



SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STREET KIDS

Appeal - 2023



**Working to provide educational opportunities
for very poor children in Myanmar**

S4SK is a registered charity in the UK, No: 1131559
www.s4sk.org.uk, e-mail: info.s4sk@gmail.com

Who we are:

In the UK, we are **Scholarships for Street Kids (S4SK)**

**S4SK, 72 Sun Street,
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S4SK trustees are:



Sheila Kaye (Trustee), Anna Young (Secretary), Erica Cadbury (Treas.),
George Penaluna (Trustee), John McConnell (Managing Trustee),
Michael Slingsby MBE (Patron) Esther McConnell (Trustee)

In Myanmar, we work mainly with the **Phoenix Academy for Learning and Motivation (PALM)**:



Some PALM directors, staff, students and John McConnell in the PALM office in Rangoon in May 2023

Together, S4SK and PALM work to bring real change to the lives of severely deprived children.

S4SK, H4SS and PALM, a brief history:

We opened our first class for out-of-school children, and awarded our first scholarships in 2007 on the initiative of John McConnell, a British Quaker, who was teaching conflict resolution skills in Yangon at the time.

Scholarships for Street Kids (S4SK) was established as a UK charity in 2009 (Reg. No: 1131559). By 2013 there was a strong team of staff and supporters in Myanmar, and we formed a local NGO which, in 2016, registered as Hope for Shining Stars (H4SS), (Reg. No: 1/PT/0172).

Myanmar has been in crisis since early 2021, a situation that has been difficult for NGOs to navigate, and those working in the field of education have sometimes come under suspicion of political alignment (a perception that could entail considerable risk). In March 2023, so as to be able to operate more safely and give the very best opportunity to our students, the Governing Board of H4SS decided to register as the Phoenix Academy for Learning and Motivation (PALM), a non-profit, private academy dedicated to provision of education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. All the existing work of H4SS continues as before, though now under the aegis of PALM. New areas of work include capacity-building courses for teachers across the sector, expansion of provision of online learning to include secondary grades, and the inclusion of children living in orphanages.

PALM directors, consultants and staff are all drawn from H4SS and include Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim faiths. We provide the same opportunities to children of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Approximately 50% of our students are girls.

PALM directors and advisor:



Daw Aye Aye Thinn, U Maung Myint and Daw Myint Myint Shwe (Directors)
and Daw Kyu Kyu Shwe (Advisor)

The children we support: Most of the children we help are out-of-school, and work long hours each day to support their families from as young as eight or nine. They make bricks, peel beans, fish, scavenge for recyclables, carry loads on building sites, herd cattle, pick water cress and more. Their families have been illiterate for generations and cannot afford the loss of income incurred by children attending school full-time. Children thus become trapped in poverty, unable to access education at the time in their lives when they need to be in school.



The burden of child labour! You can watch this young brick maker talk about his life in one of the videos on the homepage of our website. The work of S4SK and PALM enables child labourers to access education.



Our strategy to enable working children to improve their life chances: Provision of education alone is not enough; it needs to be paralleled with care for the economic situation of their families. Over the past 16 years, we have responded our families' problems as they arose, and in the process have developed a strategy which releases children from the trap of poverty and gives them access to education.

1. Accessible education: The first step is the provision of education in a way that does not depend on previous schooling. This is important as most of the children in our classes have never enrolled in school. Our teachers use a child-centred, active-learning approach, with games, quizzes and projects. Classes are fun, and the children are keen to learn. Our NFE classes act as supplementary education classes would in the UK, bringing illiterate and out-of-school children to the approximate level of first or second year in secondary school.

Every class has a beginning. Usually it starts with an approach from a concerned individual or NGO worker worried about the plight of children on the street in a particular locality. Our staff will then visit the area and set up a meeting with community leaders and parents to see if they will help research the need in the locality. Once the survey is completed, we ask them to join us in establishing a class. If they agree, we set up a Non-formal Education and Child Protection Committee (NFEPC) to help arrange and then oversee the class. These local NFEPCs are invaluable in helping us keep in touch with the community, finding and adapting class venues, and identifying educated people locally who could be trained as teachers.

Once started, the class becomes part of the day to day lives of desperately poor families, and as a result we begin to encounter, and engage with, the problems they face daily.



The story of Ahboegone NFE class:

Our families cannot afford proper housing. Typically, they live in shacks with a framework of bamboo, with woven pressed bamboo panels. Hamlets of such houses spring up on waste ground, and are often vulnerable to flooding and eviction by the authorities.

This particular class started in 2014 in just such a hamlet called Kokowine. It was run from the H4SS school bus by a team comprising two teachers and one mentor, three evenings per week. In the top photo you can see one of these early classes, visited on this occasion by one of S4SK's regular donors, Graham Prescott of Just Trust (Charity No: 1079684).

