

Annual Review
2019-2020



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n i s h t h a

Who we are

Nishtha is a well-established village based NGO, which has been running a very active health and community centre in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh for the past 25 years.

Our main objective is to work for the benefit and development of society as a whole by improving the welfare of families, particularly the most vulnerable women and children.

Our aim is to respond to the felt needs of the local population and adapt our work to the needs of changing times. In all senses our work is holistic, looking perspicaciously into the needs

of the community from health, education and environmental angles.

Our director is **Dr. Barbara Nath-Wiser**, a general practitioner from Vienna, Austria who has been living in Sidhbari since 1984. The Health Centre is dedicated to the memory of her late husband Krishan Nath Baba who was a respected spiritual personality in the area and was concerned about the well-being of the local people.

Our staff of 24 local people work as a well tuned effective team to run the clinic, community centre, farm and outreach programs.

What we do

Nishtha runs a Primary Health Clinic which extends into the surrounding villages through health education, clinics and a program to help single women who suffer greatly from social stigma and lack of opportunities in society. We have a small in-patients' facility which is frequently occupied by long term destitute patients who have nowhere else to go to recover from strokes and other degenerative illness. We also look after a number of children with very severe problems.

Alongside, Nishtha Community Centre reaches into local primary schools and baby crèches improving nutrition, lighting, equipment and educational materials. Children flock to our after school program to borrow books from the library, attend computer classes and enjoy creative activities and sports. We provide sponsorship for needy college students, self-defense & empowerment training for women and gender awareness and Non-Violent communication training for young people and our employees.

Nishtha's team of 6 trained activists reaches out

to over 7,000 single women, widows, separated or divorced women, the most marginalised group in society, many of whom are small farmers, in a radius of 25 km from our centre. They hold village level meetings to give such women a space to talk about their emotional, health, financial and legal issues or concerns for their personal safety. They offer the invaluable service of providing information about and help in accessing government benefits.

Nishtha's highly innovative environment program works to inform and provide solutions to the waste and pollution problems that affect the health of the village. We are particularly concerned about the ever growing plastic waste which we collect and make into blocks for use in construction.

For the past 6 years we have been implementing natural farming methods on a small plot of marginal land, gradually improving its fertility. Our aim is to influence local people to avoid chemical farming and to encourage healthy and sustainable food production.



Message from Dr. Barbara

Looking back in hindsight I marvel at how much we were able to achieve last year. Although we are doing whatever we can in our community during this pandemic, we surely appreciate and rejoice in the extent that we were able to work with so many groups and individuals and in so many fields last year.

Our staff, now totalling 24, including the loss of Radha and the addition of Manju Devi and Vandhana Devi to the single women's team, are the backbone of the Nishtha community. We work hard to build strong teams who work together comfortably and efficiently. By holding regular meetings we facilitate communication and encourage everyone to voice their views. During the year we have held yoga sessions, non-violent communication and empowerment trainings for our staff and two of the younger members have been on trainings to help build their capacity. Our picnic to the camp site at Kareri village, events such as the Rakka Mela in June, Beena Dooj in November

and then the children's and staff Christmas picnics have all provided occasions for us all to open up, relax and enjoy our time together.

I am especially grateful to our temporary medical Doctors, Dr. Sara and Dr. Shreya who worked hard with us in the clinic, as well to our Austrian Civil service volunteers, Luisa, Severen, Julian and Madaban who all played a huge part in the grand scheme of the years activities, as can be seen in the following pages of this freshly conceived report.

We all, from the bottom of our hearts, thank our supporters in Austria, Germany and the UK as well as our local donors, on whose generosity our work depends. We are awed by the dedication of the Trustees of the foreign trusts as well as our own here in India. With all of your support we are confident that we will meet the present challenge to help and sustain the most vulnerable sections of our local village communities who are particularly struggling during this time.



April

April arrives with the mountains still heavily laden with snow after a long, cold winter. The wheat is growing up fresh and vibrantly green on the terraces in front of the gleaming mountains, and the tea gardens spring to life.

The Nishtha single women took part in a colourful rally in Dharamsala, on 4th, organised by Jagori Grameen together with other local NGOs. Our aim is to increase public and official awareness of women's rights. More than 500 people attended, raising their voices against corruption, discrimination and violence.

In celebration of spring, our staff took off on a picnic up into the mountains beyond Kareri village which now has a motorable, if hairy, road. Against the joy of walking through the old village and up to a grassy slope by a pure rushing stream, it is sad to see traditional houses in disrepair and being replaced by modern concrete buildings put up as homestays. There is great demand for accommodation from tourists who can now reach there by car. The campsites are being fenced and possessed by families pleased to make money by charging for tents. Life in the villages is changing fast, but for one day our team were able to enjoy the natural beauty, relaxing, dancing and singing songs. We shared the lunch everyone had brought with them, each one opening their tiffins and dividing the contents, so we all had a rich medley of preparations to enjoy.

The playground team engaged enthusiastically in making soft landings under the swings using old tires and our plastic blocks as padding. We also sold over 200 blocks, sending them away in a jeep to be used for construction. Collecting plastic from over 400 households, mostly the simple villagers who keep it for us, is a regular task for our environment team and keeps us in contact with the local community.

The incinerator which had been leaking smoke was reviewed and tested by Severen one of our two Austrian Civil Service volunteers. After cleaning and igniting properly, it was proved to function correctly. It was then sealed with mud to prevent smoke leaking out and to more effectively contain the heat.

On 24th and 25th April, Radha and Kummo went to SUTRA to submit their three month reports. Although Nishtha terminated working with SUTRA from April, since their financial year ends only in June our activists needed to go to this meeting and hand over their resignations to the SUTRA office.

