



A LIFE-LINE FOR GIRLS IN INDIA

THANKS TO FRANCISCO IN BARCELONA!

Francisco was a long way from Barcelona, in 2007, working in West Bengal as a volunteer with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, when a friend suggested one day that they visit a school-residence for girls founded by a Hindu monk about 120 kms from Calcutta. What they found was a dilapidated building where nearly one hundred small girls were lodged; they were hungry and some were sick, but they were still better off than the unimaginable poverty of their homes.

Francisco stayed for the rest of his volunteering period that year, helping to improve the building and using his own money to feed the little girls. When he returned to Spain he raised some funding, and the next year he returned and worked again on the building and looking after the children. In 2009 he founded the Association Hogar de las Niñas, and since then he has dedicated himself to raising funds in Spain, and spending all his holidays working at the school-residence.



In 2010 the Hindu monk left the residence, and a friend of Francisco's with relevant experience took over the main task of running it, with Francisco continuing to spend several months annually there. Thanks to nearly 70 permanent contributors and donations from many sources, as well as fund-raising events organized by the Association, the school-residence has come a very long way since 2009. The residence now houses nearly 300 girls. From age 4-11 they have their schooling there, and then Hogar de las Niñas pays for their secondary schooling, and if appropriate their university training, while continuing to house, feed and care for them.



The children, many of whom come from a highly discriminated tribe, are chosen from families below the poverty line. There is immense demand for a place at the school – in 2019, for example, about 200 applied for 15 places (allocated by lottery). Since Francisco first became involved some 1000 children have passed

through the school residence and subsequent education. Through education all these girls have a chance to avoid child marriage and to have a much better life.



Over the years the building has been improved and expanded, bathrooms have been installed, the children are now properly fed and cared for, and the educational programme has successfully prepared the girls for secondary school. There are two permanent managers: the wonderful Guzman Lago Bornstein, who is responsible for the financial management and the overall running of both the residence and the school, and Ji Yunwan, who is responsible for the education of the girls; they are helped by the external Indian staff: 20 teachers, 6 cooks and 3 workers.

A constant problem at the school-residence has been the uncertainty of the electricity supply, which tends to fail about twice every day. A generator is therefore essential, since otherwise the electric water pump does not work (consequently no water to clean and to cook, unless bought in jerry cans), the food in the fridges can spoil, the fans in the dormitories stop working, the girls cannot study in the evening, and computer-training becomes impossible.



The school-residence had a generator but it was old, inadequate for the greatly expanded demand for electricity as the number of children (and staff) grew, and it failed frequently.



Hogar de las Ninas turned to Femmes d'Europe for help and in March 2020 we provided the 1000 Euros required to buy a new generator. According to Francisco, the new generator has made a significant improvement to the management of the school-residence.

It is so satisfying for our Association to help such wonderful enterprises!

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Projects Committee