

CHOKI TRADITIONAL ART SCHOOL



*Thangka of Guru Dragpo, painted at
Choki Traditional Art School*

NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Kuzuzangpola!

It is my pleasure to present you our summer 2017 newsletter with all the highlights of - usual as well as new - activities that concern our school during the first half of this year.



First and foremost, a record number of 118 new applicants (98 boys and 20 girls) seeking admission at our school turned up against the advertised intake of just 35 students. At the end, not foregoing our goals of helping as much under-privileged youths as possible, the school for the first time, admitted 18 additional boys as day-scholars thereby admitting a record number of 55 new students (including 19 girls) this year.

Since CTAS strives to achieve the sustainability of its operation in the near future, we are happy to note a few notable developments which can have direct impact on achieving this long-term goal. First, for the first time, the school held a formal meeting with all its alumni who have every intention to contribute in their own small ways in order to keep the school's programs running successfully for many years to come. In a moving gesture, all the alumni collectively offered a Ku-sung-thuk (body-speech-mind) Mandala to our founder Dasho Choki Dorji as a humble sign of their gratitudes. Secondly, the Creativity Art Program (CAP) of the school got more impetus through direct support of Ustinov Foundation where one of our staff Ms. Cheychey got trained in Germany for a period of one month while Mrs. Judith and Mrs. Gabi joined the school later for one month to teach the students on how to blend modern and traditional designs seamlessly and in a non-destructive manner to create marketable products such as Bhutanese souvenirs.

CTAS wishes to express its sincere gratitude to Alan and Patricia Bickell for their generous donations which enabled us to renovate the boys' toilet and bathroom facilities which required urgent repair and expansion works.

I feel extremely proud to share among our supporters and well-wishers that our founder Dasho Choki Dorji was also one of the official recipients of the Certificate of Appreciation from the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Royal Government of Bhutan for his tireless contributions in the vocational education (traditional arts and crafts sector) during the first ever TVET (Technical and Vocational Education Training) Symposium held on 23 June 2017.

Besides our usual and planned events all of which were conducted successfully, the school expresses its sincere gratitude to Mr. Mario Fontana from Fontana Foundation for his sincere commitment and support and also for visiting our school as much as he can.

With this, I hope you will enjoy going through our newsletter which I am sure will update you, in a brief, of all the happenings at CTAS during the last six months. Do feel free to contact us at any one of the addresses mentioned on the last page of this newsletter for any information from us or simply visit our website at www.chokischool.com.

I on behalf of all the staff and students would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the supporters and well-wishers for enabling us to continue helping these under-privileged youths and also promoting and preserving Bhutan's rich cultural heritage.

We look forward to your continued belief and support for our school.

Thank you.

Sonam Choki

New Admission – CTAS Enrolled 55 New Students including Day Scholars

For the 2017 academic year we had again the large number of 118 applicants (98 boys and 20 girls) coming from almost all 20 districts of Bhutan against an advertised intake of 35 (15 boys and 20 girls). Notably, for the first time, we also received six applicants possessing Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificates (equivalent to K-12 standards in the United States). This highlights and confirms the growing issue of youth unemployment and decreasing opportunities of further studies (mainly in government colleges) for Bhutanese students after K-12 levels. However, CTAS adopted its already advertised criteria, which favor primarily the neediest and deserving applicants based on the applicants' capabilities, interest, their age and socio-economic backgrounds and not just their school qualifications alone. This ultimately ensured fair and transparent admission procedures for which all the parents expressed their appreciations.

Nonetheless there was huge pressure from parents and youths who couldn't get admission in the school. Almost all requests come from genuine parents of disadvantaged students who have taken a lot of time and efforts to come from remote villages. These youngsters have no other alternatives elsewhere, CTAS management therefore agreed to admit, for the first time, 18 additional boys in a day school system, with a nominal monthly tuition fee of Nu. 1500 (USD 23) If these students perform and progress well as per the rules and regulations of the school they will be given full scholarship for the next year.

36 boys including 18 day school students and 19 girls, making it a total of 55 students newly admitted in 2017. Now we have a total of 165 students (49 girls and 116 boys) studying at our school.



