

HISTORY OF SALESIAN COLLEGE YOUTH CENTRES

SCS – A Burning and Shining Flame in the Balasun Valley Youth Centre Apostolate: 1963–2003

INTRODUCTION

Sunday 25th August 1963 saw the birth of the Youth Centres under the patronage of Salesian College, Sonada. They were three in number- the one of Gorabari, one at Shantirani (Hope Town) and the one at Margaret's Hope. That small tree had grown and at one time branched into 26 centres. Under their refreshing shade thousands of boys have taken shelter, nay enjoyed its sweet fruits. It does not seem to be a mere chance that the fire kindled from its flame has put the surrounding hills and valleys on fire. Certainly, the motto of SCS, *Flamma Ardens et Lucens*, was not a meaningless slogan when we find that the wild fire of more than 40 youth centres had been kindled by the hundreds of SCS students inspired by Christ and Don Bosco. It is an undeniable fact that the thousands of boys and girls who pass through these centres as well as hundreds of Brothers have gained a lot over the last 37 years of existence of the SCS Youth Centres.

The effort of compiling a brief historical sketch of the Youth Centres becomes all the more significant as the SCS continues with vigour and renewed enthusiasm to make it grow from strength to strength for more years to come. This work, therefore, justifies its inevitability in the context of the apostolate for the young. I am happy to bring out this book, a dream-work of many that has come to see the light of the day.

I thank all who have contributed to its making. Above all I congratulate and thank all who toiled and continue to work untiringly to make great things happen in the Youth Centres.

TO YOUTH WITH LOVE

The immense possibilities open to do good to the youth around are indeed an invitation and a challenge. The lowering beauty of the mountains, the well-trimmed bushy tea plants are too luxurious a sight to admire from afar. But the hamlets nestling in the hills and valleys do have a different story to tell. The brothers of the Salesian College who dedicate six days of the week to strenuous studies begin each week with their activities among the present 15 centres. They, who have trampled the stone paved roads and footpaths of these villages can, narrate their story of these people.

An SCS Youth Centre is a place where every Sunday a group of Salesian College students organize recreational and educational activities for the youngsters of the area where it is located. These activities are conducted for boys and a sizable proportion of girls.

Practically Nepalese, known also as Gurkhas, inhabit the whole of Darjeeling District. Everyone knows that the Gurkhas are fearless fighters and excellent soldiers. Most of the people in the villages around find their livelihood in the work in tea gardens. The socio-economic condition of these people call for serious consideration. Roads transport facilities, educational and employment opportunities, medical care need immediate attention. The government authorities have done much to enhance education. Yet the illiteracy, poverty and unhealthy condition of these people cannot be ignored by anyone, who is fully conscious of the crying needs of his fellowmen.

The aim of the youth centres conducted by the brothers of the College is intended for the enhancement of education, moral, cultural and social upliftment, especially of the poor youth. Their manifold activities are aimed at the complete liberation of the young from whatever oppresses them and to elevate them so as to make them good citizens for tomorrow.

The Youth centre activity is a complex network of enterprises, and hence demand coordination. The Youth-Action Committee is such an agency that knits together these Youth Centres. The various activities are co-ordinated by the Youth Action Committee composed of the leaders of the various centres and the Catechetical group under the direction of a member of the staff. It has a library, a publication, and a musical and cultural department- all with the reach of all the centres. Besides the centre organizes competitions at various levels- essay, drawing, short story, singing, dancing etc. Each year the Youth activity begins with a Youth Mass in which hundreds of boys and girls belonging to other faiths take part. Besides the Inter-Youth centre Cultural Day and the Collaborators' Meet, Football tournaments are organized at the Zonal level. They form part of the regular annual activity.

SCS considers the involvement of the students in the locality of vital importance for their integral formation. Hence, all the students of the college spend the Sundays in doing youth work and social service in the villages around. It greatly helps towards the training of their apostolic sense as the animating spirit of daily activity and also as a form of love for the young.

At present SCS runs 15 Youth Centres spread out in all directions within a radius of 12 km. A team of not less than three brothers animates each centre. Attendance in these centres varies, but there is usually an average attendance of 40 boys and girls. In total the SCS students reach out to about 600 children and youth every Sunday. Several teachers, headmen, elders and senior boys and girls help them in this apostolate of love and service from the locality.

The Brothers leave the college for their respective youth centres immediately after Holy Mass and breakfast. All the necessary items for their YC activities (ball, indoor games articles, snacks etc.) are got ready the previous evening so as to enable them to leave the

college latest by 8.30 a.m. They return to the college by 5.30 p.m. and spend sometime in reflection and prayer to assess their work and experiences.

The activities in these Sunday youth centres are of various types. As soon as the Brothers reach their respective centres of apostolate, they gather the youngsters in the village school, community hall or playground, and organize outdoor games like football, volleyball, cricket, badminton etc., and indoor games (especially during rainy days). Those talented in music are also given opportunities to practice musical instruments like harmonium, guitar, congo, tabla etc. The brothers also promote arts and crafts by providing opportunities for fretwork, drawing, painting, embroidery, knitting etc. After the games, the youngsters are gathered together once again for spoken English class, singing class, and group meetings (especially for bigger boys and girls). Occasionally film shows, audio-visual programmes, Bingo etc are also conducted to keep the boys enthusiastic and cheerful. The activities of the day are brought to a close by giving the youngsters some moral instruction either by the Brothers themselves or by some teachers or elders of the locality. In the past mimeographed leaflets like 'Rajan' or 'Prakash', published by Youth Action Committee, were used for such moral instruction. At present we have the printed folder 'Tarun Mitras' which offers reading materials for character formation and for acquiring general knowledge.

The Brothers also visit families and provide them with medicines, library books etc. That is also an occasion to establish certain rapport with the people, to come to know their real problems and needs and together find solutions for them. In fact, many community development programmes had their genesis in such friendly contacts. Such visits, moreover, are also an occasion to help the Children's Aid programme by following up the sponsored children.

The brothers also take special care to look after the catholic families in their villages by organizing Holy Mass, prayer services, catechism classes etc.

Besides these regular activities, each youth centre also organizes certain other programmes like parents' day, orientation day, fancy fete, sports day, quiz, debate, completions in indoor games, singing, dancing and drawing. The winners in these competitions are sent up for the inter-youth centre competitive events and tournaments. Among these, the parents' day celebrations deserve special mention. It is an annual event that the youngsters, as well as, the elders eagerly look forward to. It is an occasion when the youngsters celebrate their love and gratitude to their parents through variety entertainment show, agape meal, etc. Of late some centres have also started organizing orientation programmes for the parents on such occasions.

The major inter-youth centre events that the Youth Action Committee organizes at SCS annually are the following: tournaments in football, volleyball, cricket, shuttle, Sports Day, Youth Mass, Talent Contest, Quiz completions, Orientation programmes for the coordinators and for youth, indoor games competitions, essay and drawing competitions, Cultural Dan and Dance competitions together with Fancy Dress.

For many years the Youth Rally was an event that drew hundreds of youngsters from the various youth centres far and near giving them an opportunity to meet and share with each other. The major events of the day were the march past, fancy fete, agape meal, and a variety entertainment programme in which all the youth centres usually participate. A meeting of the leader of the youth centre and the elders of the village, who help the Brothers in their work, is also held on that occasion.

Another annual event the youngsters appreciate very much is the Youth Fest. About 20 bigger boys and girls from each center are allowed to participate in this event. It is another opportunity to impart correct life-values to the youth through talks, group sharing, audio-visual programmes, music, dramatics, etc. For the last few years these events are not being held as others annual events have substituted them.

Great importance is given to orientation programmes that are very effective in imparting correct moral values and life principles to the youngsters. Hence the Brothers bring various groups of youngsters to SCS from time to time and organize a whole day's programme for them. They try to reach out to youngsters in their own idiom: through music, dramatics, group dynamics, audio-visual programmes and so on. These occasions are of great help to the youngsters in taking stock of themselves and charting their course of life.

Orientation camps of longer duration are also organized for youth centre leaders to give them training in value-based leadership. For instance, a two-day leadership camp held for the Co-coordinators of various Youth Centres.