First move: In 2018, the class moved to nearby Dagondine where **the local community cooperated with H4SS to build a small bamboo school on waste ground (bottom photo).** With its wide windows and spaced bamboo floor, the classroom was open to the breeze, and was a pleasant place to teach and learn.

Second move: In 2021 the building was demolished to make way for a road. However, **by this time there was considerable enthusiasm in the community for the class to continue, and one of the NFEPC members offered the front room in her house as a new venue.**

Closure: This arrangement continued until late 2021 when the whole community was uprooted for 'land development', and families forced to find new places to stay. With most families having moved away, and one of the teachers (Ko Phyo) leaving to take care of a family business while his father was sick, the class was no longer viable and had to close.

However, one by one the displaced families started to return, rebuilding shelters on alternative patches of waste land. One of the parents called to say that the children were now back working at fishing and crab hunting. Hunting crabs is particularly dangerous as they hide in holes in the marshy banks and are caught by small hands reaching deep into the mud. Sadly, one child had died after being bitten by a snake while using this technique; a tearful father said it wouldn't have happened had the NFE class been there. **Some days later, Ko Phyo met some of his former students on the road, scavenging for plastic bottles: "I felt so sad to see them, and wanted to try to restart our class there."**

Third move: The class restarted with sixteen students on 1st August 2022. **A generous lady in the locality offered a patch of land and, using the wood from the previous building, the parents themselves constructed the classroom.** It was not to last long, however. On 25th August, barely three weeks after the completion of the building, the families received notice that they would have to leave; of course there was no compensation or provision for their rehousing, and the families relocated to villages some miles away, some to a village called Ahboegone.

Fourth move: There, a local family offered an old building for the class and Ko Phyo ferried the children to and from their new homes each day. However, the situation involved much travel and was not ideal. **Fifth move:** Then, in June 2023, we were offered a patch of land in the compound of a Buddhist monastery. **Again, parents and PALM cooperated to build a classroom, this time with mostly new wood, at last on a site not vulnerable to eviction or flooding. Now a vibrant class of 21 children learn there happily each day.**



2. Compensation for lost income: Many of our pupils are the breadwinners for their families, so that time in class means a lowering of family income. Family Support (FS) payments compensate families for lost earnings while children are in class. This is paid monthly to parents, and the occasion used to get to know the families, and engage with them on the lifestyle issues (family budgeting, child rights, nutrition, hygiene, child protection etc.) that affect children's wellbeing and development.

During the pandemic, and throughout the current civil unrest, with prices of essentials fluctuating wildly, we have been providing food and hygiene hampers rather than cash payments. This helps ensure that families have what they need to look after their children.

3. Social work: With little or no experience of schooling themselves, parents often do not understand the need for consistency in attendance, and readily withdraw children from class to help at home or work if money is tight. They are on the margins of society, working at unskilled jobs with no security, and hardly able to get by in the best of times.

Our teachers act as social workers, visiting homes and ready to help with whatever domestic problem threatens the home environment for the children. We fund a social work bursary too which can be drawn from to pay medical bills, repair homes, etc.. For example, in response to this flood (bottom left) we are covering the cost of house repairs, and are helping to reconstruct houses in such a way that bamboo floors that can be easily raised in times of flood.

Because of their extreme poverty, there is a



tendency to endure, rather than treat, health problems. If you aren't going to be able to afford the treatment, why go to a doctor in the first place! Thus, poor people often only come round to seeking help when the problem has become an emergency. Two ways in which our social work has helped are, firstly that our teachers have often initiated contact with medical services at a much earlier stage than would otherwise take place; secondly, the fact that the parents know that we will cover the cost of medical treatment, gives them the confidence to seek medical help earlier.

The picture of mother and baby (bottom right) represents the happy end to just such a story. When the baby became sick the mother did not think initially to consult a doctor: "We thought it was not very serious. Later, he could hardly breathe for mucus and we became worried about him"

The baby was taken for treatment first at the local hospital in Hlegu, then in Yangon. The doctors thought the baby would die, but he recovered and is now thriving. The cost of transport and treatment came to 100,000/- MMK, (£40) which would have been very difficult for the family to pay, but was covered by PALM. **Each and every NFE student family sponsored by S4SK can access this kind of support. Having such a safety net does much to relieve struggling families of the stress that inevitably surrounds poverty.**

5. Successive opportunities: Provision of successive opportunities for education and training to bring about real change in children's lives has been a key part of our philosophy from the start. Vocational training (VT) scholarships sponsored by S4SK have included health and social care, sewing and tailoring, hairdressing, electrical appliance maintenance, domestic electrical circuitry, plumbing, mobile phone repair, welding, motorbike and auto repair, and air-con servicing to name a few. Once qualified, students can access low-interest start-up loans linked with the family savings scheme (see item 6).