Parents of the applicants attending the briefing session from school administration

Parents - Teacher Meeting

This year the first half parents- Teacher meeting was held on 18th March 2017 at CTAS assembly ground. The main propose of holding such meeting is to share the policies and plans of the school and to establish good relationships between parents.

During the meeting the Principal informed parents about the introduction of a new system that was planned last year and the enrollment of 17 day school students. The principal and some of the teachers also explained the school diary 2017 activities, how to record in it and the uses of the diray for further use with the management.

In conclusion Apa Karma Tshering from Changjiji, Thimphu thanked Dasho Choki Dorji for his profound thought in establishing the school, the Principal, staff and all the supporters within and outside the country for rendering their support and offering these opportunities to the families and their children.



Freshers' Welcome Night

This year's Fresher's Night was held on 18th of March 2017. As usual this event is organized each year to create a platform for the new students and the old ones to get to know each other. The 2 hour program started at 6 pm and was hosted by Lopen Kinzang Tenzin by introducing the new students followed by the welcoming by the older students with a short culture program consisting of Dzongkha, Nepali, joker dance and solos songs etc. to express a warm welcome to the new students.

The Choki families, staff and students of CTAS attended the show.



CTAS' 1st General Meeting of the Year with Alumni

The first half alumni association meeting of chairmen and vice chairmen was held at Multiple Purpose Hall at CTAS on 1st April 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the activities for 2017, transferring responsibilities from the old Chairperson to the newly appointed Chairperson, discussing plans and the way forward for 2017, suggestions and feedback on the improvement of the association and lastly the offering of Ku-Sung-Thug (Body, speech and mind) blessing ceremony offering to Dasho Choki Dorji on his 80th birthday, coinciding with our school rimdo.

The present and the former chairperson, CTAS Alumni representatives, the Principal and few staff members attended the meeting.



The third annual school rimdo (a Bhutanese ritual ceremony) was held on 12th April 2017 at our multi-purpose hall. This year rimdo was presided over by the Lama Dawa Gyeltshen from Punakha Dzong.

Such rituals are normally performed for the well being and happiness of all the sentient being- including all our students, staff, supporters, donors, well wishers and for our own school's future.

This year the school Rimdro or blessing ceremony was made very unique and special. Our alumni sponsored additional arrangements such as offering of Ku-Sung-Thu (body, speech and mind) mandrel to Dasho choki Dorji on his 80 year of age as an expression of their love and gratitude for his dedication and moral support. The body, speech and mind blessing ceremony is offered for good health, happiness and for the continued prosperity in life.

Further the alumni also organized a purification and long life blessing ceremony early in the morning for all the students, teachers and their families.

At the end of the day everyone felt very connected, some of our negative karmic action purified and blessed and the bond of our alumni and students thriving.



Mario Fontana Visits CTAS

On the 22nd April 2017 Mr. Mario Fontana, President of Fontana Foundation visited CTAS. In his address to the students, he stated that the school has come a very long way and that he is happy to see that the school is making good use of the facilities and support.

Mr. Mario visited, the classrooms, the creativity class, the furniture showroom and met with the Principal.

On the same day Mr. Mario Fontana inaugurated the newly renovated Boys toilet and bathroom funded by Mr. Alan and Mrs. Patricia Bickell.



The Boys Toilet & Bathroom Renovated and Modified

The old toilet for the boys had deteriorated over the years and was in need of urgent major repairs and modifications. The need for renovation became more urgent as the number of students, especially the boy students, increased.

The school is very fortunate to have received financial support for the renovation from Mr. Alan and his wife Patricia Bickell. The project was started in Mid December 2016 and was completed in April 2017.

The newly renovated boys toilet now has separate urinals, four separate bathrooms with full privacy, adequate toilets, an additional washing area outside including a concrete based hand wash basin, repaired water taps and an additional water tank which now ensures 24 hours water supply for the new facilities.

This new construction will now immensely help more than 100 boy students who are studying at the school by providing them a convenient, clean, modern, well-drained and a less congested washroom and bathroom facilities. These facilities now have improved our boys' health and safety and offer privacy and dignity. Our boy students are certainly very happy and proud of this new facility.