Nicola, our advisor on the care of disabled children visited this spring and gave various suggestions about adaptations to Sanjoli's wheelchair, how to make Arushi more comfortable and to make two corner chairs of Sanjoli and Shaksham, both cerebral palsy patients. Luisa, our first female Austrian civil servant took on this task industriously and then set about painting the chairs with attractive patterns and bright colours. Nicola had also spent time with a new patient, Bhagwanti who has multiple physical problems but is mentally very alert. She visited her house and, realising the difficulty the mother had carrying her growing 3 year old child up and down the very tricky approach steps, found a baby carrier to make life easier. She also took her some toys and books so she is able to entertain herself.

Around 15 children came every day to the community centre to enjoy the after school programs. We took applications for the new batch of college students to be sponsored and there was plenty of work on the farm going on. In the clinic it was relatively quiet with a total of 285 consultations whilst 241 attended Dr. Kusum's ever popular outreach clinics.



May

In May the fields are transformed from golden wheat to ploughed land as they are prepared for the coming rice planting which will take place next month, as soon as the monsoon rains start. It is hot so we are relieved to have shifted the water filter from Samlekharnath School which is soon to close, down to a convenient spot in the centre of Rakkar village. Although it was cumbersome to move and required a new tank and modifications to the stand, the result is that it can now be accessed by many more families.

Nineteen undergraduate and four MA students including both old and new students have been selected for Nishtha sponsorship. They will attend Sunday afternoon meetings at Nishtha to learn English conversation with our Trustee Puja Anand, improve their computer skills with Vijay and Ankush and form a cultural dance and song group with Vijay Bhadwaj. The students are all very enthusiastic and look great in the local costume which they wore for a photo session with Gauri Gill for our new calendar.

Fourteen of these students participated in a three day Gender Awareness training run by Manju Devi, a highly experienced and effective trainer. Ravindra, our Wenlido trainer and Vijay, who recently undertook gender trainers training at Sambhavana also participated, exercising their training skills. We were delighted to welcome our trustee Kamla Bhasin for a lively musical guest session. These trainings very effectively compel young people to think deeply about themselves and their lives, an opportunity they happily embraced.

With the start of the school year, the children's program took off with lots of outdoor sports including the very popular cycling. In order to improve our stock of bicycles we sold three which are too big for the children and too old to repair and bought two new ones: one small simple one for smaller children and a medium sized bike with gears which the more competent, bigger kids can learn to use. Luisa and Ankush are always there for the children when they are cycling, doing their

best to make sure everyone gets a chance!

Ravindra, Vijay and Ankush visited the book fair held in Dharamsala which had a remarkably good selection of Hindi children's books from all the main publishers. They bought a large selection for main Nishtha library. They also bought duplicates for the outreach book boxes for the schools on the mountainside.

Our latest trainee doctor, David from Newcastle University, joined our Outreach Clinics this month. Organised by the single women activists in remote villages, they provide local women with the opportunity to consult a doctor and receive practical health education. He was very motivated by the level of basic hands on care he could provide for the women in such simple rural settings. Working alongside Dr. Kusum and Ram is a transformative experience for our elective doctors. Our medical team also meet and help our disabled children when they visit the clinic.

On 30th May, after a long illness, Arushi passed away at the age of 17. We first found Arushi when she was only 6 because we came to know her mother who was an anganwari worker. Abandoned by her husband when the child was born and found to have cerebral palsy, Vishvindu took care of the child on her own, carrying her on her back up the hill to the Anganwari when she went to work. When she could no longer carry her, Arushi would be left on her own in the house while her mother went to work. When the Nishtha team became aware of this we organised a helper to stay with the child during the day and Nicola closely supervised chairs and feeding methods which were extremely helpful. We were very grateful to Dr. Sara for supervising her hospital stays and for getting her home before the end.

In May the clinic staff are busy preparing calendula ointment which is a wonderful healing salve. Fresh flowers grown in our garden are part dried and soaked in linseed oil. After straining it is warmed gently with beeswax.



June

Rakkar Mela is held at the beginning of June by the temple on Rakkar Road. It is a lively event which enables us to make direct contact with our village community, focusing on different issues each year. This year we felt particularly concerned about the environment and adopted a slogan 'Our World is Dying' which we made into lapel stickers so people were able to advertise concern for the state of the environment wherever they were in the Mela. Our stall always draws a lot of attention and interest.

The bi annual Single women's block meetings were held this month. The meeting for Rait block was held in Ladwara whilst the Dharamsala, Kangra and Nagrota block meetings were held on 14th June in Nishtha Community Centre Hall. Each were attended by around 70 participants. These meetings enable the activists to inform the women about recent updates of the Government schemes through which they can apply for aid. This time these included agricultural insurance, medical insurance, the widow's pension scheme, Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojna, a scheme to benefit destitute women and girls, home loans and information about updating their Aadhar cards. The meeting in Nishtha was also attended by Rohit Katoch and Roji Katoch, Dharamsala district court advocates, who carefully listened to the women's individual legal problems and gave them appropriate advice.

Despite the persistent rain this year the onion crop on the farm is bountiful, providing a good supply for our school feeding program. Our farming team: Sunil, Sunita and Vandhana are busy planting, weeding and mulching the ground, protecting it from the heat of the sun and the coming monsoon rains which if allowed, will leech all the goodness out of the earth.

Mohinder takes every opportunity to talk to groups who come to see our environment program at work. The team are busy making plastic blocks and storing them in the newly reinforced loft in the garbage centre. The new advanced play centre on the ground is now complete and the children love it! A special thank you to Evelin Stingl from Austria who takes such an interest in the children's program during her visits that she initiated the idea and paid for it.

During the first three months of this year the clinic has seen an average of 287 patients a month and the outreach clinic an average of 233 attendees a month. This means that an average of 35 women attended every outreach camp and 20 patients a day are seen in the clinic.

