



MITRATAA Foundation

Annual Report: Our Impact 2016 - 2017



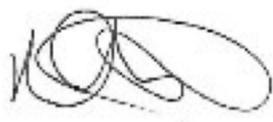
Note from Bec and Nimu

We have the best jobs in the world. Having the privilege of taking the generous support of our donors, delivering it with love to the women and children of Nepal and seeing the magic which results keeps us constantly inspired. This year has been no different and we love to watch the way Mitrataa develops, building on lessons and directed by the needs of Nepal each year. Some of the highlights for us this year have been Sangita's Singing – The Musical which we ran for the first time in January with the assistance of Elise Morton from Sydney and Wilson Academy, the launch of the Heartquake portal sharing stories and giving a voice to the superhero survivors of Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquakes, and the day to day "aha" moments with the children and the families as they progress towards their dreams.

We can't wait to see where the future takes Mitrataa and thank with all our hearts every member of the Mitrataa family both in Nepal and around the world.

Keep believing, keep dreaming and keep working hard always.

With gratitude



Bec Ordish
Executive Director



Nimu Sherpa-Ordish
Country Director

About Us

Our Journey to Here

Mitrataa was founded in 2000 after Bec spent 6 months in Nepal as a volunteer teacher. The Foundation has had a journey of twists and turns with considerable learning and adapting along the way to become the energetic, thriving organisation it is today. Our work is grounded in the theory of positive psychology – Rather than “fixing what is broken”, we identify what is working based on strengths and passions (whether on a country, village, group, individual level) and build on those.



Our vision

Our vision is to do ourselves out of a job in Nepal by creating a network of inspired people, who are trained and engaged to continue with the sustainable projects we create.

Our purpose

Our purpose is to inspire Nepali people to empower themselves and to take responsibility for their own futures by providing them with the education, skills, training, networks and belief in themselves to achieve their dreams.



Dream Recipe

All of our work is based around achieving dreams and goals as a tool to overcome challenges and disadvantage. This Dream Recipe is our recipe for success, based in the principles of positive psychology, and forms the underlying values for all of Mitrataa's work:

Passion

We are much more likely to achieve our dreams if we pursue something we are passionate about and/or good at.

Hard Work

There's no escaping it, no short cut! It is going to take hard work. This is why having a dream we are passionate about and believe in is so important. It helps the hard work feel more like fun!

Belief

We must believe we can achieve the goal and believe in ourselves. We must also have a Cheer Squad who can help keep us motivated and believing in ourselves when the inevitable challenges arise

Persistence

The reality is that we'll encounter "speed bumps" or challenges along the way. That's part of the journey and these are all opportunities to learn and grow. We must keep trying.

Plan

Without a destination in mind, we'll go around in circles and never achieve our dreams. The actual route must be flexible to allow us to adapt and take advantage of opportunities along the way but some guidelines and a destination are crucial.

Our Team



Saraswoti Thapaliva

*President - Dream
Speakers (our local NGO
partner)
Team Leader - Nuwakot,
Dream Catchers
Independent Scholarships*

Nirmala Shahi

*Team Leader -
Panchkal, Bhaktapur
and Riviera*

Bandana Sen

*Assistant Accountant,
Team Leader - Wilson*

Krishma Basnet

*Junior Project
Manager - Riviera*

Sapana Thapa

*Team Leader - Lumbini,
Motherland & Belmont,
Office Manager*

Sarita Gurung

*Team Leader -
Special Projects,
Junkiri Award*

Keshav Karki

*Junior Project
Manager*

Tapas Budha Magar

*Junior Project Manager
& Project Leader -
Roshani Award*

Dream Catcher's Scholarships

Our Dream Catchers Scholarships support students' education costs. The extent of this support depends on their specific needs as we do also request families to contribute something to their children's education. In most cases, the scholarship includes school fees, exam fees, uniforms, books, stationery and basic medical costs. For some students, it includes their hostel or living costs. For others, it includes their fees as a day boarder.

This year we have several batches of students; some are at our partner schools and colleges and others are in other programs.

With our partner schools, we negotiate with them to keep our costs down. In exchange for reduced costs, we offer teacher training and other support such as the CSU visit (see below for more details).