The direct contact with the life of the common man has created a social awareness in the Brothers, which is reflected in the organization of the following community development programmes:

- a. Construction and repairs of community halls, village schools, roads, etc.
- b. Providing drinking water facilities.
- c. Teaching job-oriented trades like tailoring, typing, knitting etc. and conducting Spoken English Courses,
- d. Promoting health and sanitation in the villages by getting para-medics trained, by conducting health programmes like BCG camps, anti-TB campaign, anti-drug abuse campaign, by visiting the sick and distributing medicines etc.
- e. Providing scholarship for the education of poor children.

Great importance is given to making our beneficiaries responsible for their own development. Hence we insist on raising a part of the required funds for the various programmes from the people themselves. So each centre has to raise its own funds from the people for its regular activities through occasional collections, fancy fete, film show, Bingo etc. For some years the inter-youth centre programmes were supported by the

financial assistance of funding agencies like the MISSIO and IGSSS. Many community development projects were done with CRS Food For Work help and with SCS funds.

SCS Youth Service has its own share of problems too. In fact, many centres that were flourishing at one time are closed down now due to political interference, infighting among the villagers, lack of support from committed elders, lack of personnel etc. One of the main problems that the Brothers face is that of the language as it is difficult for them to learn a new language during their regular study programmes. However, intensive spoken Nepali language courses are being organized during their holidays to solve this problem.

The enthusiastic response of the people to SCS youth service in general is a great encouragement for the brothers to continue this service with new approaches and greater commitment. In fact, Youth Service office still gets a lot of requests for either reopening closed centres or for opening new ones. Unfortunately, we cannot respect these requests due to lack of personnel.

SCS youth service may perhaps be only a drop in the bucket in comparison to the total need. However, Sonadians are committed to its goal of being 'signs and bearers of God's love' to our youth around and help build a better world for them. Looking at the immense possibilities ahead, these are but tiny ventures. What is remarkable it that throughout the years the brothers have shown themselves to be dedicated, creative and actively involved. This is a sure guarantee that this work will not tumble down and perish as long as they are fully committed to the cause of the youth – "that part of society most exposed to danger and yet so rich in promise." The ever example of Don Bosco, friend of Youth, will continue inspiring the footsteps of all who go forth to serve the young with love and commitment.

BALASUN

At an approximate distance of 12 kilometers is the village Balasun inhabited by about 600 families. The Youth Centre conducted by the brothers was opened on 4th June 1967 and is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At the initial stages itself there were over a hundred boys attending the Youth Centre. On 17th March 1968 Marma was opened. It is a fine village situated at about 3500 ft. above the sea level, with a population of 1200 (68 census) and 300 families. The village school in Marma founded some time in the wake of this century has given a great impetus to education in Marma. In 1968 the brothers began to cater more to the needs of youngsters, thus a club was started in Balasun for the boys who were above fourteen. In Marma Lekhnath Club was started. On 9th October, 1968 due to excessive rain floods and landslides caused untold suffering. Balasun River was washed off, two persons died and 18 houses were destroyed. The brothers were forced to cancel the Sports Day due to these calamities. In the 1969 Youth Rally at Salesian College, boys from Balasun and Marma participated. On 13th April, 1969 a Scout Troup was started in the valley and on 12th June of the same year, the village library was founded. 10th August saw the first Parents' Day and Scout investiture. On 12th October a village library was

established in Marma, and a Sports Day was held there for the first time. On 15th May scouts were given uniforms through the kind financial aid of the then Manager of Balasun Tea Estate. On 26th November the Scout troops were approved. On 29th April 1970 at the college, a grand Campfire was conducted for the Scouts. On 6th September, 1970 Balasun won the first Inter Football Tournament defeating Rangbull one against nil. On 25th October the Sports Day was held with a special exhibition which was officially opened by the Manager of the Tea Estate. Some CPM members tried to foil the programmes but without success.

On 9th September 1973 a Scout Camp was held at Salesian College in which 9 boys attended. The Scouts joined for Scout competition held in Darjeeling on 23rd September. On 2nd November Bro. K.P. Philip and four scouts left for Delhi to take part in the National Scout Jamboree held at Faridabad, Delhi from 7th to 11th November, 1974. On 16th November 1975 Balasun took part in the 3rd Annual Inter Youth Centre Sports held at Salesian College. In 1977 Inter Y.C. Football tournament Balasun Y.C. defeated Tamsing in the finals.

Marma which was less frequented for sometime due to distance, was re-opened on 15th October 1978. However the visits to Marma would be monthly or bimonthly. On 28th October 1979 about fifty boys were taken to Salesian College for a picnic.

Mr. R.S. Rai, the then Manager of Balasun T.E., has been a great help in every way in the well-running of the Y.C. Mr. Peter Rai, the Head Master of the village School, and several other teachers have been very generous and co-operative in the work. A village library was started in Balasun. The Youth Centre was closed for few years and recently it has gained its old memory back.

Today, the Youth Centre in Balasun is not the same as yesterday. Though there are many scopes for Youth Apostolate the difficulties faced are not few. For few years the emphasis was given to Evangelization to this valley and catering to the Christian Community by visits, Mass and prayers. The contribution of brothers is much appreciated by people especially children with whom they work. The future was never certain and they never could predict. Today the cooperation is found in the persons of the teachers and youth belonging to the Upper Balasun to which the brothers have responded willingly. They are happy about the present work. But they believe firmly that the future is in the hand of God and in the hearts of men of good will, and this is guarantee enough for them that this humble work will continue for the good of the Youth for years to come.

GORABARI

Gorabari Savio Youth Club began on 18th August 1963. Gorabari was then a small village comprising of about 30 houses, which grew to be 60 by the year 1980. Before the coming of the Salesians the benefits of a true development and civilization were a far-off reality. It was the sincere efforts of the inmates of SCS that made Gorabari something beautiful and enterprising. It is just one of the many villages that needs attention, sympathy and concern for the way it was saved from the unhappy situation of these less privileged

people. I hope to give an accurate, objective and reliable information of the beginning of the Youth Centre here which I hope, in turn, will enhance a fellow neighbourhood feeling to fructify into a better solidal living as brothers and sisters of the same Father in heaven.

The village lies on the Siliguri Darjeeling highway at a distance of 61 kilometers from Siliguri and 15 kms. From Darjeeling. It is situated at an altitude of 6,500 ft. The village covers an area of roughly one kilometer. Precisely, from the 395th jhora (mountain stream), to 411th. The road cuts across the village and all the houses are on either side of the road. On one side the village overlooks the tea-garden valleys and is sheltered by fairly thick forest on the other. The vegetation is fairly thick. A variety of pines are available. The soil, being loose and sandy, landslides are common around this area during the rainy season. The village is reported to have been the "home of the white." The British soldiers used this village as a stop-over. The origin of this settlement seems to have been in 1881.

Since the time of the opening of the YC, an average of 45 children attends the Sunday activities at the Club and there are games, music and other recreational facilities provided to them. Thanks to the efforts of Salesian College, and the cooperation of the people, Gorabari has a football ground. The Savio Youth Centre, which was officially opened in 1968 by the College, is a great asset to the village. The boys and girls of the village get enough recreational social and educational facilities and moral instruction in the youth centre on Sundays and on some weekdays. Besides, the annual Youth Centre events held at SCS, the youth centre sports, the Football Tournament, the College provides it with meaningful recreational and educative entertainment through its occasional dramatic and cultural programmes like the College Concert and Bosco Jayanti.

Education brought a better future to the village. It is encouraging to note an increasing interest of the parents in the schooling of the children. The majority of the children and youngsters, a very good percentage of the whole population, is going to school. Still, poverty and illiteracy of the parents are causes of dropouts. The College certainly plays a very great role as a centre of cultural and social education. In 1964 the College opened the first basic school. In 1973 the Rajhata Primary School came into being. Now the children attend the schools at Gorabari, Sonada, Shantirani, Dilaram and Darjeeling as well as Sikkim and Nepal. However, the majority are in the primary and high school. Only a couple of them have passed through the University studies. Nevertheless, a close look at the village at large will show that progress and standard of living is making a steady pace.

The Apostolic work of brothers are appreciated and get cooperation and help from the Youth and leaders of the village. However, due to the over familiarity the people especially the youth, fail to realize the help we give them. Yet, the possibilities of doing good are open to us. There are in fact a marked signs of interest and progress in the Gorabari village. I hope, with a better knowledge of the socio-cultural setting, the brothers can make their service more fruitful by being creative and committed, which in turn, will lead to greater understanding, love and cooperation which are certainly the integral elements of any human development and civilization.