CTAS remains very grateful to Alan and Patricia Bickell for this very generous support.



BEFORE



AFTER

Teachers' Day

On the 2nd day of the third month as per the Bhutanese calendar coinciding with the birth anniversary of our Late Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, Father of Modern Bhutan 'Teachers' Day' is celebrated in Bhutan. CTAS, the only private school in Traditional Art in Bhutan, celebrated the day in simple way, as always. The students led by coordinators made their arrangements and surprised teachers and the supporting staff. This year this event was celebrated together with our two special guest and teachers Mrs Judith and Mrs Gabi Mett from Switzerland and Germany.

The school captain, on behalf of all the students, gave a brief speech to the teachers and staff thanking them for their love, time and support. Students later performed a short cultural program comprising of traditional and modern dances and songs as token of their expression of gratitude to the teachers and concluded the day with a simple lunch organized by the students for the teachers.



Mr. Mohd Sabir, New Delhi India from L.N Enterprises visited CTAS for 2nd time from 23rd to 29th April 2017.

Mr. Sabir visited CTAS for the first time in April 2012 when the school received the first five BERNINA sewing machines from BERNINA Company, Switzerland.

During his stay at CTAS, Mr. Sabir helped with the repair and maintenance of all the BERNINA machines, taught the students some basic maintenance and shared information and tips on the better use of the machines.



Creativity Art Project Continues

In 2016 we started a Creativity Art Program (CAP) at our school, currently specializing in textile design and souvenir creation in the field of tailoring. This CAP project is sponsored and supported by Ustinov Foundation. The introduction of the creativity courses has created new ideas, experiences and exposures for our students. Further, as the world is opening to the new emergence of technology and developments, it is also very important for artists to experience and be exposed to these new technologies, skills and methodologies to be able to promote and sustain their artistic skills.

The training proved to be a very successful and effective program for the students and will continue to be a valuable addition to the school's curriculum. As a continuation and to sustain this creativity program two important trainings were organized under the financial support from Ustinov Foundation for 2017. Ms. Cheychey training with Pia Welsh, Germany and Judith & Gabi's creativity training at CTAS.



Ms. Cheychey's Training with Pia Welsh, Homburg, Saarland, Germany

Ms. Cheychey whose educational background is in computer hardware and networking, with some leadership experience in school / college and her interest in designing art works also had the opportunity to attend Mrs. Pia Welsch's creativity class at CTAS from 7th October to 5th November 2016.

At the end of Ms. Pia Welsch's training program the idea to employ and train Cheychey as an instructor for creativity classes was conceived based on her interest and capability.

Pia Welsch has recommended this approach and suggested to further train Cheychey in Germany. The school is very fortunate to receive this generous offer from Pia Welsch. Cheychey was in Germany with Pia Welsch for 38 days from 2nd February to 10th March 2017.

The whole idea behind was to help Cheychey develop further confidence, knowledge and explore new ideas and possibilities for the creativity class. During her stay in Germany she had the opportunity to participate in Pia's quilt workshop and quilt exhibition where she met with quilters and textile designers from all over Germany and Europe. The school would like to thank Pia, Mr. Tobias and Mrs. Melanie (Cheychey's host family in Germany) and Peter Ustinov Foundation for supporting Cheychey.



Mrs. Judith Mundiler and Gabi Mett Visit CTAS

Mrs. Judith Mundiler and Gabi Mett were at CTAS from 24th April to 23rd May 2017. Ms. Judith is a professional pattern creator and expert in sewing projects and Mrs. Gabi Mett is a textile designer. The purpose of the visit was to explore more creative ideas for the creativity class and enhance the skills taught by Mrs. Pia Welsch and to learn and combine these new creativity skills with traditional skills and design and thus improve the quality and creativity of our designs.

During the one month training, Judith and Gabi focused on designing products for different applications using different techniques such as patchwork weaving, wave cut techniques, layering with leftovers, machine appliqué, free machine embroidery, free quilting, embellishment, different purses and bags etc while on the other hand exploring and using locally available materials..