The class 10 final exams have been renamed from SLC (School Leaving Certificate) to SEE (Secondary Education Examination). Our students performed very well this year and have continued to support 8 of these kids as they continue their journeys towards their dreams and we can't wait to see what they achieve in future. Out of our 11 students:



Pushpa
Riviera



Srijana
Riviera



Muna
Riviera

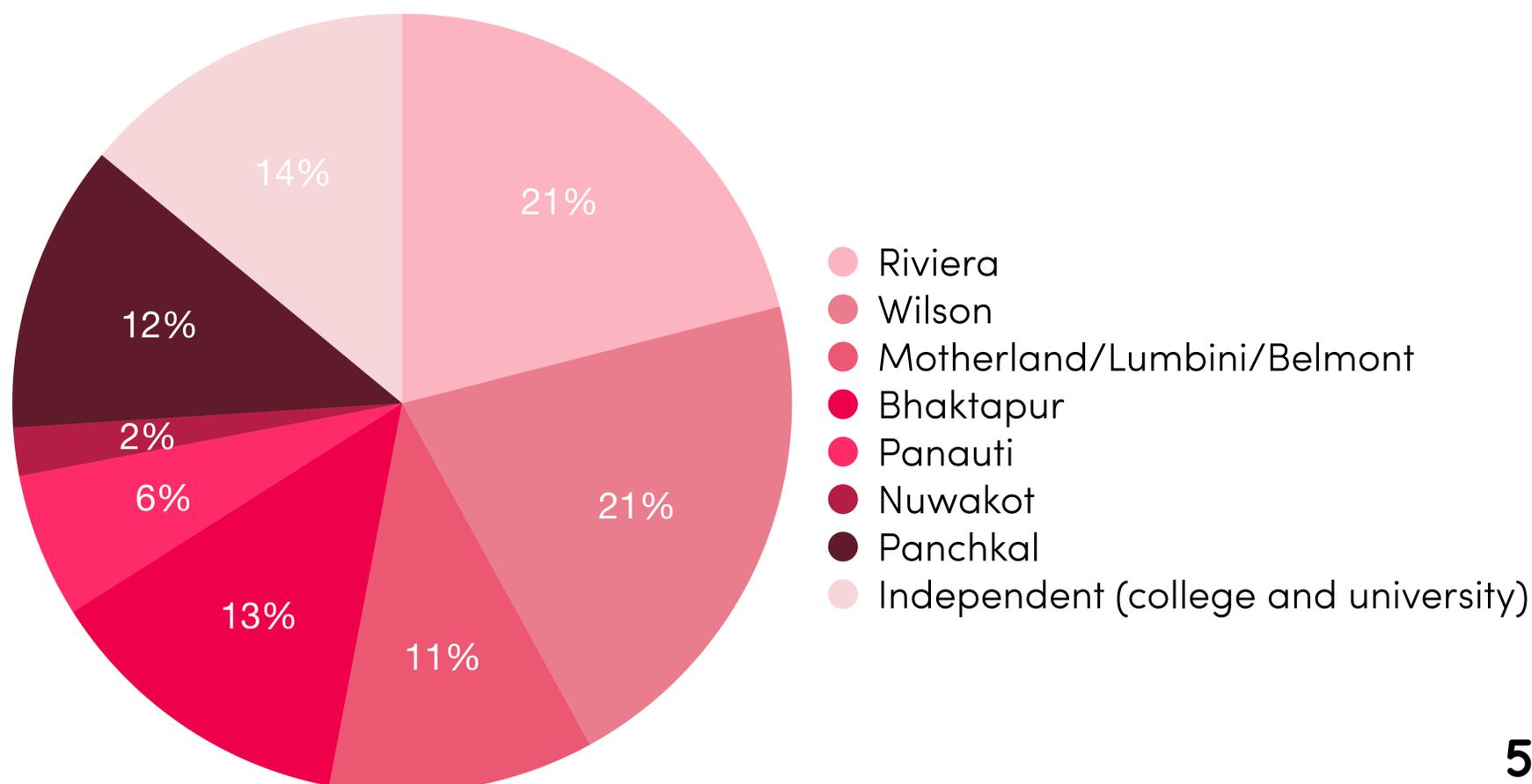


Krishmita
Riviera



Soniya
Mahendra Bhawan

Dream Catchers Scholarships



Academic achievement isn't the most important element we expect from our students. However, getting good results does show their commitment to their studies and their futures, as well as their attitudes and willingness to work hard to achieve a goal. It also boosts their confidence. Thirteen of our Dream Catchers scholarship holders came in the top 3 students in their class in their final exams for the last school session which finished in April, so we hosted a celebration dinner for them. This was an opportunity to us to recognise their hard work and present them with a certificate. It was also an opportunity for them to network with other Mitrataa students from different schools and areas. Each team member wrote a personal card to each of the students they are responsible for and gave them a short speech of encouragement, paying forward the advice they have been given over the years.

In addition to these school students excelling, Kal Bahadur, currently in his second year of his Diploma of Civil Engineering, not only passed his first year board exams (no mean feat with only 8 people from his class of 48 passing), he also achieved the highest mark in his college. All his hard work and commitment has paid off! We are so proud of him.

Each of our batches of students get together once a month for a monthly meeting. Our independent, college age students, meet monthly and often have debates on current issues such as the role of families in determining their futures, the development of women and budget planning. This is also a great networking opportunity and often results in the students coaching and tutoring each other in different subjects.



Sunimaya
KVS



Bhupal
Motherland



Tapas
Wilson



Kanchan
Riviera



Kripa
*Saraswoti
Shikshya
Griya*



Babanath
Panchkal



For the school students, their parents or guardians attend the meetings too. Each month we have a different theme for the meeting. It might be financial literacy or budgeting, hygiene, homework, positive discipline or exam support. In addition to checking in on the families, these meetings provide an opportunity for networking, giving the families a support network they can call on when they need someone. This has been particularly strong for our Bhaktapur group. They began a savings program where each family contributes 100 rupees each month to a pot. They keep this money to give to any member who faces a challenge, claiming that they wanted to be able to help each other and not always to rely on Mitrataa. They provide a lot of support for each other – this is the power of a network and cheer squad.