BANSGARI

“Ye banks and braes and strums around
The Castle O’Montgomery
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drum lie.” – R. Burns.

Bansgari- the land of the bamboo gardens- the Youth Centre began in the year 1974. Cut off, as it were, like an isolated island Bansgari lies adjacent to the Balasun river. It is at an approximate distance of 12 kms. from Salesian College and it takes almost three hours to reach the place. The weather is almost akin to that of Siliguri. The luxurious wealth of landscape here cannot be over-emphasized. Down flows the gentle river of Balasun, up there is the forest and on both sides there are the mountains spreading out its beautiful landscape.

The activities in the centre are very effective and consist of embroidery, English classes, games- both outdoor and indoor- singing classes and other entertainments and competitions like singing, dancing and chance games. The youth centre is attended by an average of 50 boys and girls. The village consists of about 80 families and mostly all of them work in the Tea Gardens. One of the crucial problems faced is the lack of good football ground. The brothers have helped to form a club and provided ‘food for work’ from CRS in order to make the playground, but after sometime the work was left incomplete. We do hope that in the near future the children will have good playground. It was through the same work scheme and with the cooperation of the village the brother along with the club members had made a path to Kurseong. After the landslide of 1999 on the main jeepable road, this present path is the only means of reaching the town by foot.

The people of the village, though mostly illiterate, long to educate their children. Many of these children go to Kurseong, Darjeeling, Margaret’s Hope and Sonada for studies. The people are concerned, kind and humble. They happily share with the brothers their goodness and all they have. The Parent’s Day, celebrated annually is an occasion for the children to manifest their love for their parents. The people are cooperative and do appreciate this gesture of gratitude. Once a year the boys and girls are taken for a cooking picnic. The Youth Centre apostolate is certainly ‘worth the trouble’ walking all that distance, for the upliftment of the people especially the youth.

ARIBHUTIO and GAIRIGAON (Nava Chetan Youth Centre)

Situated about 10 km away from SCS, Aribhutio is a small village that lies between Margaret’s Hope and Bansgari. It was opened as an extension of Bansgari Youth Centre in 1978. There are about 55 families in the village, and the little school here is run on voluntary basis by two teachers. The land for the school is donated by a kind gentleman. Though the small playground there is almost always marshy, children enjoy playing football over there.

Aribhutio was opened as a branch of Bansgari youth centre 1978 but now the brother go regularly there and the activities conducted in Ariobhutio are carried out in Nava Chetan as well.

The lockout in the Margaret's Hope Tea Garden since since 16th November 1982, has had its repercussions on the YC very badly. Due to this reason, almost all the youth of the village have been forced to go in search of some work outside the village to earn their living; consequently the attendance in the YC has been rather discouraging. It was in 1983, after the Parents Day Celebration that the brothers along with the headman and the elders of the village sat for a meeting as to the fate of the Youth Centre as it faced the unavoidable problems. Everyone was in favour of continuing the YC activities inspite of the problems. They had formed a managing committee, which collaborated then on with the brothers. They came to the compromise and involved the boys of the village to take up main responsibility of the running the YC. Inspite of the above-mentioned difficulties, the youngsters participated in the important events held at SCS, conducted by the Youth Animation Group. Prior to 1990 a Don Bosco Road was constructed by the contribution from the College through the CRS project.

The Youth Centre offered a lot of scope for typical Salesian work, since it was very much backward in economic and social fields. The presence of the brothers here for the last 30 years has improved the lot of the people to a great extend. In 1987, projects such as repairing the school building, repairing their roads. Providing drinking water facilities were taken up at the initiative of the brothers, under the Food For Work programme.

The main emphasis in the work in these two villages earlier was the overall development of the people especially children and youngsters. The village has been steadily on the path of progress. The brothers sought to seek their concern, problems and worries and tried their best to understand them and identify with them. Their earnest prayer and firm hope was that these people would rise up to a high standard of social, economic, moral and intellectual and religious self-maturity.

RANGMOOK

The Youth Centre at Rangmook came into existence due to the continuous insistence of the people of Rangmook who had known of our activities directed to the young. The brothers had little difficulty in getting the permission of Mr. Johnston, then manager and other prominent people of the village. The Y.C. was opened on 14th March 1976, and was officially inaugurated on 11th April, 1976.

The village is about nine kilometers from the college. Our Youth Centre at Rangmook is attended by boys from three different villages- Cedars, Beachgave and Rangmook. Most of the people are workers in the tea garden that belonged to Mr. Johnston. The village has a lower primary school. The village had a hydro-power project. There is a small library and a 'Merry-go-round' in the village. A club called Dana Sporting Club is constituted of the

youngsters, and it enables them to be good sportsmen. There is a good road now to the village from Sonada. The playground is quite far away, and is rather small. The living conditions, medical facilities, water-supply etc. are far superior to many other villages around here. Though many people are illiterate or uneducated, there is a growing awareness among the people about the urgency of education. About 500 children attend the village school. The headmaster is a very co-operative and sacrificing person and is from the village itself.

The Youth Centre at Rangmook is attended by an average of 75 members. They are divided into groups according to their age, class and height. There was a time when these groups were named as Bruce Lee, Siam Tappa, Pele and the fourth group consisted of girls.

Each Sunday activity began by an assembly in which the teams stood still and sing the anthem "Pukharo" to Don Bosco; this was followed by 10 minutes of Drill which was very much appreciated and it enabled the boys to be disciplined. It was followed by announcement of the day's programme. Moral classes were held on every Sunday according to the teams and groups thus allowing others groups to play. The moral instruction has always proved useful and there was a marked improvement in the behaviour of the children.

The Boys play volleyball, football, carrom etc. while the girls, though not regular, are given facilities such as stitching, skipping, rings etc.

Importance is also given to music and singing. All the musical instruments are placed at their disposal. Since many of the boys are not regular, there is no possibility of giving systematic training in music preferences are given to those who are interested. Singing classes are conducted regularly either all together or in groups. An English class was started years back but due to the inconstancy of the students, it was discontinued. An attendance register was kept for the Sunday Oratory and a prize was given to the most regular of them. Before closing the hectic day of activity all the children gather together for the final get-to-gather through singing and games. The activities of the day come to an end by a short prayer- an important dimension of our work, which makes the work more than mere social service.

Medicine is distributed occasionally while visiting the families, but due to lack of sufficient time, it was not possible to keep up with this good practice of meeting people in their homes to hear and to share their problems. The members of the Y. C. are given ample opportunities to develop and exhibit their talents through competitions, sports, games etc. Often times they encounter at the football ground and join in the game in fair competition.

Rangmook Y.C. was opened as a result of the closing of Nalichore Y.C. in 1976. Since then Rangmook has certainly been a successful undertaking from every aspect. The

remarkable success of our work is also due to the good will and co-operation of the headmaster, teachers, tea garden workers and factory-officers. They all do appreciate the work rendered by the brothers and are convinced that those who attend the Y.C. will make great strides of progress not only in the field of games or music, but above all as true human beings who are God's sons and daughters. The center was closed down in 1987 and got back its old status since few years when the catholic presence needed the SCS help.

SONADA

The so called Sonada Youth centre which has seen much wandering as in the early days of Don Bosco, began in the 1960's and is now known as Johnson Hatta. The Youth Centre was shifted from Scotch mission school to Amar Jyoti in 1964, due to troubles from the town of Sonada. Now we have a school, and the land was purchased by Fr. Rector of Salesian College at Rs. 2000 for this purpose. The government's aid and the people's hard work have been responsible for the present school building. It was hoped that the school would serve as a permanent place for conducting the Youth Centre.

There are about 200 families around and on average 60 boys used to attend the Sunday Youth Centre activities, which has dwindled of late. People in general are quite poor but are sociable and friendly. In the Youth Centre the children are provided with possible sports- games facilities, singing classes, various competitions etc. Though many of the children are not educated properly, their behaviour is rather good. The annual events at the centre include Sports Day, Parents, Day, Lucky Dip, Quiz, Drawing Competitions and Singing Competitions etc.