The course completed successfully and on the 22nd of May during the closing ceremony, all the items developed during the training were displayed at the MPH for all students, staff and Choki family. Everyone was very happy to see the huge progress and all the students shared good feedback about the successful course. We would like to thanked Mrs. Judith and Mrs. Gabi for their full support and commitment in sharing their valuable skills and knowledge with our students. We also would like to thank Mr. Mario and Arianne for their support for arranging these two professional teachers to visit our school. Our big thank you to Peter Ustinov Foundation for their commitment and continued support of the Creativity Art Program at CTAS.



Vocational Training Institutes Members' Visit to CTAS

On the 26th April 2017 Mr. Marti and Mrs. Patricia from Australia and 27 Principals and head of the different vocational training Institutes across Bhutan visited CTAS. This visit was coordinated by the Training & Professional Service Division, Department of Technical Education, MoLHR, and the Royal Government of Bhutan in collaboration with TAFE New South Wales, Australia.. The objective of the visit was to enable TAFE NSW to obtain a first-hand experience of the challenges of Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) in Bhutan.

The Principal gave a brief overview of the school, vision, mission and objectives, courses, supporters and the sustainability plan of the school etc. The program concluded with a visit to the classrooms and exhibition room and meeting with students and staff. The visitors were very impressed by the school.

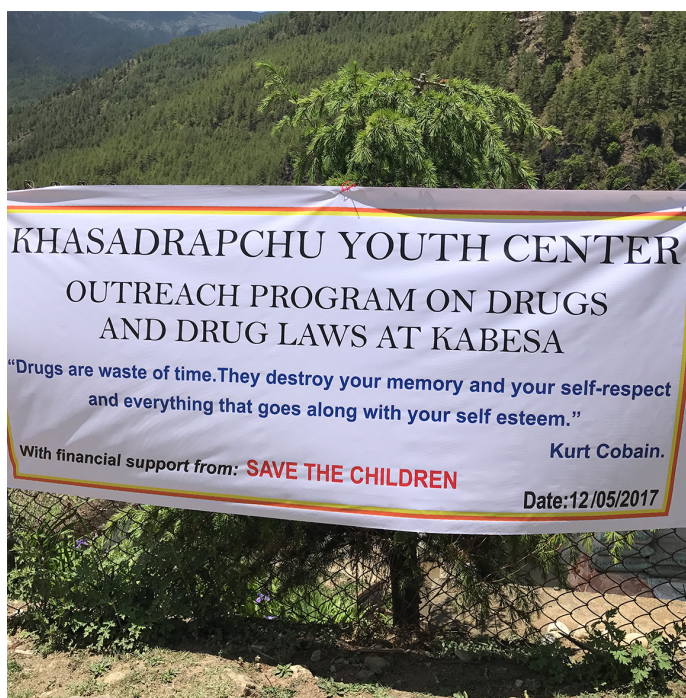


Awareness Program held at CTAS

The local awareness program on substance abuse, such as drugs and alcohol, for the Kabesa community was conducted at CTAS on 12th May 2017. The Khasadrapchu Drug Youth Center gave talks on the legal rules and regulations and their implications.

The focus was put on parents and youths understanding some of the rising trends in drug abuse amongst the young people and their consequences and legal provisions. Drugs and alcohol are harmful to our health. They further destroys the relationships among the family-members and relatives. The Khasadrapchu Drug Youth Center urged the young people to stay away from drugs and try to be a responsible person in the family, school and the society.

The director of the Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency, representative of Kabesa village head, villagers, shopkeepers and students from Kushuchen High secondary school, Dechencholling and CTAS participated in the program.



CTAS Foundation Day

Choki Traditional Art School celebrated its 18th anniversary on the 19th of May this year. The chief Guest was Mr. Kinley Dorji, Director, Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labor and Human Resource, other guests came from various institutions, handicrafts and alumni, a few other well-wishers, the Choki families and our two creativity teachers Mrs. Judith and Mrs. Gabi attended the celebration.