After their final exams, we took our 11 class 12 students away to Tistung for a few days. This was an opportunity to us to recognise their hard work and present them with a certificate. It was also an opportunity for them to network with other Mitrataa students from different schools and areas. Each team member wrote a personal card to each of the students they are responsible for and gave them a short speech of encouragement, paying forward the advice they have all been given over the years. Each one of them has worked really hard and regardless of the outcome of their exams (which they won't receive for 6 months), we are extremely proud of all of them and are excited to see what the next stage of their life journey brings!



Our Dream Catchers program not only supports the students. We see the students as part of a wider family and as such provide holistic care by also providing support to the families when needed. For this reason, sometimes we support surgeries for family members, counselling for abusive fathers, rent for a few months when families fall on hardship. All of this is delivered with love and compassion and a focus on ensuring they are independent and able to support their families.

Non-humans! Yes, it's true we have some very important non-humans in the Mitrataa family! In addition to Puntu, our family dog, and Greyni and Pumpy, our hostel cats, we foster abandoned kittens during the kitten season to give them the love and support they need to survive until forever families can be found for them. This is great experience for the kids in responsibility and enables them to have a chance to pay forward their love.

Visitors

We are very strict on volunteers or visitors to the Mitrataa family. We expect them all to use their experience and passions to contribute so that the visit or time they spend with us is mutually beneficial. This year we have been extremely fortunate to have some wonderful, passionate, generous visitors.



Under Elise's mentoring a cast of 30 students from one of our partner schools, Wilson Academy, did 3 performances - one for their peers at school, one for their parents and then the final one in front of 200 members of the Mitrataa family. Sangita's Singing is a story with universal themes - literacy, education, bullying, celebrating our strengths, friendship. Hearing the Mitrataa students discussing their ideas after seeing the show was wonderful. I heard the group from Panchkal discussed it all the way home in the bus (a 3 hour journey!). One of the parents hugged me as she told me that this was the story of her family - her daughter was the first in their family to be able to read and that had been possible thanks to Mitrataa.