Sadly, Dr. Sara is leaving us this month after more than a year working as a doctor in the clinic, as she has to return to her family. We hope she will return. She has been particularly helpful in giving special attention to our disabled children. Bhagwanti now comes regularly to the clinic for medicines and the twins Sejal and Sonakshi, who are on growth hormone therapy, come every two months for their checkups. Nishtha pays for their treatment with funds provided by the Meyer family.

Sanjoli is now very happy with her super padded wheelchair arrangement which enables her to sit more comfortably. She was really encouraged by meeting and spending time with Chhotu, a 40-year-old man who also has cerebral palsy, who came to stay nearby. Baby, her helper also learned a lot from his carers about how to make her more comfortable with cushions and supports. She is now 12 years old and growing very fast.



July

Nishtha's summer holiday program for the local kids was run with the invaluable help of Ravinder Kaur, an experienced teacher from Delhi, who has been coming to Rakkar and giving her time to the Nishtha children's program for the past few years. This year she specifically came for the school summer vacation to involve the children in an intensive program of activities. Along with our Community Centre team: Ravindra, Vijay and Ankush, she structured a whole month program leading up to and including a week committed to the environment.

At the beginning of the month 20–25 children joined the program but then some went away for their holidays, leaving 12–15 kids everyday. The two Ravindras started the day with energetic games to use up some physical energy, followed by a session of Hindi and English story telling. The children would then settle down to their school subject homework with the help of the teachers. At lunchtime they were given seasonal fruits and a healthy snack to boost their energy for the after lunch program of creativity, games and sports.

Ravindra Kaur very kindly brought many environment related materials including videos, songs, posters and books with her from Delhi. We used this material topic wise, a few days looking at water problems, then air pollution, deforestation and so on. We showed the videos and discussed the issues and solutions presented. The next day the children drew what came to mind from thinking about these topics.

In the second week, each child took a plant pot and decorated it beautifully. Then Mohinder took them onto the farm where they learned how to fill it with layers of soil, compost and gravel. Finally they planted marigold seedlings and stood them on the balcony. Every day the children watered their plants and watched how they grew. In the meantime they worked on a program of songs, readings and skits which they performed at the end of the

month for the Nishtha staff. They had decorated the Community Centre hall with drawings and posters made during the previous weeks. Their skits were excellent and they chanted slogans made up by themselves. Finally they sang a very catchy song about not throwing plastic here and there.

Nishtha environment team was invited by the Tenacious Bee Collective to address a meeting of local women in the Badsar Panchyat near Jia. Our team was invited by Kirna Devi, the village Mayor, to present Nishtha's ground breaking work on managing plastic waste in Rakkar village. The local women were very happy and agreed to make use of waste plastic as sitting mats. Sunita talked about Nishtha's single women program and invited the single women who were at the meeting to join the Single Women's forum.

Eighteen girls participated in a very successful Wenlido three day training from 5th to 7th July run by our trainers Ravindra and Deepa assisted by Vandhana. Most of the girls were from our sponsorship group. Some of them were experiencing this training for the second time so were able to give some assistance to the trainers as well as helping guide discussions. The girls learned correct self-defence techniques and about being aware of negative energy or attitudes directed at you and how to respond on those occasions in time. The girls come away from these trainings feeling more confident to speak up against abusive talk around them and knowing more about themselves and their bodies

Nishtha Activist Vijay attended a very useful four day workshop in Sambhavana facilitated by Project Rise on understanding how to raise gender conscious boys. He learned how to approach the boys through very specific and effective modules which will help them to modify their attitudes towards women and girls. He is now equipped with facilitator skills so he can hold transformative workshops for adolescent boys.



August

During August, our peak monsoon period when the children have to play indoors, Nishtha sponsorship students used their weekly Sunday meetings to learn about the present environment crisis. We talked about the causes of the crisis, watched video clips about movements and individual efforts to save the environment and, convinced of the importance of tree planting, planted over 100 trees. We are inspired by activists like Greta Thunberg to try to understand how we can live sustainably on this planet.

Rakkar Youth Social and Environment Club held a meeting in Nishtha Community Centre hall to organise their group and plan their upcoming program. The club has 12 active members and are urging more youth in the local area to join so they can work effectively in the village.

Our environment team went to check the trees planted earlier in the month and provided them with bamboo tree guards to try to stop the local goats from eating them.

Following the advice of the Director of Agriculture, North Region when he visited our farm, we decided to plant some tea plants on unused parts of the Nishtha farm. The Government tea department provided 150 tea plants at a subsidised rate and the farming team dug pits and planted the bushes according to the training they received at Palampur University.

Manju attended the Single Women's monthly meetings in August in order to understand how the single women activists work in the field and

how the program is working in the villages. As we are no longer working with SUTRA, we don't have access to their leadership trainings, therefore we have decided to organize such trainings at Nishtha this year. The first successfully took place on 29th to 31st in Nishtha community centre.

This three day leadership training was organised to enhance our single women activists' abilities to think critically, lead effectively and work with a positive attitude. The group consisted of our activists plus one or two engaged women from each of their areas making a total group of 13. Our trainer, Manju used lots of interesting practical activities for this group who are not so comfortable with reading and writing. It was a wonderfully active and interesting workshop which the women felt was very helpful, as well as creating a deeper understanding and trust among the team members. The participants are now more equipped to create more interactive and interesting single women meetings. Manju plans to hold a follow up workshop for this group later in the year.

During August we worked on the 2020 calendar, selecting photographs from Gauri Gill's photos which she took when she joined us for 4 days in May. This is a process which Brian Sebastian, our designer is helping us with, judging the photos according to how they will print up and the impact they will make and then setting them into a unique attractive design. We managed to complete the work and get them back in record time from the printers before Philippa left for the UK so she could take them for the UK Trustees and donors.