Since many of the children are other wise deprived of some sort of recreational facilities, the work is certainly a necessity. Circumstances often prevent the boys from being regular in the Youth Centre. The youngsters are in need of greater understanding and help but since we find it often difficult to meet their expectations they do not greatly benefit from the work. However, more friendly and human approach to them may make the existing relationships better. Political parties and ideologies are often responsible for keeping the youngsters away from such youth activities.

As a part of the social development project, a Kacha Jeepable Road was constructed at Upper Johnston Hatta along with a drain with the CRS help. Later the Amar Jyoti-Sonada bridle Path was constructed in 1981. The center was closed down in 1987 and was opened after few years again.

The Youth Centre at Sonada is both challenging and promising. Now it is all the more challenging because the older members are no more. The young generations were not initiated into the movement. The brothers do struggle to continue the centre inspite of discouraging response. They need to be more creative in their approach to the young who have other interests which are easily met with in the town. From this year (2001) a brother

helps out in the catechism class in the parish too. This may in future be taken more seriously as the main activity of the brothers, if the situation goes as per present conditions.

The work is appreciated by most of the people there, especially by the poor children who constitute the vast majority of the beneficiaries.

SUNNARBASTY

Sunnarbasty lies southwest of Sonada. It is about an hour and half journey to reach the place. Sheltered from the North wind, it nestles snugly at the foot of a lovely hill that surrounds it. The village of Tera Number encloses it on the east; a hill separates it from the near by villages of Rington, Margaret's Hope and Beltar. The flourishing tea gardens of Rington are spread around this little village of about 60 families. Most of the people are financially poor, and they are workers. People as whole are simple, co-operative, trustworthy and peace loving.

It was on 18th June, 1978 that the long awaited dream of Sunnarbasty met its realization. The people there had been insistently asking the brothers to begin a youth centre there, and having studied the possibilities, and a meeting with headman, it was found possible to begin this undertaking. Thus, the youth centre was inaugurated on 9th July, 1978 under the auspicious presence of the Rector of Salesian College. Both the villagers and the then existing Merry band contributed items to make the day solemn.

Since then the youth centre has about 40 attendants every Sunday. Since the playground is small, games are held in shifts; indoor games facilities are ample. Distribution of Tarun Mitra and other leaflets on moral and religious values, moral classes, English classes, singing etc are some of the other regular activities. The children take part in the inter youth centre competitions like Essay, Drawing, Singing, Football Tournament. Parents Day, Lucky Dip, Sports Day etc. are held annually. One of the deplorable conditions of the children here is lack of educational facilities. The lower primary school in the heart of the village reminds one of the 'Village School' as described by Goldsmith.

The work is so much a success mostly due to the co-operation and good will of the teachers who try to be present at the centre, and are ready to help in whatever way possible, and also the people of the village who appreciate our work.

The football matches held in the villages during the season of Football cause one of the problems that is faced regarding the normal running of the youth centre. However anticipating the youth centre by a few hours and making it possible for the children to go to the matches can solve this. Another problem we have to cope with, is the smallness of the playground.

The future is not in our hands and is unpredictable. But as long as the good will of the people and the enthusiasm of the brothers last the work here will meet with great success.

RAGHUBIR BASTI

Raghubirbusty, popularly known as Tera Number is a village close to the Salesian College, with about 105 families. Most of the people work in the Rington tea garden. Though poor, they are hard working and have enough to eat, and reasonably good houses to live in. Water supply has been made available through the help of Salesian College.

About 50 children, the vast majority being youngsters, attend the Youth Centre. They are in general, educated, and are good and healthy. The games that are conducted are as in other Youth Centres. The boys are very much interested in volleyball, and hence they are helped to build up a volleyball court. In the absence of a school building few years back, all the activities were held in the open, but thanks to the generous help of the benefactors there is a school, which was solemnly inaugurated in 1978 at the celebration of the Parents Day.

The brothers receive good co-operation from teachers, grown-up members of the club and the people of the village. The brothers' presence also enables the people to some extent to be open, generous and united. Besides the limited recreational facilities- since the playground was small, drill was conducted. The children were much thrilled to march and their parents took pride in seeing them march in such a disciplinary manner. An attraction towards military life, discipline etc are part of every Nepali, and therefore a good use is made of these means to inculcate discipline and good health in the Youth.

NAYABUSTY

It is one of the recent Youth Centres opened in 1999, with the title Naya Busty Divya Pariwar with the main objective of helping the children of this poor little village to grow. It is situated on the slope of Tera Number, one k.m. distant from SCS. Since the time of its inauguration the Youth Centre saw a slow and steady progress with a regular attendance of an average 50 children. Today the Centre boasts of having its Council and six lay persons collaborate with the Brothers in the Sunday activities. Though comprising a population of only 115 persons, Nayabusty has a number of children who benefit a lot from the Sunday Youth activities. Through meetings, programmes, games and visiting houses the Brothers have contact with the youth;

At present the youth along with the collaborations of the laity of the village, are trying to enlarge the playground and are trying to establish themselves gradually with the full cooperation of the brothers. They get the needed cooperation from the Headman of the village.

Being mostly children especially those below the age of 12, who are not regular, the brothers find difficult to organize certain planned activities except games, music and sometime cultural programmes. Now they are trying to help out the bigger boys and girls through classes, animations and meetings. Though not in a very elaborate way, some children have benefited from the Children's Aid Programme and the brothers helped to collect biodata and following up the families of the sponsored children. It was a project, which helped very much in improving the lot of the poorest children.

KHARIABUSTY

The Avinash Youth Club, established in 1983, has its objective to build a successful Club helping the local youth to grow and mature into 'good citizens'. It is situated below Goethal' Siding, 14 kms. away from the College. This registered Club is just one of its kind that requires brothers' animation in helping the Youth leaders in executing the Club activities. The youth themselves show a lot of leadership in way of organizing the various activities of the Club. It has a building and the recreational facilities. It has also a ground and a library. SCS has helped in financing for the maintenance of the Club. Some years back they had taken the initiative of collecting fund for text and library books, water supply facility and for training in music. Besides helping this Club to get registered, SCS has contributed to the repairing of the Community Hall in 1987 through IGSSS.

Today the brothers are catering mainly to the moral and physical well being of the participants along with intellectual formation especially through the English class. Occasionally Essay, drawing, singing and other cultural competitions are held at the Youth Centre. Their efforts are being put to making the club a united one through the creativity of the of the animators. Besides the geographically located Youth Centre, the youth are contacted though. The Brothers visit the families to keep in contact with the youth. They are invited in turn by all the families to have their meals.

Football, Volley Ball and Cricket matches. For the last twenty years the club has shown its stability and many youth are coming out of it as future leaders of the society.

DEORALI BUSTY

The Youth Centre here has been existing for the last (8 years), located on the main upper block of the village consisting of nearly 400 families, right on the top of the mountain flat. For sometime it was being conducted at a private primary English medium school Presently it is being conducted at the main playground and the Government Primary School campus with the permission of the Head teacher and with the collaboration of the local youth leaders. The objective is to see to the intellectual and social well being of the children of the locality.

It is about 10 km away from SCS, where the Brothers have to reach either by foot or by bus below Chaitapani and then walk up the hill till they reach the top. Here the people mostly

live on agriculture and selling of milk and vegetables. The boys, therefore, have to work even on Sundays either to collect grass or do farming.

The average attendance is 50 boys and girls of which mostly are children. So far the council has not been set but all the same the involvement of the lay persons are seen in the execution of its activities. The normal activities are: games, get-together, and drawing, singing and cultural competitions. Since there is no regularity in attendance the Brothers find it difficult to plan consistently some regular programmes for the boys and girls. Certain measures are being taken for proper collaboration of the youth leaders, to bring people together and teach them values of life. They do get cooperation from the villagers especially from the Headman and the Head teacher. The animators feel positive about having raised the spirit of the Youth Centre.

EK BLOCK

After Upper Mamring and the Lower Mamring were closed, a Youth Centre in this small village of around 30 families, was opened in 1998 with the objective for intellectual formation and social awareness. It is 10 km away from the SCS. The brothers have to walk up to Dilaram and then climb up the hill to Bagora. The village is situated on the opposite side down the Bogora village. Most of the villagers are Buddhists, living on agriculture. There is no headman in the village. The adults of the village come together along with the youth leaders for any decision-making policy. There is a small temporary primary school for the children and the village people expect the Brothers to form the character of the boys and girls through value education, English classes, games and visits. The Brothers along with the help of the local youth conduct various competitions, organize the Parents' Day, Video show and lottery.