Thae Mar Aung's story: "When I was 8 years old, my family moved to near Yangon to find work. My parents were poor and could not afford to send my brother and I to school, so my mother enrolled us in the NFE class. I enjoyed learning there. However, after only three months in the class, my father died. That was seven years ago, and I still miss him such a lot. Shortly after he died, my mother became responsible for all of the family's food. However, she was weak from time to time. She would go to the field alone to pick water cress, and sometimes faint, so that other villagers would have to bring her home. On days when she was weak, I would take over. I would leave the house around 5am to pick and sell cress. The emergency support from H4SS was a big help.

I used to think, if only my father was there, I could have a full life. But my father had gone, and I felt weak among my friends. After a while I realised that I still had my mother and brother to support me, and teachers too. With their support I felt I could face the world again. Because of them, I am no longer weak. Now I can greet the world with a smile.



In time, Mum became stronger and could work once again. In 2014, our home was damaged by a storm but we rebuilt it with help from H4SS. We were in debt too, so Mum joined the H4SS savings group and has nearly repaid all now.

In 2019 and 2020 I stayed at the H4SS Learning Centre. I could study better there than at home. I learned to sew and became very interested in dress design. I began to attend E4Y (a prevocational college in Yangon) till it closed because of Covid. After that I learned online at home, with a tablet provided by H4SS and lessons from E4Y and H4SS. I came back to live at the Learning Centre again in 2022 and studied tailoring, Burmese language, English and maths. I learned to make blouses, skirts, dresses and trousers. In March 2023 I went to work as an intern at a ladies' tailoring shop in Yangon. There I could learn more about dress design.

One day, I hope to be able to help my teacher as a trainer for the new trainees. The support of family and teachers is a source of strength for me. I am grateful to them all, and to Po Po John and Daw Aye Aye Thinn who gave me a place to study."

Thae Mar's mother said: "I'm happy to see that my daughter is doing a designer course. I cannot read or write. **I never thought my child would be able to improve so much that she could work at a decent job. I am so happy to see her in her life now. I often lie awake at night thinking about it.**"

Thae Mar is one of the girls on the front cover of this booklet.

6. Poverty alleviation: Many of our families are in debt to money-lenders at interest rates of between 20% and 30% per month. Typically, moneylenders do not push for the debt to be repaid early, preferring to collect the interest over months and years. The impact on children’s wellbeing is huge, with child labour often funding these interest payments.

H4SS runs a savings scheme which can mitigate or remove family debt in time for NFE alumni to access full-time vocational training or further education.

There is a strong social side to the scheme, with groups meeting every month to deposit savings, adjudicate loan applications from other savers, check their interest, share saving and income-generating plans, and encourage each other.

Amazingly, the scheme has kept going, though with adjusted savings commitments, through both the pandemic (when we arranged meetings outdoors around the school bus) and the current period of insecurity.

Since our aim is to get families free of debt in time for their children to enter full-time study or training, we offer a top-up loan (at the same low rate as the savings scheme) to ensure that students can be free of work at this time.

Daw Win Kyi Ma, mother of one of our students said: “I took a low-interest loan from the savings group to repay a debt to a money-lender. In saving, I follow the system that I learned from the H4SS saving scheme training. Each day, before going to the market each day I put 400/- Ks, 200/- for saving and 200/- for paying back, in my savings box. That way, I can save between 10,000/- and 12,000/- (£4-£5) per month. Now that I have nearly repaid that loan, I feel free from worry.”

7. Specialist teacher training: Teaching children from illiterate families and little or no previous schooling can be challenging. Each year we run teacher capacity-building courses which emphasise the child-centred, active-learning approach which, we know from many years’ experience, works with out-of-school children. In addition, this year, PALM is running courses which focus on deploying the same approach in an online setting (see photo opposite and section 8).



Mothers deposit savings at a regular meeting of one of the PALM savings groups (above). Senior staff and new teachers on the Online Education Project prepare for the opening of the project (below)



8. Online education project: The current state of emergency gripping the country has adversely affected the education system in a number of ways. With teachers out on strike across the profession, many schools are unable to provide a full timetable. While better-off families can afford private tuition to compensate, children from poor families, along with those living in orphanages, are at risk of getting left behind.

In past years, we would encourage alumni of our NFE classes to join the formal state system if they wished, and support families to allow them to enrol. In the current situation this option is not practicable.

Also in past years, we would consider opening NFE or study-guide classes in localities where there was a need. However, in the current climate, any new community class can be suspected of being politically aligned, and so risk being targeted.