September

Our waste management team attended a meeting in Dharamsala of all the local interested bodies: NGOs including Waste Warriors, the Tibetan welfare Office; Dauladhar Central University professors and officials from the Municipal Council. The SDP, ADM and planning officer all came as the government is seeking an effective solution to the problem of waste. Mohinder spoke about our plastic block making project, encouraging the Government to launch it in the villages as a practical and effective income generating employment project.

With this energy, the NGOs and some concerned individuals decided to get together to work on cleaning up the town and surrounding villages. Mohinder invited them to Nishtha to see our work. Every 1st and 3rd Saturdays Nishtha organises clean ups involving schoolchildren and local people, providing tea and snacks after each session along with a talk. Mohinder hopes to put together skits and songs to enliven the program and help to educate people about how to segregate and not to throw their garbage.

On 17th September Nishtha was invited to make a stall at the Patola (Khanyara) Mela. Every year on this day since time immemorial, the local serpent spirit Indru Naag has been worshipped with the playing of traditional music in the Naag temple. As the younger generation are not taking this forward, a local NGO called Shram (hard work) took the opportunity to engage the young people in a mela (fair) and talk to them about the local traditional customs. They played traditional games and 14 local NGOs set up stalls to show what they do. These included handicrafts, women's groups,

anganwaris, a nearby organisation that works with ayurveda and naturopathy, Tapovan and Nishtha. 150 children participated by singing songs and performing skits. Nishtha's stall showcased our environment work and our children's library. We provided a large selection of books to read and materials for the children to draw.

Our tea plants are now all planted and settling in. It will take several years for the plants to become established but when they do we will be able to pluck and prepare our own tea. It rained almost every day this month so a lot of weeding and mulching went on on the farm. Our turmeric has grown impressively huge! All through the monsoon our team have been cleaning the water filters every week to make sure the schools and village have reliable clean water. As a result we had very few cases of gastroenteritis in the area.

Barbara is already busy writing greeting cards to each one of her Austrian and German sponsors to be sent along with the calendar. This way of keeping in touch with our donors is a major part of our fundraising effort.

The clinic has had regular attendance during the 4 days we see patients each week. September was the highest load so far this year. A total of 352 visits which is a daily average of 23.5 patients. Of these there were 219 women, 95 men, 16 boys and 22 girls. Since many of these are chronic or problematic patients who take a good deal of time, it means our doctors are kept busy. We are also receiving up to 40 new patients a month, widening our reach into the surrounding community.



October

Our accounts team are very relieved that last year's accounts audit is now finally complete and we can send all the documents to our accountant in Delhi who makes our FC6 submission to the Home Ministry. For our accounting team the audit is a good learning experience in managing the daily accounts correctly. This month they also completed the 6 month reports to our three major funding Trusts. This includes the reports on the Corpus Fund income which is also sent to the Trusts who have been supporting our drive to build a Corpus Fund for the long term security of the organisation.

With Dr. Barbara acting as translator and assistant instructor, our old Yoga instructor friends, Michal Haukin and Sandra Sabatini very kindly conducted two days of yoga workshops for our staff. The first day was for the women and the second for our male staff. Everyone was very appreciative of the sessions which invigorated us all!

At the beginning of the month 20–25 children started attending tuition classes to prepare them for the end of year exams in March. Two special teachers have been employed, Shakshi, who completed her MA as a Nishtha sponsorship student and Sanjay, who is doing a post graduate diploma after completing his B.ed. He hopes to get selected for a teaching post at a Government School so is happy to get more teaching experience. He thinks it is important to focus on maths which is the most difficult and worrying subject for every student.

In the days leading up to Diwali the staff set about cleaning and sprucing up the Nishtha buildings. Without the help of Goodie who broke her big toe in August so was off for 2 months and Rasma who was also not with us very much because her husband was very ill, all the staff had to pitch in and do as much as they could to clean up and

paint. Most of the walls are natural mud plaster, which is easily spruced up with a coat of cow dung lipai.

Diwali, which is a full holiday in Nishtha is a family oriented festival, celebrating the start of the Hindu year. Beautiful traditional patterns called rangoli are painted in the courtyards with a trail of little feet leading Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity into each home. Dr. Barbara celebrated along with her household and friends including our two new Austrian civil servants Madaban and Julian who have recently arrived and will be working with us until next June.

All month Dr. Barbara has been working hard on her power point presentation which she shows during her fundraising events in November. She made a very good new presentation of the Clean Green Rakkar Program. She also had made and printed invitations to her fundraising program, organised by Nishtha Austria Trustees in Vienna. All the while she was busy writing Christmas cards to send with the calendars which are posted to Austria and Germany in November.

We were joined by Nurith, our brilliant, faithful photographer who spent a busy 2 weeks with us photographing the work we do and the surrounding area. Rosmarie, a very helpful and kind volunteer from Austria spent nearly two months with us getting involved with the Women's stitching group. She gave them a lot of good advice and some interesting new bag designs. The women appreciate all the help they can get to improve their products. She also organised the stitching of a set of black curtains to black out the light in the community centre hall during film shows and will help Barbara by organising a fund raising event in Austria before Christmas.



November

Over 100 single women celebrated "Bheena Dooj" on 1st Nov along with our Nishtha Trustees, staff and some students. Beena Dooj or sister's celebration has been borrowed from the idea of Bhaya Dooj, when brothers are celebrated by the girls. The women put together a wonderful program of songs, talks, plays and dances, appreciating their sisterhood and support for each other on this special occasion. The students performed a Gaddi dance in full costume and the school children joined in with a skit about the environment and the need to protect trees. Everyone enjoyed tea and samosas before they went home.