The members are not regular in attending the Sunday activities due to household works eg: farming, cooking or cutting grass. There is a plan to extend the school building with another classroom, gather the children there and bring them out of their shyness and give proper intellectual formation.

Today the Youth Centre can boast of having its council and the Savio Club members.

MALI BUSTY

The Youth Centre was opened in 1998 to meet the needs of the youth of the village through intellectual formation and recreational activities. It is 9 km away from SCS, consisting of 85 families with 480 persons. Their main source of income is from the Tea Garden. Majority are self-employed either in farming, cow rearing for milk and growing vegetables. On an average 40 children attend the Sunday's activities, which are mainly: English class, games, singing, annual parent's day and cultural programmes etc. Three lay persons are involved in collaborating with the Brothers in executing the Youth Centre programmes.

Recently the Brothers had found disunity among the youth and now they are trying to bring them together by visiting their families and the Club where the youth gather. Due to irregularity in the attendance of the youth members, the animators find hard to organize activities consistently. From 2000, they are trying to organize activities at the zonal level and they have been successful.

CHAITA PANI

This is another youth center of recent origin. It was opened in 2000 with the objective of moral and intellectual upliftment of the children of the village. It has 130 families with 450 members including 250 children of the age group of 1-18. Most of the people live on daily wage. Some are in the army. Few are contractors and businessmen.

Every Sunday the children gather and participate in the recreational and educational programmes conducted by the Brothers of SCS along with the collaborations of the youth leaders and the Headman of the village. The main activities are: English class, music class, singing-dancing and drawing competitions, social work etc. At present there is an average attendance of 50 children under guidance of the Youth who have now a council. Due to the political instability and poverty they children are not encouraged to study and qualify themselves. Today, the Brothers have given an educational thrust and brought about an awareness of hygiene in the surrounding while at the same time trying to unite the youth and villagers together. They do receive cooperation from the village but it could be still improved with the collaboration of the youth leaders and the village council members. Certainly the activities in the village have been instrumental in the moral, social cultural and intellectual developments of the ousters and they hope to continue in earnest for the betterment of the whole village.

VILLAGES BENEFITTED FROM THE YOUTH CENTRES THAT ARE NO MORE

BELTAR- A Village in Kettle Valley

Nature seems to be the most co-operative factor in the life of human beings. But in certain cases we can over emphasize this tendency of nature. Such was the case in Beltar. Take a pause in any place between Tung and Dilaram. Glance downward in the direction of southwest. There you could count 35 houses built along the narrow strip of Kettle Valley. This village was well fortified by the mountains all around to protect it from the inclemency of weather and fate. The ever-refreshing stream was always in the same vigour to run downward. The green shrub, which was the life of the people, was as sturdy as 50 years ago. Above all the people were always grateful and contented in their appearance.

Beltar is one of the well-settled villages around this area. Poverty and famines are far from these people for every one has some work or other in the tea plantation or in the factory. Though within themselves they are well knitted they have very little contact with other people, due to the poor communication and transport facilities. The brothers' presence, therefore, was very well appreciated and as a grateful gesture they had co-operated with the brothers very generously.

On Sunday the village school was placed under the disposal of the organisers of the Youth Centre, to conduct the various activities. Around 40 boys and 25 girls attended the centre. Approximately three hours were spent with them during which the boys usually played caroms, football, snake and ladder etc; the girls engaged themselves in creative art like stitching and embroidery.

The brothers also taught them guitar and harmonium. Before they ended the day's activity, the brothers would explain to them the content of ' Prakash', 'Soldiers of Christ' etc. Thus they imparted some moral and human values to them. The result of this little food for thought was instantaneously shown in their polite and good mannerly behaviour towards one and all. The love and concern the brothers had shown to them came in return always with greater interest of co-operation and good will.

BUTTAKETTY

Buttaketty is a youth centre that was comparatively of a short period of duration. The centre as opened by the brothers on 4th May 1980. Prior to its opening Fr. K.U. Mathew, then director of the Youth Centre activities visited the place and studied the possibility of starting the youth centre there. The constant request of the Samaj also led to the undertaking of this new venture. The former name of the village was Buttuwa-Ketty, which literally meant, "field of corn or maze". It is situated below Tamsing and adjacent to Rangmuk. The distance to this centre from the college is about 8 Km. The village had about 75 families, of which only 35 belonged to the village 'Samaj' where the brothers

worked. They were invited by members of the CPI (M) and they gave help and co-operation. Most of the people were employed in the Oaks Tea Estate. People did have work and children had the basic educational facilities. Since the village was rather new and the families young, the attendants of our centre were mostly young boys and girls. An average of fifty to eighty children attended the centre each Sunday.

The brothers planned to conduct annual events such as Parents Day, Lucky Dip, Sports Day, Picnic and other competitions during the course of the year. The club was very co-operative, but on certain Sundays, when there was work in the Tea Garden the Youth Centre activity received set backs. However, the people of the village are eager to have the brothers working for their children and helping them to grow strong physically as well as morally. Football, Caroms, moral classes, singing and music classes, drill, English classes, flower making and other creative and competitive activities were main features of the Sunday programme.

Though at present, the Youth Centre does not exist as was conducted by the brothers still the people do remember the pioneering work done by some of the brothers from the college. Butta Ketty which owes its existence to the closure of Dilaram, fast on its way to progress and we do hope that the children and the youth there are growing up to upright and honest citizens.

CHIMNEY BUSTY

Chimney Busty with its laugh-provoking name was a new entry into the history of the Youth Centre activities. It is a village about 10 km. Away from the college, and was opened on 5th August 1978, when the Youth Centre of Bagora was closed down. Bagora Youth Centre, which began in 1971, had been facing problems that led to its final closing in 1979. The brothers were invited by the people of Chimney Busty, to conduct a youth centre where and thus the Don Bosco Club was opened in 1978. Chimney Busty was then a small village with 60 families. Most people were literate and were financially well off. In the village there existed an Adult Education Scheme being carried out in which 25 to 30 adults participated. Many of the families depended themselves on agriculture and had good cows bought with the load received from the Central Bank of India. From the village, there was engineer, two carpenters, a professor, one man was in the Navy and a headmaster. The village has a dispensary. The Sunday Youth Centre conducted by the brothers had a regular attendance of about 60 children, who busied themselves in playing games like football, volley-ball, shuttle, carrom, Chinese checker, snake and ladder, rings, skipping etc. The club had two guitars and a harmonium at the service of the young, and singing classes were taken regularly. Other activities were: teaching English, drawing and stitching facilities. Most of the attendants of the Youth Centre were school going hence discipline was not a serious problem. The youngsters took a leading part in organizing and collecting funds for the Youth Centre Day. In collaboration with the village people Sports Day was organized in 1979 for the entire village. The club also organized a football tournament for elders and boys. Of the five teams, the parent's team entered the

final and it was a thrill for the mothers of the village to watch their husbands fight their children in the finals.

This Youth Centre was well organized with a secretary and president to look after its efficient running. Mr. Gopal Thappa, the Head Master was very co-operative, and the people as a whole were much appreciative of this work on behalf of the young.

Sunday was much sought-after day in Chimney Busty. It was also a source of great joy for the brothers to help build a world of young who are the promise of the future. Each of them felt that the Youth Centre belonged to them and they belonged to the Youth Centre.

DARJEELING

Darjeeling the Shangri-La of foreigners and holidaymakers had no youth centre to care for the spiritual needs of the Young until the year 1978. Fr. Marcus, then parish priest of Darjeeling felt that he could not adequately look after the loitering youth of his parish due to his diverse activities. Hence with the approval of the Bishop, it was decided in the parish council to call in brothers from the Salesian College to give a helping hand. The Bishop, Rev. Eric Lepcha, was only eager to have the Salesians since he felt that such a work was in keeping with their charism. As a result, two brothers went all the way, 20 km distance, for the first time on 18th June 1978. Another Youth Centre was born.