Elise Morton

Many of you will recall that Libby Hathorn wrote a gorgeous story about a girl from the village who goes to Kathmandu to study. The book, Sangita's Singing, was illustrated by a local artist, Bandana Tulachan. Now the book has become a musical with script and lyrics written by Libby Hathorn and music composed by Elise Morton, who visited Nepal to produce our first production of the musical.

We both cried - especially as her daughter acted in the play and couldn't keep the smile off her face. Sikha, the girl who played Sangita, told me that she loved playing Sangita because she loves to sing and could relate to Sangita's gift (and, boy, can Sikha sing!).

There were 11 Mitrataa students in the cast and watching them develop so much confidence and new skills was a privilege, especially Sudip who used to be shy and now has discovered a love of dancing and sharing his ideas with people. Each and every one of the cast opened themselves up to learning so much. I couldn't be prouder!

Charles Sturt University, Australia

Thank you so much to Elise for writing the songs and coming over to direct the kids, to Patrick for letting us take over your school for the month, to the Wilson band who played the Welcome Song, the Mitrataa team who all worked incredibly hard to get this off the ground (and especially to Sapana, Ashwini and Bandana who danced the opening song), to the cast who all grew in confidence over the course of the show and to Libby for trusting me with her gorgeous story and always believing in us to deliver.

The final performance was filmed and is available on DVD. We also released a video clip of the kids performing The Song of Kathmandu around town. Next year, we plan to take the show on the road - the Wilson cast will travel to Panchkal and teach the students there the performances which will be fun as well as giving them an opportunity to pay forward their skills, teamwork and leadership. We also plan to do a large performance in a hall in Kathmandu and invite schools from around the Valley - and hopefully Libby will be able to attend and see the show then too.



Every year after Tihar for the last 5 years, we have hosted a group of Faculty of Education students from Charles Sturt University, Australia. They get practical teaching experience in our partner school, Riviera, as well as visiting our village partner schools in Panchkal. We were very lucky this year to have some inclusive education students and lecturers which enabled us to improve our approach and strategies for students with additional needs.

As a result of their ideas, we have implemented pilot programs with 3 of our partner schools in Kathmandu to try to better assess and support the learning gaps for some of the students who struggle with the school environment. Having the CSU group here each year is a great opportunity for all of us. It's a program which allows everyone to learn and share and be inspired by each other. Thank you so much to the Riviera team for their support, the Mitrataa team for all their hard work and to Terry and the CSU team for all their passion, energy and willingness to try new things.





Matt Bushby & Kylie Evans

Our class 12 Hotel Management and Travel/ Tourism students were treated to 2 weeks of training with Matt Bushby, Business Consultant, TAFE NSW and Kylie Evans, Business Development Director, Crowne Plaza, Coogee Beach, NSW who generously donated their time to conduct hospitality training for the students. The students learned so much and had a lot of fun learning about cocktail making, customer service, communication, sales, restaurant service and a variety of other skills, culminating with the students hosting an event for Matt and Kylie at our hostel. The training was conducted to the Australian TAFE standard.

This was an amazing opportunity for the students with practical skills they will use regardless of their future career paths. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to Matt and Kylie for sharing their time, energy and passion with us. We look forward to a long lasting relationship with them. Thanks also to Uttam at the team at Hotel Moonlight for letting us take over your hotel for so long! And to the team at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza for hosting us for the day.

Community Programs

One of the main issues in our village partner schools is the irregular attendance of the students. We implemented 2 programs in our partner schools in Nukakot and Panauti to try to overcome this challenge.

Rewards - Panauti and Nuwakot

In order to encourage the students to be regular in school, as well as to teach them some financial literacy skills and some self-responsibility, we implemented an Attendance Rewards Program in our partner schools in Nuwakot and in Panauti. This project involved rewarding the students with Rs 20 for each day that they attend school; they don't get cash though. At the end of the month, they were given a voucher for the amount they had earned for the month. They could exchange this voucher for school supplies such as shoes, jumpers, stationery, school bags at agreed stores. The students had to learn the value of items and to save if they didn't earn enough reward points in one month for the product they wanted to buy. It also taught them to take care of their belongings as they had to earn them themselves rather than simply being given them.