Before Dr. Barbara left for her fund raising tour, Dr. Sheya, a recently qualified Homeopathic doctor joined our clinic team for a three month internship. She has quickly settled in and acts as a professional support for Dr. Kusum while Barbara is away.

Furthering Nishtha's collaboration with Dharamshala Waste Warriors, our local school children engaged in an exciting clean-up program along with 70 youngsters from Delhi. It was a challenging but very productive day with 6 large sacks of plastic waste and glass bottles collected from the local forest area and the creation of a series of fun environmental posters. At the end they all enjoyed tea and samosas, expressing their delight at meeting and working together for the sake of raising awareness of the damage done to the environment by casually discarding our waste.

With winter coming, our staff checked the government primary school children's shoes and socks and found them to be in very poor condition.

They set about taking the measurements of the 113 poor children from 5 local primary schools, ordering new shoes and 2 pairs of socks each. Now, every one of those children have good footwear to see them through the cold, wet months ahead. The anganwari children will also be provided for with crocks and socks which need to be specially ordered.

In collaboration with Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) Nishtha organized a zonal level sports program on the beautiful Rakkar school ground framed by the glorious Dhauladhar mountains. Around 200 players from Dharamshala and Nagrota blocks participated in volleyball, kabaddi, athletics, tug of war, shot put and "matka phod". It took a week of preparation and two days of full on energy by our Nishtha sponsorship students, NYK volunteers and Rakkar youth club members to make this event such a success. Everyone had a wonderful time and our local youth picked up lots of useful sports tips from the experienced police team.

In November we re-submitted all the land papers for our farm plot to the agricultural office in Shimla with the errors previously pointed out corrected. We are looking forward to finally getting a positive response to enable us to register the land in the name of the Trust.

Our staff and volunteers busily prepared and posted 420 calendars to Austria and Germany. Azad our night watchman spends his evenings sealing and cutting a hole in the envelopes so they can go as book post. The 115 calendars to the UK were sent a little later.



December

Dr. Barbara held a big pre-Christmas program in her precinct church hall in Vienna, which was attended by over 150 people including trustees, sponsors and former civil servants and student doctors. The tombola was a big hit with lovely gifts kindly donated by a private hospital in Vienna. Several stalls were set up including one selling Nishtha bags and calendars, another selling a children's book by a friend, Eva Chirnu of words from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The proceeds will go to Nishtha. The evening was graced by a musical piece by Angela May and of course Dr. Barbara showed her PowerPoint and talked about our work.

A second, smaller program organised by our friend Rosmarie in her village in Tirrol drew around 50 people. Again Dr. Barbara gave her presentation and talked to many people. As she says: "the results of these programs is not immediate but in the long term they generate a good deal of interest and support for our work".

Two very valuable two day workshops on Non Violent Communication were held for Nishtha staff and single women earlier this month. We invited an experienced trainer named Chitra from Delhi. She led the groups in a voyage of discovery, thinking and becoming aware of feelings and needs and particularly how to deal with our own and others responses to difficult situations.

A hastily put together Wenlido workshop for 11 Anganwari workers from district Chamba was held in December. This was organised by Deepa, our Wenlido trainer who had met Minakshi, an Anganwari teacher from Sihunta during one of our health camps with Dr. Kusum. Keen to learn, the women picked up the techniques quickly and spent up to 9.0 in the evening discussing. Our trainers felt this was a very fulfilling workshop as these women

work in very remote villages where there is a lot of violence and confusion about what is and what is not acceptable behaviour, especially within families. They were very grateful saying: "We are new women now! We are not the same as when we came. Now we are fearless and can face anything!"

Single Women's Block level meetings take place every 6 months in the 3 areas our team covers. This time, Nishtha decided to lend support to the women by sending a staff member to each meeting. Ravindra went to Narwana for the Nagrota block meeting, Dr. Kusum went to Rait and Vijay went to Gaggal for the Kangra block meeting. All three returned enthusiastically praising the organisation of the meetings and telling how they spoke to the women who attended about the work Nishtha does and how we can support them. They all felt it was very useful and our single women activists were pleased.

On Christmas Day, since the school was on holiday, our community centre staff decided to take the 15 children who were regularly coming to our after school program for a full day picnic up on the hillside above Rakkar village. We carried food to make a big pot of khichari with vegetables and curd. While it cooked the children snacked on namkeen and peanut brittle and played all kinds of games, drawing and cutting out, dancing, loving being out in the clear air and winter sunshine.

It's Cricket Season again! 15 local teams have already signed up and the tournament organised by enthusiastic local boys has been the focus of attention for the village for the past week. Nishtha cleared the ground and brought in tractors of clay to make the pitch. We also provided new kit and a loudspeaker to announce the match points and results. It's going to be an exciting season!



January

The crocks and two pairs of socks for each of the 47 little children associated with the 4 baby creches in the hilly area above Rakkar Village finally arrived and were distributed. It is very cold this year so our staff went to great lengths to find good quality warm socks so that these children from poor labouring families would be well equipped for the winter. At the same time they bought and distributed sets of blocks, a stacking tower and soft balls for each kindergarten to make the children's days in the crèche more interesting and fun.

One of our local boys, Nikkhu, had a serious accident 2 years ago when he was a welders apprentice and fell off a building they were working on. He is now able to get up and walk so is trying to recover and re-think his life. Vijay talked seriously to him and encouraged him to re-take his 10th grade exams which he had failed first time round. He is now studying with the help of Sanjay, our tuition teacher who is making it his mission to prepare him for the exams in March. We really hope he does well!

Barbara returned from her very successful fund raising tour during which she promoted our 25th anniversary celebrations to be held next October. At present we are still receiving responses and hope to put together a nice group with whom we can celebrate and show off the wonderful area around us.