The young who frequented the youth centre were mostly Catholics. The attendance was never steady. It fluctuated between 30 to 40 members. Some of the girls from Shishu Bhavan of the M.C. Centre, Darjeeling would be regular members. The brothers worked in close collaboration with the parish priest Fr. Marcus. It was Fr. Marcus who usually conducted the moral instruction. The brothers shared their joy through their participation in football, shuttle, volleyball, table tennis and caroms. They were all organized by the brothers. Other activities included drawing competition, singing classes and social work.

The main annual events were:

- 1) The Children's Day, which was unique feature of this Youth Centre. It had no Parents Day but only the Children's Day in which the children would bring along with them their parents as well.
- 2) Taking part in competitions conducted in Salesian College. These included singing, drawing, essay and short story. They have walked away with many a prize on the Sports Day as well.
- 3) Every year the brothers took them out for picnic.

From 1982 the Youth Centre took a new shape with the coming of Bro. Gilbert, a diocesan and the present Director of the Youth Centre Activity at Salesian College. Besides the regular Catechism we were visiting the Busty around the town to get more members from there and we had succeeded. There was more participation of Youth. They were

formed into a Youth Group for the first time as a group for Sunday Catechism. Once the Divyavani, Pastoral Centre came into existence, the activities were held there under the guidance and supervision of Bro. Gilbert. The brothers also helped the JTI students in singing and Group dynamics sessions for few months.

The work was much appreciated and co-operation was remarkable. To induce the children to be regular the brothers tried to make the Youth Centre activities as interesting as possible. The Salesian presence was felt only when children and youth were happy to come to the Centre and attract others as well. By 1985, the brothers had stopped going to the Youth Centre as the diocese took it up.

DILARAM

The Youth Centre in Dilaram christened "The Dilaram Boys Merry Club" came into existence on 29th August, 1965. This club was intended to enable the young to come to the club and spend their time profitably through games, recreation and other creative activities instead of idling their time in gambling, and forming unhealthy groups. The students of Salesian College received the help and cooperation of the headmaster and the village committee and soon initiated lots of healthy amusements for the children with a view to make them good citizens and upright men. The club membership soon rose to 125 and various activities included moral classes. 'Prakash', a weekly publication for providing good reading material; out door games, indoor games, hobbies such as flower making, fret-work, drawing and painting, book-binding etc. Drill was conducted to infuse discipline. Importance was given to teaching of music, dancing. The Youth Centre celebrated 8th parents days and four concerts. Excursion, films, matches and tournaments, competitions at various levels etc. were held.

Medical care and other social welfare services were rendered to the poor and needy. A house was constructed for a poor family. The centre also had a small library with books borrowed from the college Youth Centre Library. Families were visited. English classes were conducted for senior boys. Regular attendants were given tickets and the most regular of them were awarded prizes.

The Youth Centre had envisaged a plan for future activities comprising of the following activities;

1. To build a good library for the people;
2. To give organise tuition in English
3. To aid poor students to continue their studies
4. To enable them to get jobs,
5. To form a "Manoranjit Sangh" for music, acting, singing and entertainment to help the young;
6. To conduct "Leadership Courses" for promising and youth full candidates
7. To provide them with educational excursions,
8. To have a magazine for the village mimeographed

Signs of displeasure and lack of co-operation from the part of the villagers and children were manifested through regular harassment of the activities. Seven sets of carom coins were removed from the centre. The playground began to be cultivated and games facilities were confined to the school. Soon enough, even the school was made inaccessible to us, thus forcing to discontinue the work. On 25th April, 1980, the Youth Centre staff met and discussed the problems with the director of the Youth Action Committee, Fr. K.U. Mathew, and decided upon the closure of the Dilaram Youth Centre. New Youth Centre at Buttaketty and Goethal's Siding were opened as a result of the closing of this centre.

GOETHALS SIDING

Goethal's Siding, about 14 kms from the college was opened as one of our Youth Centres on 1st June 1980. There were about 60 families in the village; financially they were rather backward. The educated people worked wither in Nepal or in the Goethal School adjacent to the village. The centre was attended by an average of 60 children. Among the activities importance was to moral classes through pictures, pamphlets etc. There were also facilities for games, music etc. On 16th August, 1980 the brothers along with the collaborations of the youth had organized the 'Children's Day'. The people of the village did appreciate their work and cooperated with them. They were great help in carrying out this tiny venture of the college on behalf of the 'growing hope' of tomorrow- the youth.

JORKOHLA

The Youth Centre at Jorkohla - a village situated on the Hill Cart Road, about five kms off from the College, was opened on 6th June 1971. The village had about 40 families. The centre had about 55 members of which at least 40 attended the youth centre every Sunday. Activities consisted in games, singing, moral lessons etc. There were ample facilities for developing the talents of children through flower-making, stitching, drawing etc. Parent's Day, picnics etc were held annually. A variety entertainment was held in 1980, which helped the brothers to collect funds for the centre. The school was placed at their disposal and Mr. Kumar, the Headmaster then was very co-operative and helpful in everything the brothers did. The grown up boys of the centre had formed a team to look after the well being and good conduct of the smaller children. All felt a sense of belonging and responsibility. The members of this team collected 25 paisa per month from each member of the youth centre (an initiative of the boys themselves) so as to facilitate this sense of belonging and responsibility. Thus, the boys began to realize that the youth centre and all the things, were theirs. The club also met repairs, in case of damage.

The work was appreciated and the boys looked forward to Sunday. Most of the days the brothers were welcomed by enthusiastic group of children who awaited the coming of the brothers. They hardly had any trouble from any unwanted elements. However, one of the serious, and perhaps, insolvable problems faced was the lack of a playground. The

boys often had to be confined to the school or were forced to play on the road. Judged from the then existing standard, Jorkohla was one of the most hopes that the brother's humble work would enable the young to grow up as the leaders of tomorrow.

UPPER KALEJ VALLEY

The Sun rose majestically on the Eastern horizon above the Nepal Mountains, which marked the beginning of a new day- a day out of millions. But each day goes to make up a month, a year and a century. Everyday is different from another, so was that particular day in April. They had a particular golden touch for it was to be a landmark on the beginning of the Youth Centre. Bro. Louis Humsce was invited by Fr. Jelleci to accompany him to Dooteriah, to have Mass in the Catholic family there. On the way back from Dooteriah he happened to land up in Upper Kalej Valley. During his chat with the Headmaster he realized that he was very much in favour of starting a Youth Centre there. So the Youth Action Committee took up the challenge and brothers were sent and the Youth activity began.

Upper Kalej Valley is a village below Rangbull with a distance of about seven km. From Salesian College. Just like a newborn babe, who has to depend on others, but fights for its own existence, the Youth Centre too was a centre, which was just born and began to grow. The very first Sunday with the children was on the 8th June, 1980. It was at the initiative of the brothers of Tamsing youth centre that this new Y.C. was opened. It depended on Tamsing for financial matters, since it had no fund of its own.

The village of Upper Kalej Valley is wide spread and is divided into two sections. There were about 400 families with a population of around one thousand five hundred. Good many people were employed in the Upper Kalej Valley Tea Estate. There were others who earned their living by looking after cows, which is so common a profession among the Nepalese. The village had no transport facility whatsoever. Only a footpath reached up to the village. On the whole the standard of living of the people was not too bad compared to many other villages.

The village has two primary schools. So a good percentage of the children receive elementary education. The school in which the brothers conducted the activities was just newly built; it had a fairly good football court close to it. The headmaster was always supportive and would stay with the brother the whole day to help the brothers. Occasionally another teacher would come. From the other school, a lady teacher would help too. The children very well accepted her. The teachers were very cooperative.

Generally there would be 60 to 80 children and on certain days it went beyond hundred. As a regular programme there were games, both indoor and outdoor, singing, distribution of 'Prakash', medicine and now and then Bingo and other games to keep the children happy and occupied. The brothers took part in all the common activities of the Youth Centre like football matches and other competitions.

The children were good natured, obedient and cooperative. They were also quite healthy and clean in comparison to other villages. The brothers felt that they were very much wanted there. The people were very cooperative too. Above all the smiling, cheerful faces of the innocent children were always an encouragement to the brothers to keep working for them.

There was much to hope for a bright future since the headmaster and the children were very co-operative. The main problem that was faced was the lack of funds. The brothers had conducted a magic show to raise fund. They expected the kind cooperation of the people with good will to help them to do good to those poor children. The joy and satisfaction that were derived from this humble work was certainly enough reward for them and urged them to proceed on with confidence and courage.

