that we learn and at the same time if we work hard we are in position to generate some pocket money for ourselves and are able to help our family too.

Since I will be graduating this year, I would like to request all my beloved friends to never give up their studies and work hard to get to the final year like myself. I know it's very tempting when people offer us attractive money to do work for them but I feel it's very important that we complete our course so that we will have better work opportunities later.

My advice to my friends is that they should never indulge in relationships while studying, avoid alcohol, drugs and smoking.

I am very grateful to the school and to all the supporters for making me the man I have become. Further I am very grateful to the school for appointing me as leader of the mask dance and providing me the opportunity to teach and interact with many students. I have gained lots of experience and wisdom. As my small contribution and as expression of my gratitude I would like to volunteer maybe once or twice in a year to visit CTAS and teach mask dancing to our younger students. May CTAS grow further and help many more students across the country like myself and bring lots of happiness to everyone. Kadinchey la!

TO SUPPORT US, PLEASE CONTACT US AT THE FOLLOWING ADDRESSES:

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