We ran the project for a year in each school. On assessment at the end of the year, we determined that the students in Panauti were now regular in school as a combined result of the school lunches program (discussed below) and the rewards program and in Nuwakot the students were regular initially due to the rewards program but increasingly because of the English for Life program and our teacher, Santoshi. As a result, we assessed that the rewards program had served its purpose and could be stopped. It was a very successful program on a number of levels and we will be considered with other village partners in the future.



Lunches - Panauti + cafe

Our partner school in Panauti, Shree Pananuti Lower Secondary School, had been having trouble with attendance and engagement of the students. One of the issues appeared to be a nutrition issue as many of the students were not eating breakfast and so were coming to school hungry. Another organisation was providing tiffin to the students from nursery to class 3 so we decided to establish a community kitchen to provide a full hot nutritious lunch to the students from classes 4 to 8 every day. We recruited and trained 5 mothers of students at the school and trained them to cook hygienic, nutritious dhal bhat. The women in turn taught the students hygiene and etiquette and to watch them feed 140 students in 30 minutes in an orderly and organised way is such a privilege.

The teachers were very impressed with the increased attendance, energy and attentiveness of the students and their exam results also improved over the course of the year.

We had agreed with the school that we would support the community kitchen for one year and we worked with them to open a café, the Namaste Café, to sustain the lunch program for the students in future. We conducted training for the staff, including some time with Matt and Kylie when they were in Nepal training the class 12 graduates in hotel management. The principal of Shree Panauti LSS has been very supportive. We will be handing over the management of the café to the school shortly. It is not quite covering the costs of the lunches program yet but it is getting closer and hopefully will in the near future to ensure the sustainability of the program.

We are now looking at replicating the project in Nuwakot with our partner school there. Sustainability of these projects is core to our philosophy but it is one of the most challenging parts of the project. A café won't work in Nuwakot so we are exploring alternative sources of income for the school to ensure the lunches program there will also be sustainable in future.





English for Life in village schools Panauti, Nuwakot, Panchkal

One of the biggest challenges in our village partner schools is the level of English. The students are not taught in English and they struggle in the senior classes as they have no basis in English. In Nepal, further studies and jobs are often dependent on being able to communicate competently in English, causing an immediate disadvantage to the village students. We developed an English for Life program and trained teachers (who were also paid by Mitrataa) in each of our partner schools, in Panauti, Nuwakot and Panchkal, to deliver the program to class 3 and 4 students. The students love the program and we have seen a great increase in their confidence both in English and in presenting in Nepal as part of the program involved teaching them presentation skills and hosting quiz competitions.

Another part of the program involved the students making flash cards for each of the topics and laminating them so they can be used with future classes.

We began these programs in Nuwakot and Panchkal with summer camps last year. Summer holidays are a high risk time for students as many drop out and do not return after the break. Keeping them engaged in their learning and having fun at the same time is a great way to minimise this risk and inspire them at the same time. The students loved the program and it gave them a burst of confidence in English before the formal program began.

Menstruation Programs

Menstruation is still a taboo in Nepal; it isn't discussed at all. In villages, many girls are still forced to sleep in the cow shed when they have their periods. They are not allowed in the kitchen or to touch male family members or to enter temples. Teachers tend to skip over this chapter in the text book. As a result, many girls are shocked when they get their first periods, believing they are dying. They do not know how to care for themselves during this time, or what's normal and what's not. They keep it secret, ashamed of themselves.

The Dream Speakers team (our local NGO) decided to do something about this. They prepared a workshop for a group of teenage girls in Bhaktapur and gave up their Saturday to spend it sharing stories, experiences, facts and information with the girls. The girls were so excited to learn that their tears or anger before their periods is normal and not something wrong with them, what foods to eat to minimise cramping and ensure their health during their periods, why women get periods and how to use a pad correctly. The team then rolled out this workshop in our partner schools in Panchkal and Panauti too.

