

Education is not a luxury - Access for all

With the educational sponsorship campaign 2013, the Friends of Waldorf Education support Waldorf schools facing difficult economic realities.

Berlin 26.02.2013/KS. With the launch of the campaign for educational sponsorships, the Friends of Waldorf Education, an internationally operating association, reinforce public awareness in 2013. The aim is to point out that foreign Waldorf schools, even though they have to survive without government support, are following the social impulse "Education is not a luxury - Access for all". In recent years the association has emphasized educational sponsorships, as they are often one of the few long-term support tools that can help privately funded Waldorf schools in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, to continue with the admission of students coming from difficult economic backgrounds. As a result more children have access to a child-friendly education.

The number of Waldorf schools and kindergartens is continuing to increase on a worldwide scale. Currently there are 1,026 Waldorf schools and more than 2,000 kindergartens, excluding numerous young Waldorf initiatives that are currently in their development phase. Around the world, parents are looking for alternative educational approaches. The trend is to move away from achievement pressure, a strict state curriculum and overcrowded school classes towards an individual learning atmosphere and a learning environment that takes into account each student and his or her current development.

In many countries, such as South Africa, Guatemala or Poland, Waldorf schools receive no government support. They have to finance themselves and are thus struggling for survival on a daily basis. Nevertheless, these schools strive to also accommodate children whose parents cannot pay school fees or may only be able to do so partially. The Friends of Waldorf Education support these schools through educational sponsorships enabling them to accept more students, especially from low-income families, raised by single mothers or fathers or children without parents. Educational sponsorships are not only beneficial to individual children, but also to whole regions such as in the townships of South Africa, or in post-socialist countries such as Armenia that are severely affected by poverty, violence and unemployment. This is because Waldorf schools play a key role in integrating rich and poor, as well as various ethnic traditions.

In the spring report 2013, Nana Goebel, Chair of the Board of the Friends of Waldorf Education, talks about a win-win situation for both sides: "Through our sponsorship program we aim to enable more and more children to attend a Waldorf school, and hope that many students will feel inspired to help children gain access to education in developing countries or in countries with difficult economic conditions. Such sponsorships can be the beginning of long lasting friendships, which are of mutual benefit. Maybe a visit to the foreign country follows, maybe a language exchange. There are many opportunities for cooperation to be discovered."

A godmother from Finland calls the attention to another important point of the sponsorship program: "Godparents at the Friends of Waldorf Education are not simply paying the school fees of a single child. The children, who are supported through sponsorships, act as ambassadors for all children who are in need of financial assistance at the specific school. I think this is the right approach, because children should not have to compete for the attention of potential sponsors."

Several aspects are important concerning the sponsorship program of the Friends of Waldorf Education that are not necessarily common in development cooperation. The program is not only enabling better access to education, or simply calling for solidarity between Waldorf students worldwide, nor does it only promote the idea that godchildren are ambassadors for all children in need, but the association also forwards sponsorship donations at 100% to the foreign schools. Since its foundation in 1976, transparency concerning money matters is of utmost importance to the organization. Therefore each sponsor may decide for himself how much he or she is willing to donate, and if he or she would like to further participate in the 10% campaign by supporting the association's work, such as the administration of forwarding donations or public relations, with a further 10% on top of the amount donated.

Through these efforts, the Friends of Waldorf Education have been able to attract godparents in Waldorf schools such as parents or students, as well as entire school classes, who learn a lot from the resulting cultural experiences. Accordingly Fabian Michel, coordinator of educational sponsorships, reports that recently two classes from Ljubljana have decided to help children in South Africa by donating two Euros per month per student.

Finally one can already imagine the prospects that are opening up for the sponsored children: "I began to understand just how important sponsorships are when I started to write to strangers on the "other side" of the world and open up my heart to them. They understood me, and I no longer felt alone. The sponsorship went way beyond mere financial support. Over time the exchange of letters developed more and more of a therapeutic character, as I encountered understanding and support when I had to go through some really tough times" says a former sponsored child from South Africa.

Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V.

The Friends of Waldorf Education support more than 600 Waldorf schools, kindergartens, curative education facilities and social projects worldwide in financial and legal matters. The Friends furthermore organize the WOW-Day campaign and promote educational sponsorships, emergency education and community services.

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