Our new online education project, currently in its pilot phase, goes some way to respond to these problems. It will provide secondary school level education taught by qualified teachers to alumni of our NFE courses, children living in orphanages, and others who find it difficult to access education. The subjects covered are Burmese, English, Maths, Science, Social Science and Life Skills from Grade 5 through to Grade 9.

The children commented that they were nervous to start with, working online with new teachers. However, it was also exciting and challenging in that they had to interact with teachers directly. There is no 'back row' in an online classroom.



A student story:

Myo Min Oo: “I dropped out of school to help my parents work in the market. Mum and Dad made coconut dumplings which they sold from a bike. Their daily income was about 5,000 kyat (£2). When I was 15, I joined the H4SS NFE class and studied there for 2 years. In 2018, I went to the H4SS learning centre in Hlegu Township and started the first year of E4Y. During the outbreak of Covid-19, I was taught online. However, there was a problem with the internet connection. Often I had to ask questions by phone.

I trained in mobile phone repair, but my first job was with an online textile business. I made a big mistake there. A fellow worker and I were smoking in the company hostel and started a fire by mistake. We both were dismissed. After that, I worked in several mobile phone shops preparing phone software, before my present job. The laptop I was using kept stalling, so H4SS gave me a desktop computer with greater capacity.

There was a problem at one shop; one week during stock-taking it was found there was one phone short. I was suspected of being the thief because I was new, and also I had been sleeping in the shop overnight. But I would never steal, and said so. I was saved by the CCTV which showed that the sales girl had taken the phone.

Now I am in my third job with Tun Mobile. There are 7 employees and I am able to lead in configuration of software. My earnings are based on 50% salary, and 50% depending on output. Last month I earned 350,000/- MMK (£140) and could send money to my parents.

I work willingly because I want to learn. However, no one can teach any one completely. The important thing is to continue our learning by ourselves all the time. When employers scold because they are not satisfied with our work, we must be patient, and learn from them in order to progress. Social skills are also important to deal with our customers. There are challenges everywhere. We must face the difficulties in daily life and we must have resilience.

I noticed a big difference going from the Learning Centre to work. At the Learning Centre, when I was sick, my teachers kindly asked after me and gave me medicine and food. But at work, there is no one who would ask me my situation. I don't have a regular time for meal when I am busy at work. I felt that learning Centre is the warm place for me. I become to know that more and more. “



Myo Min Oo with his family and at work in the phone repair shop



Leaving a legacy to S4SK:

S4SK has been providing education to severely disadvantaged children and young people in Myanmar since 2009.

Through provision of learning opportunities at different levels, together with measures to address the poverty of their families, we are bringing real change to young lives, one step at a time.

The need now is as great as ever, and we are in this for the long haul, committed to each child as they grow and concerned to advocate when possible for better provision for out-of-school children across Myanmar.

Please consider supporting the future work of S4SK by leaving a gift in your will. With your help, we can continue to bring real change to the lives of severely disadvantaged children in Myanmar.

If you would like to leave a legacy to S4SK, please write to the treasurer for details at: s4skfinance@gmail.com.

Dear Friend and Supporter,

The political and economic upheavals in Myanmar present huge challenges to the families we support. Nevertheless, we are finding solutions and even managing to expand our work to include online learning for older children, and support for educational projects with migrant children from Myanmar in Thailand.

S4SK is a small charity. Apart from the costs of our appeal, all admin costs at S4SK, including communication and travel, are covered by donation from the trustees, so you can be sure that roughly 99.5% of your donation will go to the work you see here. Please help us to continue to bring hope to the lives of these terribly disadvantaged children.

In friendship,

John McConnell (Managing Trustee, S4SK)



Please support our work:

1. By cheque or charity voucher to the treasurer at the address below, and made payable to Scholarships for Street Kids;

2. By electronic transfer to Scholarships for Street Kids Lloyds Bank plc, Branch: Hustlergate, Bradford, A/C No: 00376613, Sort Code: 30-91-12. Or use the IBAN code: GB68LOYD30911200376613. Please email the treasurer at: s4skfinance@gmail.com when you make a donation;

3. By regular donation (Standing Order) please email the treasurer to receive a donation form at: s4skfinance@gmail.com.

Gift Aid: If you are a taxpayer, you can also boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer. In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my donation of £_____ to: Scholarships for Street Kids. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

I am happy to receive further information relating to the work of S4SK

I am happy to receive information sent to my email address:.....

S4SK is a UK registered charity, No: 1131559. We will process your personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018. Our Privacy Policy is available from the Treasurer.

Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:.....

Please return to: Erica Cadbury, Treasurer, S4SK, 72 Sun Street, Haworth, Keighley, BD22 8AH
email: s4skfinance@gmail.com