On Friday 17th, as part of the local Fridays for Future Campaign, Dharamsala Waste Warriors worked alongside Nishtha in organising an awareness raising program with the students and teachers of the government school in Rakkar. Mohinder gave a talk in the school about how our village is developing rapidly and the quantity of garbage is becoming uncontrollable. Inspired, the students took an oath saying: "we pledge to be aware of our use of consumer materials and will follow the motto: re-use, re-duce and re-cycle". The students then went out in groups to clean up the village.

This is the time for the turmeric which has been growing so vigorously in the Nishtha farm to be harvested. 25% has to go back into the ground for which the young corms which will sprout next year are kept aside in a basket until the weather becomes warmer. The older corms which are 2-3 years old are cleaned and washed and then lightly boiled, softening them so they can be easily chopped up and dried before grinding. Pure turmeric has wonderful healing and health restoring qualities. This month we also planted 10 kg of seed potato.

On the last Thursday of the month, an important meeting of our Single Women team was held along with two new assistant activists: Manju who has now completed 3 months and Vandhana who has just joined us. It is very heartening to find that the team is working cohesively and effectively and to learn that our most experienced activist Kummo will stay with us, deferring her retirement in order to offer valuable support to the younger members of the team. This meeting was followed by our weekly staff meeting, held in cherished winter sunshine in the Community Centre courtyard.

The cricket tournament is now in full swing. It is being organised by 4 boys from the village. There are 60 teams playing in two categories, the under-19 and the over-19. Two finals will be played near the end of February. Bad weather in December and January and the increased number of matches has meant that they could not finish by 26th January as in previous years.

Mohinder is very pleased that this program is working so well and keeps the boys engaged in a worthwhile activity. The ground will stay alive up until the monsoon as this program helps to inspire everyone to play sports. It is truly energising for the village!

We are very grateful to Radhika, our Trustee, for donating 100 new children's books to our library.



February

The school children were very excited when our team arrived on a cold winter morning with a huge bowl of boiled eggs which they ate very happily. In order to increase the protein intake of the children during the winter Nishtha staff decided to provide them with roasted chickpeas or soya beans, peanut brittle and once an week a rare boiled egg for each child!

Nishtha has launched a campaign to make sure that every one of the less well-off villagers we come in contact with through the clinic and the single women's program, is able to obtain an Ayushman Bharat government health insurance card. This valuable card gives the holder up to 5 lakhs medical coverage in specified hospitals in the state. Nishtha has produced an information leaflet and our single women are now experts in showing the way through the official bureaucracy to obtain them

Our Single Women activists have also done very good work helping 46 widows to get the government pensions they are due but are denied for various spurious reasons, often that a family member who offers no support at all to the woman holds a salaried job. It is absolutely essential that widows should get even the small pension they are due from the Government in order that they can retain some independence and dignity.

Mohinder is very excited that the block Panchayat office is showing an interest in building eco-san toilets in each of the 5 local village offices. These will be low cost urine diversion dry composting toilets inside a small building made of our plastic blocks. They are also interested in making benches. Nishtha will facilitate and supervise the construction, raising awareness in the village of sustainable alternative solutions. At last it feels like Nishtha's initiative to make building blocks out of soft plastic is gaining momentum with both individuals and government departments ordering blocks.

Dr. Shreya, has been loving accompanying Dr.

Kusum on the outreach clinics into the villages. She reports that the clinics are a great initiative to promote health and well-being of communities in remote areas. The program increases understanding of common illnesses and awareness of the current environmental challenges faced in everyday life. It is a medium through which to sensitize women about personal health problems and teaches them basic fitness techniques. Shreya has really enjoyed being a part of the team but sadly will be leaving us soon.

At last the Cricket tournament finals were held! The 2020 Rakkar title was won by the Barol team who defeated the Dari eleven in a thrilling match. The under-19 category saw our local Rakkar team just defeated by the stronger Fathepur team. More than 200 spectators were kept entranced on this sunny Sunday, enjoying watching the players running between the wickets, smashing sixes all over the ground, swing and turn balling and displaying extraordinary fielding to save a single run for the victory. It was tremendous day! Finally the winner and runner-up teams received their shining trophies and medals from the chief guest Mr. Vipin Nehria, and Mr. Ankush from Nishtha distributed the last of our 2020 calendars.

Nishtha's youngest employee, Ankush Sharma, along with 35 other youngsters from across the State, attended a 10 day workshop at Sambhavana, a training centre near Palampur, to learn about the Himalayan Region, discuss the local garbage problems and explore the culture of our region

Our Trustee Puja Anand who has been very kindly running Sunday spoken English classes for our Sponsorship Students gave a report on what she describes as a great group who have hugely benefitted from the gender training they received. There is more openness among the students, girls are participating more, and the boys are more respectful and accommodating. And the attendance is nearly 100% every week!



March

On the 1st and 2nd March, Naya Asha, the Nishtha women's stitching group presented their products at the Dharamsala Tourism Festival which was held in the indoor stadium, organised by the hotel and restaurant association of Dharamsala. It was a good time to make people aware of their products but sadly the Corona-virus pandemic shutdown came soon after so there has been no chance to build on this exposure.

Dr. Kusum regularly checks up on our disabled children. Sanjoli, Priaya and Shaksham who regularly go to Tapaovan, the twins Sajal and Sonakshi who are receiving growth hormones and Bhagwanti who is at last putting on weight now her cleft pallet is repaired. The dislocated hip discovered during a hospital visit last year has also been corrected and remarkably, she is beginning to move her legs and is even trying to crawl.

A Japanese team who are doing organic farming bought 250 plastic blocks for the construction of a building as a temporary dwelling near Gyuto monastery. We were very happy to clear our store in order to have space to make more!