This is a great example of Mitrataa's Pay It Forward model. We are very proud of the Dream Speakers team. They did this entirely on their own initiative. They worked well as a team, preparing and presenting confidently and professionally. Well done, team.



Early Childhood Learning Support Panauti and Nuwakot

We are in the process of establishing a Kindergarten and Nutrition Centre in Panauti and in Nuwakot to support the toddlers in the community to get a great start to their education journeys. The centres will serve as both a kindergarten and a community centre where we can run nutrition and other training programs for parents of toddlers and young children.

We have observed that many of the students have issues later in their education journeys such as health issues and memory issues as a result of poor nutrition and skill development at an early age. We aim to address this issue early. Additionally, by running strong kindergarten programs in the community schools, we hope to keep the students enrolled in these schools rather than moving to English medium schools. This will enable the community schools to provide better quality education to their students moving forward. We have done the scoping and feasibility studies for these centres and will be opening them soon.

Community Farming, Sustainability and Businesses

Panchkal - permaculture and organic farming

How would you like some fresh organic spinach or coriander for dinner, picked fresh from the field today? Our community team of vegetable farmers in Anaikot, Panchkal, (parents of some of our Panchkal Dream Catchers students) have now had 3 crops of snake beans, potatoes, spinach, coriander and cauliflower. The families work together to share their experience and ideas and we have been working with some permaculture experts to give us ideas on organic, natural ideas. As we are working directly with the farmers, we have been able to cut out about 3 levels of middlemen and so we have paid the farmers the rate the middlemen get. Farm fresh spinach and coriander for our families in Kathmandu, extra money for our farming partners - happy teams all round. In fact, the demand for their products has been so high that often we miss out!

We are also exploring some fruit trees which will help with water retention as our villages have been facing water shortages after the water table moved following the earthquakes in 2015. One of our farmers attended 3 days of organic farming training and is keen to try this out with some fruit farming. The families in this cooperative have also been supporting each other in different ways such as reconstruction of their homes which they all lost during the quakes. The community spirit and sharing of ideas, time, expertise and support between the families has been fantastic.



Business development opportunities for our families

We are always keen for our families to become independent and so if they develop a sound business plan (sometimes with our support, other times on their own initiative), we do our best to help them get the skills and capital to start the businesses. We have had several families do that this year including:

Chicken farming – Subash

One of our Dream Catchers' parents who also takes care of his niece and nephew, was keen to start a chicken farm. He had all the plans and saved/raised most of the money for his business himself. He asked us to help him with the remaining amount. We agreed to lend him some money as well as to invest some money in his business so he could get it off the ground. He has repaid half the amount already and has already started making a profit from his business. He even slept with the chickens for the first batch to ensure everything went well. He has taught us a lot about chicken farming already!

Tailoring business – Radha

One of our Bhaktapur mothers, was keen to start a tailoring business. We helped her to get it set up and then gave her an order for 20 pairs of pyjamas and 50 pairs of knitted socks for our hostel students. She did a fantastic job and it gave a healthy start to her tailoring business which is now flourishing.



Passion Box

Every child has a gift to offer the world. Our job – our privilege – is to help them identify this gift and give them the skills, support and opportunities to set it free. Focusing on our strengths and passions also gives us the tools to cope with challenging times as well as perseverance and hard work. We call it our Passion Box.



Once a child has identified their strength or passion, we work with them to develop this gift, always scouting for interesting opportunities for the students. Working with the kids to find their special gift and watching them soar is one of our favourite parts of our jobs! We have so many amazingly talented kids in the Mitrataa family. Some of the students who dipped into our Passion Box this year include:

Chitiz who attended the AC Milan junior football (soccer for the Aussies!) camp in Kathmandu. What bliss for a football fan to spend a week playing, learning and hanging out with like-minded people!



We also had the privilege of seeing Sushma, one of our class 9 students, compete in the national junior taekwondo championships in Kathmandu. She finished fourth in her category, winning her first and second round matches comfortably and unfortunately injuring her foot and losing in her third match. She also achieved her black belt and now has a coach every day to help her prepare for the next competitions.

Sneha wants to be a lawyer or politician and she has been working on her debating skills with coach, Shreya, who represented Nepal in the world university debating championships last year.