MAHARANI

Maharani Youth Centre came into existence in the year 1968. It is about eight kilometres from the college, situated on the distant bank of the Beltar River. The village consisting of about 50 families was surrounded by tea gardens and most people earn their living by working in the tea gardens. An approximate number of 60 boys and girls frequented the Sunday Youth Centre, and spent their time profitably through games that were prevalent among other centres. Music, dancing, singing etc. were given great priority. The annual sports day, Parents' Day, Picnic day etc were much longed for events. In spite of a primary school in the village, education was very much neglected and the poverty of the children was convincingly clear to everyone. The work of the brothers in this village was oriented towards the physical, moral and intellectual growth of the children who ought to emerge as the future promises, and the cream of society in the world of tomorrow.

MARGARET'S HOPE

It was years ago on 25th August, 1963 that the Youth Centre of Margaret's Hope was opened under the enterprising spirit of the then Bursar, Fr. A.J. Sebastian. 17 years later, on 17th August, 1980 that the pioneer apostle was present at the Parents' Day celebration. In the course of the years several brothers had worked for the youth of Margaret' Hope and some of them have reminiscent of their childhood days attending the Youth Centre.

Margaret's Hope is a rather big village having one of the biggest tea gardens in the area. It is about 5 kms away from Salesian College. The Youth Centre was conducted in the village primary school. About 40 boys attended the centre throughout the year. However, when the football matches began in Beltar Margaret's Hope, the number of attendants declined. Many of the boys were not regular and the good practice of giving tickets to the attendants was stopped. The names of the boys and girls who attended the youth centre were no more written down as it used to be customary.

The fretwork, embroidery etc had been discontinued due to the disinterest of boys and lack of initiative from brothers. However, efforts to reinstate these activities were under consideration. The regular games played were, caroms, Chinese checker, snake and ladder etc. Football was the only outdoor game and was played by girls as well. One of the serious problems faced was the distance between the school and the playground, which is about a kilometre or so. Due to this, it was difficult to co-ordinate the various activities properly. The boys used to go to the playground to play only when there were sufficient players. Once they began the game with gusto and vigour, it was hard to stop them.

Compared with the other villages in the area, Margaret's Hope was quite well off with regard to education and medical care. The hospital of the tea garden was of great benefit to the people. However, there were many children who were dropouts from schools, and were not sufficiently educated. Among our youth centre boys there were many who came from poor homes and lacked proper education.

The Youth Centre boys and girls participated in the various competitions organized at the centre or in the college. The prizes for drawing competition for the year 1980 was won by Margaret's Hope. In Football tournaments too, Margaret's Hope had always proved as one of the prominent teams. Unfortunately the football tournament of the 1980 held in this village had to be cancelled due to some troubles. However, the people of the village and teachers did apologize and path-up the troubles.

The help and co-operation got from several sources are indeed invaluable. Mr. Thakiru, one of the teachers was of great help to the brothers in organizing parent's day, sports day and other activities of the youth club. The parent's day of 1980 was a remarkable success. Fr. Rector and Fr. K.U. Mathew were chief guests of the functions. Prizes for essay and drawing competitions, merit prizes for good-conduct etc. were awarded at the function.

Pascal once said, "Things are better in their beginnings." This is true of Margaret's Hope Youth Centre. At present the youth centre seems to have lost much of its past grandeur and glory. Perhaps, we need both increased awareness of the interest and needs of the boys as well as greater initiative in launching out new methods to make our work for youth attractive. Perhaps, we need to use more modern methods of imparting instruction and recreation.

Margaret's Hope Youth Centre approached its silver jubilee, and as we looked back, we felt greater urge and enthusiasm to go ahead. But the Youth Centre is no more there. It was closed down in 1987.

MAMRING

Mamring is a small village with a mighty surrounding of the Himalayan ranges around it. It is about 12 km. from the college. The Youth Centre was officially inaugurated on 15th June

1975. The expedition to this new adventurous place was led by the then Rector Fr. Joseph Punchekunnel.

When the Youth Centre was opened in 1975, the number of families was 85, but today it has increased by fifteen more. All together there were hundred families. Most of them were staunch and united Hindus which helped the brothers to be of greater help to these people because they stood as one whenever they had to do something. Socially, from the development or cultural point of view, they held on to their traditional customs as good Nepalese do. Most of them were then of middle class people and a good amount of families were poor since the place itself provided with no employment except in their own homes and the small pieces of land. There are no tea gardens. Their only source of income is mainly from their sale of milk and vegetables. Their daily food is rice and potatoes taken with dal.

The Youth Centre catered to children up to eighteen. This change came about only in 1979 when boys organized a club for themselves. By 1980 there was just the school students up to class six. The Sunday activities comprised of games like football, caroms, skipping. Besides these there were singing, dancing, drawing and Essay competitions. At first they had football, caroms, skipping etc. After about an hour and half of these above mentioned games there would be singing for both boys and girls, followed by explanation of the "Soldiers of Christ" a competition or treasure hunt or bingo. The Sunday youth activity concluded with a common prayer always. Regularly there were over 70 boys and girls who came to the youth centre.

The condition of the children was pitiable, in the sense that their education was much neglected. They were left to themselves or made to work in the field. The children neglected their studies and there were very few who have studied above class six. Their future in education was unpredictable. About 20 boys were attending high school in Dilaram.

The encouragement that the brothers received from the people was much, both from the people as well as from the students. The headmaster, Mr. Deva Prasad Rai proved to be an inestimable treasure, because of the help, advice and co-operation he gave. With the Headmaster's help they had practically no difficulties from anyone in doing the little that the brothers could do.

One of the major difficulties of the people in Mamring was to get employment. There are no tea gardens. In 1979 with the Headmaster as the animator, they were supplied with 150 bags of good grains to create work for the people. The response was great. There were 40 men daily working to expand the schoolyard. The work they did was marvellous. The people were ever grateful for it. The headmaster had also earlier appealed for government aid through the panchayat, through this, running water was given to each family. And more help and cooperation was promised. We could never do enough for these people for there was too much to be done for the people especially the young people in Mamring.

One could never feel fully contented working for them, for it never tired you to work for these people because they worked with you. They wanted to develop and grow into a socially and economically secure, they needed help. It was up to us and them to join hand to achieve this single goal: their cultural and social upliftment.

MUNDAKOTEE

Mundakotee is a village on the slopes of the Sonada hills situated amid the bushy tealeaves where most of the people of the village work. About 500 families are divided into two villages. The village has a High school, and educational facilities are good. About 50 boys, once attended the youth centre that existed from 1970, but most of them were not regular. Most of the musical instruments, games articles were owned by several young people, so that most of them did not find the need of coming to the Youth Centre. Children took part in all the activities organized by the centre; moral lessons were not so appreciated and the youth centre, at present, was in need of a new vitality and enthusiasm. Though the people did not show any hostility, a more co-operative attitude from them was necessary for the successful conducting the youth activities. It was closed in 1981.

MUNDAKOTEE BANSGARI

M. Bansgari is a village situated below Mundakotee and is one of the farthest youth centres conducted by the Salesian College; the approximate distance is 13 kms. The brothers of the college began their work for youth in this remote village of M. Bansgari on 13th July 1975. There were 100 families distributed into two villages. The people were poor; men and women, and even children worked in the tea gardens to make both ends meet. Educational facilities were very meagre, and so most children were illiterate; hence health, hygiene and even character needed special care through education.

Activities held at our centre were more or less same as in other centres. They include games, singing, group games, sing- songs etc. The normal attendance was about 20 to 30. One of the trying problems faced was the lack of good playground and a good school building. Despite the great distance to the college, the annual competitive and cultural programmes held at the college were attended by the children from Mundakotee Bansgari.

With regards to the help and co-operation received from others, Sunday being the only holiday, most of the people were busy to be of any positive help, but in general the people did appreciate the work for their children, and they in turn loved to come to the centre. This gave a great joy and enthusiasm to keep going even though it was hard a time. They were both happy and good at the Youth Centre and that was the reason enough for the brothers to continue the work.

