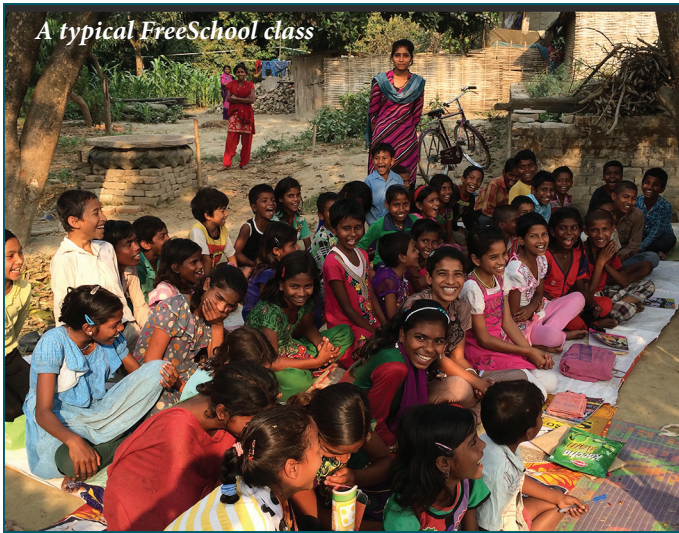


The *FreeSchools* World Literacy *and* Bridge Course Programs

Providing Education for Disadvantaged Girls and Boys in Bihar, India



Funds are raised for teachers' salaries and supplies such as whiteboards and books

FreeSchools World Literacy

Bihar is one of the poorest and most undeveloped regions of India. For almost 100 years the Sisters of the Sacred Heart—all native Indian women—have been working there to educate and improve the lives of the illiterate, superstitious villagers.

Since 2000, Sr. Mary Crescence—with the support of people like us—has held afternoon and evening classes, five days a week, using borrowed space, for those children—primarily girls—who are unable to attend the regular government or convent schools. This *FreeSchools* program provides basic education for underprivileged but otherwise bright and enthusiastic girls and boys.

By funding the teachers and basic learning materials, we currently support 23 schools in villages where

electricity is irregular or non-existent and books are rare. The basic education includes reading, writing, arithmetic, health/hygiene, and social studies.

We also provide modest scholarships for girls of promise to attend the convent schools. For many parents the cost of sending a child to these schools—around \$8 per month—is beyond their reach.

Tailoring Classes

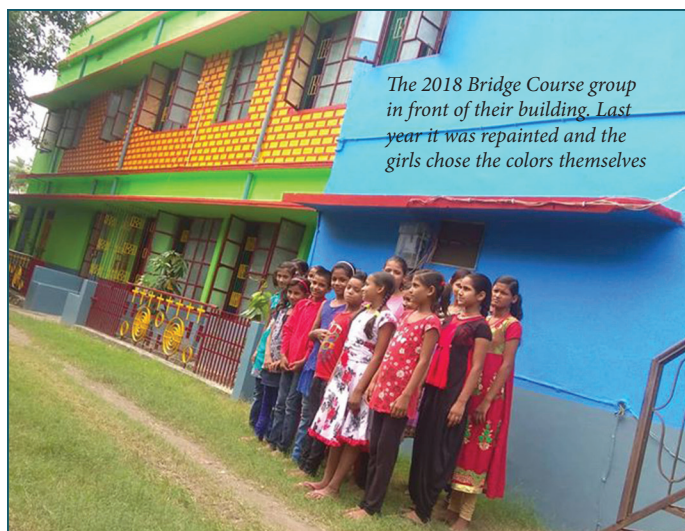
Sewing, embroidery, knitting and crocheting are offered in a few locations to girls thirteen and older with the intent of developing income-producing skills. Sr. Crescence always tells us that “a girl who can read, write and sew will not be beaten by her mother-in-law,” as she brings value to the family.



Sr. Crescence (far left), her assistant Nitesh Kumar, and Geri Johnson with a class of FreeSchool students in 2018



The girls in the tailoring classes learn to sew on treadle machines because electricity is scarce or non-existent in the poorer villages



The Bridge Course Program

In 2010 we helped Sr. Crescence realize her dream of building a dormitory on the convent grounds in Bettiah, for the purpose of housing, each year, eighteen of the brightest girls from the *FreeSchools*, and preparing them to qualify for “bridging over” to the formal schools. At the same time these girls—who would otherwise be married off at an early age—would learn social skills and be exposed to a higher standard of living, acquiring habits they could take back to inspire and educate their primitive villagers. Additionally they would form bonds with each other, leading to high-level cross-fertilization between remote villages.

Named the Bridge Course Program, the grand opening took place in March 2010. Each year since then, Sr. Crescence and her staff have acted as “talent scouts,” identifying the most promising girls between seven and eleven years of age and putting them and their parents through an extensive screening process before granting them admission to the program. As of 2019, close to 200 girls have graduated, many going on to higher education.

Our annual goal of \$8,500 covers room and board for eighteen girls, study materials, textbooks, stationery for exams, toilet articles, medical expenses, sporting equipment, salaries for two teachers and a



hostel warden, meeting and office expenses, travel allowance (for the girls to visit their families), audit fees, and dormitory maintenance. So far we have managed to reach our goal each year!

Sr. Crescence and her Sacred Heart sisters have taken vows of poverty, are self-supporting and receive nothing from the Catholic Church or the government, refusing to consort with corruption, bribery, and other practices that are common in India when money is involved. They and their staff do the actual work and the only help we as Westerners can offer is financial. Those of us who have personally visited the *FreeSchools* and Bridge Course programs can vouch that every cent raised by us goes toward the cause.

The best thing about working with FreeSchools World Literacy and the Bridge Course is knowing children are becoming literate—children who might not otherwise have this opportunity.

The hardest part is asking for donations to keep these worthy grassroots programs viable to our students.

\$30 will send a child to a village school this year.

\$40 will sponsor a girl in the Bridge Course program for an entire month.