Roshani's Award

In March 2014, the children of Nepal got a new angel to watch over them. Roshani Balika died at Bal Mandir, Naxal, aged 4. Roshani was a gorgeous, energetic, inquisitive young lady who unfortunately had a minor mental disability which meant she was treated differently. We were not able to protect Roshani but we vowed to ensure that her spirit lived on and that her death was not meaningless. In Roshani's memory, we created "Roshani's Award", a scholarship to be awarded to a very special young woman who had faced discrimination due to her disabilities.

When we met Tulasha Poudel in her village in a remote part of Dolakha, we knew she was the perfect recipient for the first Roshani's Award. Tulasha has Down's Syndrome. She is approximately 20 years old. Her mother and sister were killed when she was about 6 years old when their house collapsed in a landslide. Her father is hearing impaired and cannot care for her. She lived with her neighbour and just sat idle at home with no support, interactions or care.

Tulasha has now lived in Kathmandu for 2 years and has developed a lot of skills. She is confident in taking care of her own basic needs now. This year she has been attending a school for children with Down's Syndrome and she has loved dancing and learning and making new friends. We are hoping she will be able to return to her village and family soon with her new confidence.



Heart of Mitrataa - Our Hostel

Our hostel is the heart of Mitrataa in Kathmandu in more ways than one. It is home to our office where the team toils to support our more than 200 families and students. It is home to 15 college students (and Tulasha) who take care of each other, manage their own budget and are responsible for keeping it all ticking along. But it is also home to any of our Mitrataa family members who need extra care, whether it be love and support when they are going through challenging times, nutrition and care after medical issues such as surgery, or new children transitioning into the Mitrataa family on their way to school hostels, the kids welcome them wholeheartedly and take good care of them.

It is also home to around 20 children during some school holidays. We never know who will be there but the Heart of Mitrataa is open to anyone who needs some extra love and a safe place to stay.



Earthquake - Heartquake

After the devastating earthquakes of 2015 in Nepal, we did a lot of healing activities with the children and communities we work with. As a result, we had a whole lot of poems, stories, reflections, images, artworks which showed another side of Nepal's quakes to the one portrayed by the media.

Inspired by Australian children's author, Libby Hathorn, who challenged us to find a way to share this content, Heartquake was born. Heartquake is an online portal which gives a voice to the survivors of the quakes and provides an insight into their experience. It also contains lesson plans for teachers in Nepal and overseas to use the information with their students.

Huge thanks to Libby Hathorn for helping to edit the poems and for her inspiration, to Wiley for the branding and design of the website, to Simon Steele for his help with the coding, to Emily Lemke for some of the lesson plans, to Hamilton Public School in Newcastle, Australia, for their contribution, and to the Mitrataa team in Nepal for all their hard work in working with the families after the quakes.

Junkiri Award

We were very excited to launch The Junkiri Award this year. The Junkiri Award aims to empower Nepal's youth to light up their own futures, much like the Junkiri (firefly) does. The Award contains 6 "wedges", each a literacy necessary to thrive in the modern world:

-  Financial Literacy: budgeting and event management
-  Cultural Literacy: connections through culture and traditions
-  Digital Literacy: the power of telling stories in an online world
-  Wellbeing Literacy: physical fitness and nutrition
-  Strengths Literacy: identifying and building on our strengths and passions
-  Change maker Literacy: solution finding in our communities