In his address, our chief guest emphasized the importance of setting an achievable goal in our life and be determined and work hard to achieve that goal. He shared his own personal success story, which inspired all of us, particularly our students. The moral of his speech was that life is not easy but not so hard and difficult that we cannot achieve what we desire if we are determined. Mr. Kinley used lots of simple examples and related quotes that made the whole one-hour talk very motivating and inspiring.

The chief guest awarded 14 students with diplomas and 10 students who decided to leave after completion of three years training with certificate level, an appreciation certificate to our outgoing alumni chair person and vice chairperson. Certificates for best teacher and students of the year 2016 were also awarded.

After a visit to the classrooms and the exhibitions, the day concluded with a cultural program consisting of mask dances, the traditional and modern dances presented by the students and finally the dance and song of Tashi Labay.



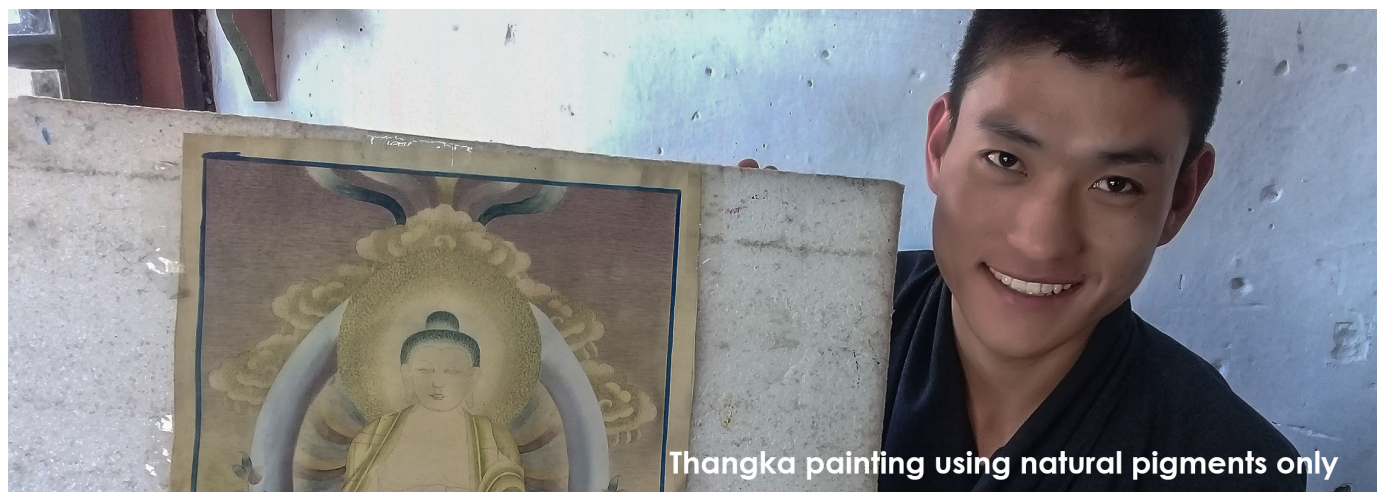
Training on the Preparation of Natural Pigment Continues at CTAS

As a continuation of the 5-day training received from the Agency for the promotion of indigenous crafts (APIC), Ministry of Economic Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan on the preparation of natural pigments last year in November 2016, the school continues to do further studies and experiments on the natural pigment extraction from local plants.

Lopen Dorji and his students worked on further research and extraction of local plants, flower, fruits and vegetable to be used as alternative paints. Once the group was able to get enough pigments we started to experiment with these pigments during our creativity art competition in April.

On 7th May 2017 the group presented their work and research on these natural pigments at the Multiple Purpose Hall of the school for all the students and staff. They displayed all the colours they have extracted and the artwork done using these pigments.

It was a very interesting session for everyone. Most of our students did not know these natural pigments and how to extract them and use them for their artwork. A similar program will also be organised for the textiles and weaving class next year.