At the start of the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in India, before the lockdown, we held a series of urgent meetings to manage our response, first to the virus threat itself and then to the local administration's restrictions on meetings and gatherings and the closure of schools. Each day brought in a new set of regulations, which by 21st effectively sealed Himachal Pradesh off from the rest of the world. The Community Centre and Clinic were closed and our staff were staying at home. However, with very few cases in our area, Dr. Barbara is keeping the clinic open between 8.30 and 11 am, the hours when people are permitted to go out for essential services. Our very poor local patients are therefore able to get the essential medical treatment they

need. She is also making herself available to her long term homeopathic patients on WhatsApp and will see patients who call on her in emergency for non-virus problems








Our first response to the crisis was to set up a stringent hand washing regime. We carefully instructed and supervised the children who were still coming to the community centre to wash their hands carefully both when they arrived and when they left. They were also shown how to cough into their elbow and keep a safe distance from each other.

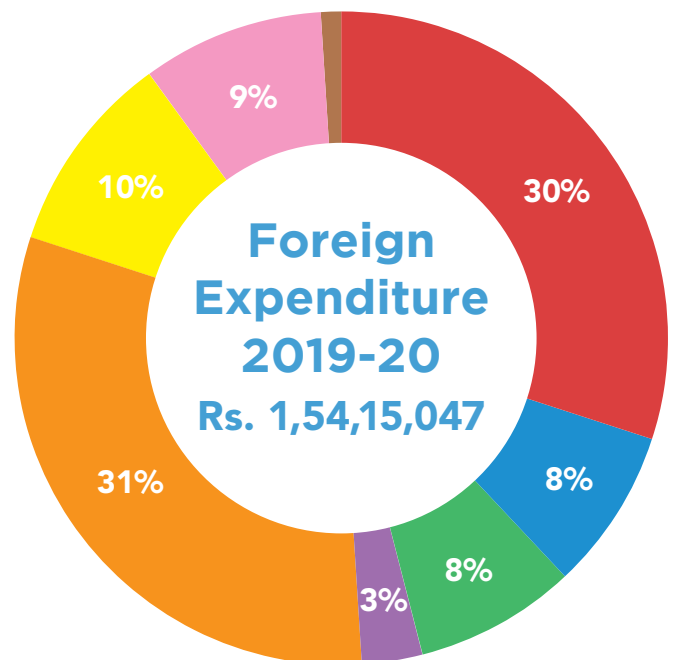
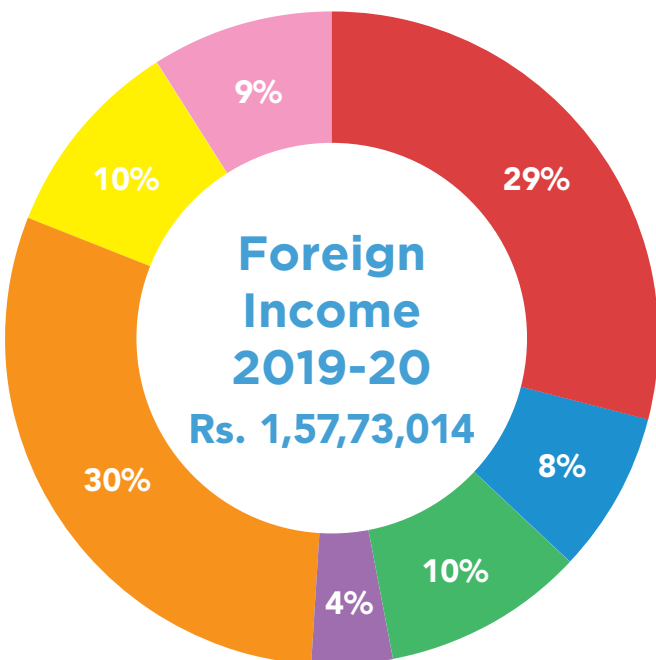
Laminated notices were put up reminding everyone who comes to Clinic and Community Centre to wash their hands, and a good illustrated chart showing how to wash thoroughly is pinned above the wash basins. All patients are required to wash their hands before approaching our registration counter. We also imposed a stringent cleaning program both in the clinic and the community centre— paying particular attention to door handles, counters, tables, handrails and light switches.

Vijay is keeping in touch with our students who are scattered in the villages, making sure they are being careful. The single women are our greatest concern. We are in touch with 7,000 women, almost all of whom are over 65. We called our single women activists in the week before the lockdown to discuss what they would do. It is important to stay in touch because isolation itself has serious consequences for already marginalised and stressed people and the risk of domestic abuse is serious.







The uncertainty of the situation at the end of this year means that all our hopes and plans have been set aside and we can only wait to see what urgent needs come up within the community. We, as a team, remain open and ready to respond however we can, and to focus on what is really essential.