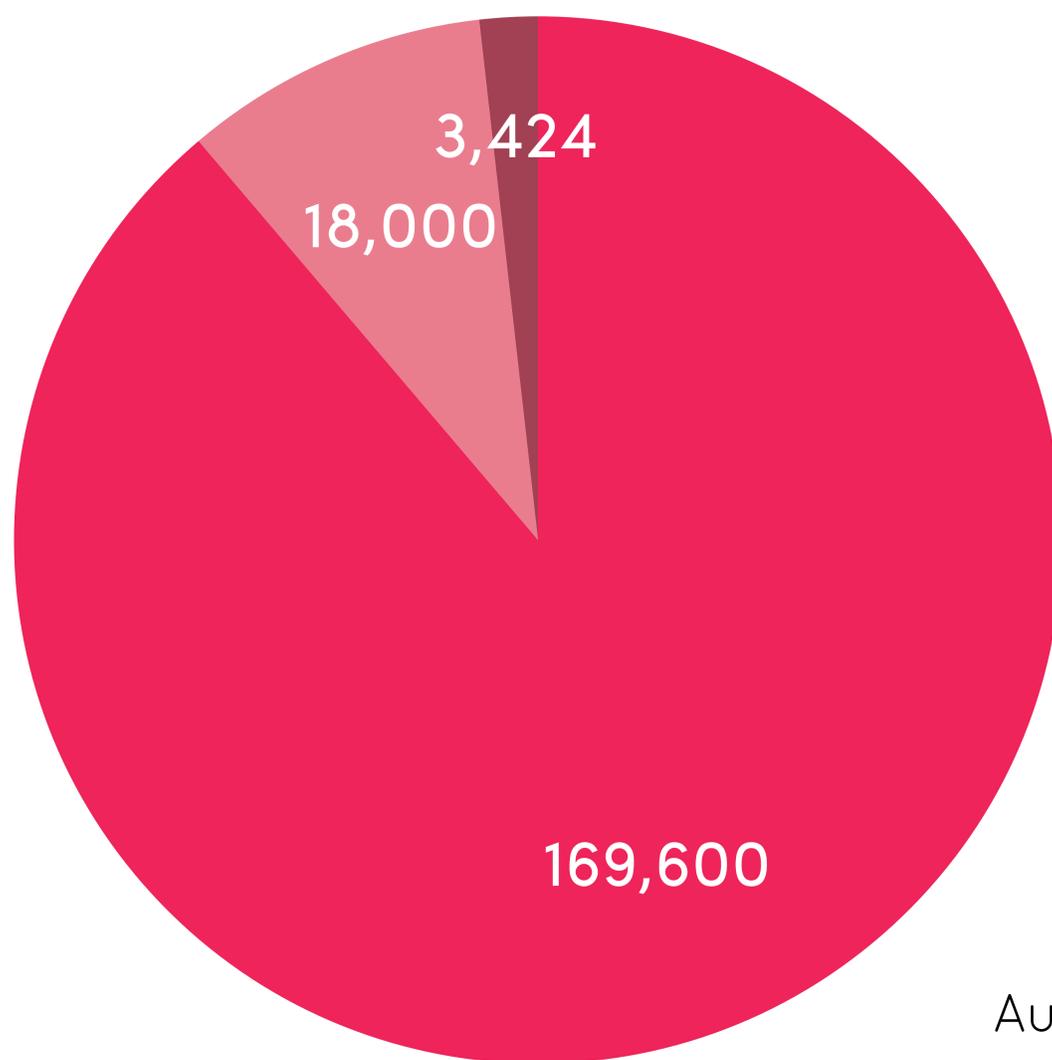
Once the fireflies have completed all 6 wedges, they will be awarded their certificate. The Junkiri Award aims to create leaders – change-makers and confident role models – as well as to give participants skills and experience to be added to their CV in future.

Once the pilot group have finished their Awards, we plan to roll out this Award to all Mitrataa students, as well as making it available in schools and colleges, youth groups and other organisations in future. We are very grateful to our wonderful partner, Wiley, for the design support in creating the gorgeous logo and supporting materials.



Finances

We take finances very seriously. Our supporters entrust us with their generous gifts – our role is to deliver it with love in the most effective way possible to the people of Nepal. Our income for this year was A\$173,473.56.



Figures in
Australian Dollars

- Charitable Project Work in Nepal
- Executive Director Allowance
- Operating Costs

Thanks to our key supporters

We are eternally thankful for the generosity of those who share our vision of Nepal's future. Thank you all for your support. In particular, we would like to thank this year:

John Wiley & Sons - for their ongoing support, both financial and with design services

Libby Hathorn - for her guidance and support as well as her creative mind

GPP Audit - for completing our audits pro-bono

J-Legal

O'Callaghan Family,
Adelaide

Quinn Family, Queensland

Ylenia dal Bianco and her supporters in Italy



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