CTAS Participates in first TVET Symposium Meeting

The TVET (Technical Vocational Education Training) professional service division, Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, the Royal Government of Bhutan organized the 1st TVET Symposium 2017 with the theme “Celebrating history of TVET in Bhutan – Towards TVET for sustainable Development”. During the two day symposium on 22nd and 23rd of June 2017, altogether five sessions were held, namely:

1. Sharing History and experience of TVET system in Bhutan
2. Sharing of Success Stories in TVET (Success in academic and career)
3. TVET system of Australia
4. History and Practice of Traditional Arts and Crafts in Bhutan
5. TVET for sustainable development were discussed followed by panel discussions.

This symposium also helps to develop a networking platform for promotion and sharing of knowledge, skills, new ideas and values of TVET system. 40 participants from Technical Training Institutes, Institutes of Zorig Chusums (Arts and crafts), private training institutes & industries from all over Bhutan took part in the program.

On the last day of the Symposium, Hon’ble Lyonpo Ngeema Sangay Tshempo, offered an Award of Appreciation and recognition of their life time services of pioneering in the field of TVET to 6 leaders and educators.

Dasho Choki Dorji, the founder of Choki Traditional Arts School was one of the recipients of the award. We are all very proud of his achievements and offer our Tashi Delek to Dasho and all our supporters and well- wishers.



CTAS Pursues Growing of Organic Vegetables in School

Since last year with support from Capital Group Companies through Mr. Koenraad Foulon on the fencing and proper drainage, the school is now motivated to undertake growing of vegetables as one of the activities.

Last year students’ engagement in vegetable growing has proved very successful in terms of reaping the following positive benefits:

- The vegetable growing knowledge has helped to develop interest in the students and has positive impact on the thinking as well as physical wellbeing;
- The variety of vegetables grown will not only provide nutrition to the students’ food but this program in the long run will also contribute towards the sustainability of the school; and
- The knowledge, skills and understanding of the good seasons to grow these vegetables, processes etc. will ultimately contribute in achieving the vision of the country’s Economic Development Policy, 2010: “To promote a green and self reliant economy sustained by an IT enabled knowledge society guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness”.

With this objective in mind, Aum Tshering, a local farmer and expert in growing vegetables and fruits visited CTAS again and shared her knowledge with the captains and house masters.



An Alumnus Shares his Story

My name is Nim Dorji and I graduated from this school in 2007 as part of the 3rd batch. I took Thanka painting as my specialization course and completed 7 years of training. My hometown is Jala, Rubisa geog in the Wangdiphodrang district.

My parents are farmers and we are 5 siblings, I am the second oldest child. I studied only class four at Jala community primary school and then couldn't continue my studies as I had to stay home to help my parents look after the cattle. I worked with my parents in the field for a few years and then when I heard about the school from Lopen Gyeltshen (Dzongkha & prayer teacher at CTAS that time) who is also from our village, I was very excited. I told my parents that I am very interested and that I want to study art. My parents knew that if I get accepted into the program, it would provide me and my family with better opportunities. They decided to send me to CTAS. I got selected during the interview. I was 14 years old when I joined the school in 2000.

I am now married with two children (a girl and a boy). Currently I work in Druk Handicraft which is owned by Sangay Tenzin and Sonam Jurmi who are both ex-students of this school. We are 10 of us who work together and we also export our artwork outside Bhutan on order basis.

The training we received from the school has really helped and changed my life. It has guided me to become a better and able person for which I am very grateful to the school and all the supporters.

Today when I look at myself it brings me enormous joy that I not only have work that sustains my life but also that the artwork we do connects us to people from different walks of life in Bhutan and it enriches my life. I am able to help promote our rich history of arts and crafts in the Country and help my parents and siblings back home in the village. I received good feedback and recognition for the quality work we've done so far.

CTAS has come a long way and the current students are very fortunate to receive and enjoy the value added curriculum and new facilities in the school. I wish the students all the very best for their studies. It is very important that we take this golden opportunity given to us by Dasho Choki, the Principal, teachers and supporters to prove our talents and skills to be a productive citizen of our Country and become a responsible person in our community and in the Country.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone, including all the supporters of our school, for their love and support to make us what we are today... a proud son, supportive brother, a responsible husband and father. Kadenchey and Tashi Delek!



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

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Newsletter Acknowledgements:

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Layout & Design: Sonam Phuntsho
Photography: CTAS Photo-kidz Club