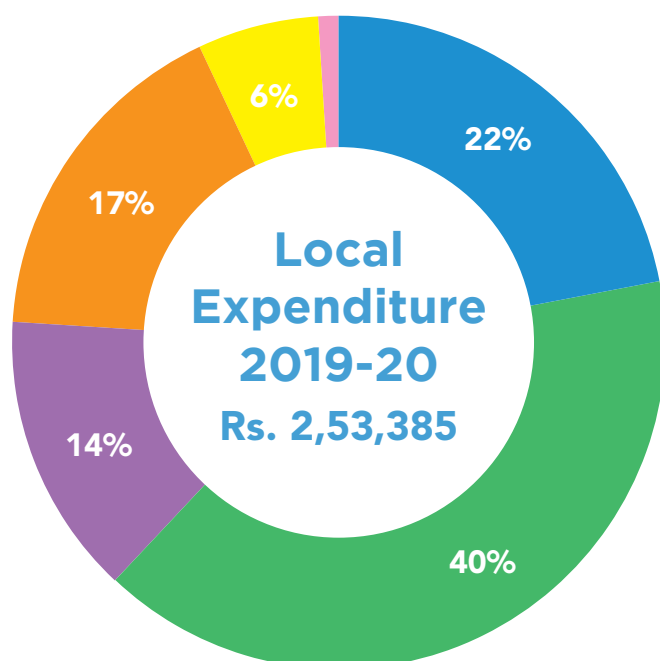
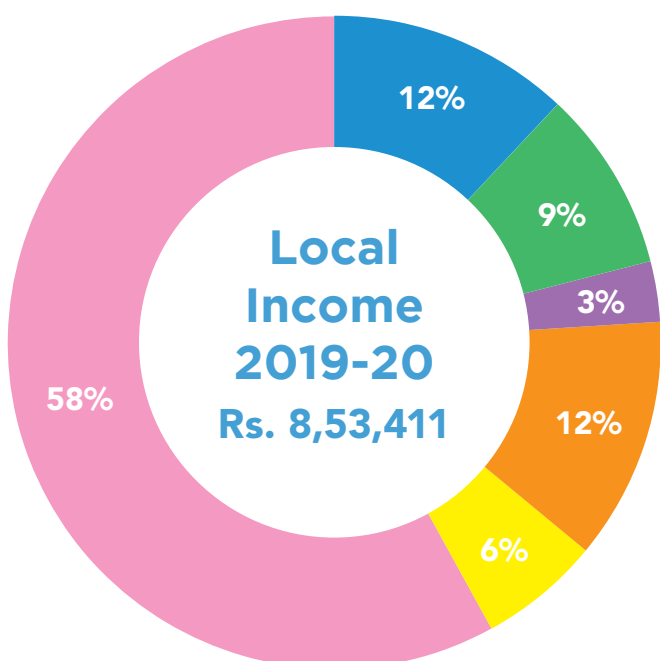
Nishtha Foreign Accounts 2019-20

Account	Income	Expenditure	Utilized
 Austria Trust	44,68,007.00	46,88,155.27	105%
 Nishtha UK	12,88,480.00	11,96,824.00	93%
 Germany Trust	15,67,262.00	12,87,183.67	82%
 Austria Trust Corpus	47,42,226.00	47,42,226.00	100%
 Germany Trust Corpus	15,60,050.00	15,60,050.00	100%
 Nishtha UK Corpus	14,18,982.00	14,18,982.00	100%
 Reserve Destitute Fund		60,565.00	
 Bank Interest	7,28,007.00	4,61,061.74	63%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed Deposit Interest • Corpus Austria Interest • Corpus Germany Interest • Corpus UK Interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4,62,430.00 1,64,733.00 54,256.00 46,588.00 		
Total (excluding corpus)	78,99,704.00	76,93,789.68	97%



Nishtha Local Accounts 2019-20

Account	Income	Expenditure	Utilized
 Nishtha Clinic	1,00,040.00	55,863.00	56%
 Community Centre	78,595.00	102,254.00	130%
 Donation for Sahil Sponsorship	25,000.00	35,950.00	144%
 Donation from Sonalika	1,02,000.00	43,300.00	42%
 Donation for Single women	49,400.00	13,972.00	28%
 Bank Interest	4,98,376.00	2,046.00	0%
Total	8,53,411.00	2,53,385.00	30%





Governance

Nishtha Trust was set up in 1998 by Dr. Barbara Nath-Wiser who is now the Director.

The Trust is governed by a board of five Local Trustees who meet regularly and are fully involved with the Clinic and Community activities.

Radhika Shaunik was a Research Assistant at the French School of Far-Eastern Studies, Paris, where she was responsible for the South-Asian section of their research library. Now retired back to this area she works as a freelance researcher on women's issues and promotes literacy through creating libraries with associated programmes, in schools or community centres.

Kamla Bhasin has been actively engaged with issues related to development, education, gender and media since 1970. She is dedicated to building the capacity of young activists and networking between civil society organizations in South Asia. She has written and taught extensively on gender, women's empowerment, participatory and sustainable development, media and communication as well as producing a large number of

songs, slogans, posters and banners for the women's movement and books for children.

Soniya Sebastian is a younger, enterprising member of the local business community. Her social reach, extensive network of local connections and knowledge of managing beaurocratic processes is of great value to the Trust.

Puja Anand is an IIT trained electronics engineer specializing in creating computer-based training. She has worked in Delhi and Singapore, where she set up and worked at Knowledge Platform, an renowned international e-learning company. Puja returned to India in early 2013 to live with her mother in Himachal Pradesh and is currently working as an online learning consultant and teaches spoken English to local children, youth and teachers.

Nayantara Mankotier comes from a well placed local Himachali family. A highly trained and experienced teacher, she returned from Delhi to set up her own Montessori school here in Kangra. She brings years of experience and dedication to education to our Trust.

United Kingdom



Nishtha UK Trust

Charities Commission
Registration No: 1118248
IR charity status ref No: XT2400

Cheques can be made out to
Nishtha UK Trust and sent to:

Nishtha UK Trust
P O Box 203 Totnes,
Devon TQ9 9BS

or paid directly to:

Nishtha UK Trust
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a/c No.: 00118802
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Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

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Republic of India



Nishtha Rural Health, Education & Environment Centre

For donations within India only:

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SBI, Sidhbari branch code: 50441
IFSC: SBIN0050441
MICR: 176007053
Swift code: SBININBB277

Nishtha Rural Health, Education
& Environment Centre

is a registered charitable Trust

Registration No: 2 1/4/98

FCRA No: 182450048

Tax exemption No: N26

10G applied for a/c No: 789198971090915

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