RINGTON

It is over three decades since the pioneers launched their youth work in Rington. The youth centre at Rington was born on 7th March, 1967. In its early years the brothers of Rington Y.C. worked in close collaboration with the youth centre in Margaret's Hope.

The village had a primary school built by the help of the college, and had done much to enhance education in this village. Most of the people were employed in the Rington Tea Garden. The Youth Centre was attended by an average of 75 boys of whom the majority were youngsters. They had games, especially football, caroms, music, singing. The brothers also conducted get-together, party-games etc.

Though we received hardly any help from teachers, headmaster etc, some of the senior members of the club were very helpful in the well conducting of the youth activities. A school building was constructed with the SCS help. The brothers always hoped that the face of Rington would rise up to a better to-morrow with the help of the growing youth. The centre was closed in 1987.

RANGBULL

Rangbull is about 8 kms. away from the Salesian college, on the Hill Cart Road, that leads to Darjeeling. The Youth Centre here was opened on Sunday 8th September, 1963. On the 22nd Sept. 1963, the plans for the establishment of the Magone Club were proposed to the Head Master. On 10th November, 1963, Rangbull witnessed the first sports meet. It was a huge village comprising of about 650 families. The people were united and took part in any social or village gatherings.

We had many activities. In the field of games, there was football, volleyball, caroms etc. The girls too had their own games like skipping ropes, shuttle etc. Many of the youngsters played the guitar and other instrument to which the smaller ones sang and danced. At the assembly they sang too. The girls had embroidery in which they proved themselves very proficient. There was also English class, which was stopped temporarily. Moral lessons were taught at every assembly. The brothers also conducted regular singing classes.

Educational facilities were amply provided. The school building was renovated and a playground was made with the CRS help. After the primary school in Rangbull, the children went either to Ghoom or Darjeeling to continue their studies. In general, the children attending our youth centre were healthy, clean and honest. The brothers always receive respect and obedience. There were young boys who were responsible, and we tried to make them good leaders. Their help was always useful for the work. The brothers tried to inculcate human and Christian values such as loving, sharing and caring. Boys showed concern for the sick and the poor. The annual Parents' Day, picnic, and other competitions were much sought for days. They tried to make the Youth Centre members take part in all the competitions organized by the Youth Action Committee at the college.

The group received help and co-operation from the headmaster and other elders of the village. The Brothers kept them informed of everything that happened at the centre. And they appreciated the work and encouraged the brothers in many ways.

The youth centre was functioning very efficiently. Jorekhola Youth Centre was on time, part of Rangbull, but it was successfully managed as a separate youth centre. The tiny efforts to do good did produce results that could not be overlooked. Youngsters who were leaders, who commanded respect and were honest and responsible had been helped to grow and it was hoped that many more leaders would spring from these tiny lads for the betterment of Rangbull. It was closed in 1987.

ST. MARY'S HILL

St. Mary's Hills is a Catholic centre and is adjacent to the town of Kurseong. The Youth Centre there, was started in 1972. There are about 250 catholic families. The Parish is well established and Fr. Edward Sagnes is the present Parish Priest. The earlier priests gave constant help and encouragement when the Y.C. was still functioning under the animation of the brothers from the College. The brothers stopped going from this year (2001).

The place is surrounded by a number of educational institutions- schools, colleges etc. and thus most of the people and children are quite educated. The Y.C. was attended by 60 children. Most of these were small boys. There had been a club for the bigger boys. Games- both our door and indoor, gatherings, singing etc were conducted regularly. The annual programmes and competitions held at Salesian College were generally attended by large numbers. Since there was no source of funds brothers conducted film shows and other organized activities with ticket to collect funds to meet the various expenses of the youth centre. The works kept youngsters and children busy and cheerful. Youngsters were often more difficult to handle but it was hoped that with the organization of a club specifically for them things could be improved.

It is impossible to transform them overnight. But the brothers did hope that the little contribution would bring success, while facing hardships as long as they are generous and ready to change and grow.

SHANTI RANI

The Y.C. at Shantirani was started on 22nd August 1963. It is about 6 kms from the college. There were about 125 families in the village of which 6 were catholic families. The majority are Nepalese, but there were also a few Hindi speaking families migrated from Ranchi, Chotanagpur etc. Shantirani has an age-old high school. The teachers are all local people. The businessmen are mostly Bengalese. Most of the poor people live by working in the tea gardens, cutting firewood, tending cows etc.

There were about 45 regular attendants at the centre. Most of them were youngsters and there were also small boys and girls attending the youth centre. They had football, volleyball, guitar, harmonium and tabla to keep them busy. Girls had needlework, skipping etc. Most of the children were studying at Shantirani high school or at Holy Cross, Sonada. There were generally good and obedient. Troubles and mischief could be easily put down by the help of grown up boys. There was the annual parents' day but that was changed to Youth Centre Day (a modernised form). The teachers and the Head master, though did not give any positive help, they approved of the brothers work. From the people they had no trouble and this itself was a kind of co-operation, which might be termed, "go-one-mile-co-operation". One of the serious problems faced was the distance to the football court, which was in Tamsing. Previously Shantirani and Tamsing constituted a single youth centre but since the children from two villages found it difficult to mix and play they were separated. However, the youth centre Day was being celebrated together.

Shantirani Youth Centre came out as the victor in the inter-youth centre football tournament. In the finals held on 27th September, 1980, Shantirani defeated Rangbull(1-0). The Youth Centre did not face any 'extinction threat' but the future prospective could not be clearly predicted.

TAMSING

At the very outset it would perhaps be necessary to make it clear that the present location of the Y.C. generally known as Tamsing, but it is actually Kotaridura. Though it is a different village all together, the Y.C still held on to the old title when it was for the children of Tamsing.

Till 1975 both, Tamsing and Kotaridura participated at Shantirani Youth Club. But from 1975, due to a quarrel between Tamsing village and Shantirani village, the boys from Tamsing showed reluctance to attend the Shantirani youth centre; instead they invited the brothers to their own village. Thus a new Youth Club was inaugurated on the 26th of June 1975, by the then Rector Fr. Joseph Punchekunnel. All that was at the disposal of the brothers were just fifteen boys, a small shed, hardly accommodating fifty people inside. Traditions say that it was built by the co-operation of brothers and villagers.

However, due to the absence of a playground and due to lack of a proper road the children slowly began to come closer and closer to the playground until in 1978 they established themselves in Shantirani play ground. The brother did not go to the original spot of the Y.C.

There had been regular attendance of about 15 to 20 boys through about 40 names were in the attendance book. Since the number was so small there was mainly football game and occasionally to break the monotony, a bingo game.

In the absence of facilities such a school, playground, almirah etc, the youth centre found it hard to provide musical instrument or indoor-games. The major problems faced were the lack of a proper 'settlement' and with this at hand, we would have been able to organize the work a bit better.

People largely are tea-garden workers, having nothing for the future except their own sons and daughters. Majority of the people were really poor and had to struggle to make both ends meet. However, the people are cheerful happy and friendly towards the brothers. Since the houses were rather far away the brothers found it difficult to visit their houses, or to have any direct contact with them. The boys too were friendly and did have good character. The few big boys who attended the club were very co-operative; small boys were simple cordial and affable.

Difficulties there were, we cannot deny. But this little work even though it's beneficiaries were few, was hoped to continue for the joy shared is joy multiplied and we could not refuse to do it when we had it in plenty.

TUNG: DON BOSCO Y.C. -T.T.I.

The winding Siliguri-Darjeeling highway opens to an enchanting panorama when reaching the slopes of the beautiful Dove-Hill. Seven and half kms away from the College, it is on this heart-warming locality the present I.T.I. Tung Don Bosco Y.C. operated. Established in the ITI village, the club drew attendance from the villages of Tung, ITI and Gairigaon.

The Y.C. was officially opened on 7th August, 1966. It was originally meant for the villages of Gairigaon and Tung and was located in the B.C. Roy Memorial L.P. School, Gairigaon. Nevertheless, the youth centre drew attendance from the surrounding villages of ITI, Maharani and Sepaydhura. In 1967, subsequent to the transfer of the school to Tung, the youth centre too was shifted with it. In the same year, the united effort of the staff brought forth the Don Bosco Club for the senior members of the Y.C. In the same year there was the first annual concert.

In the year 1968 too had a surprise in store. The Maharani branched off as a separate Youth Centre. The year 1969 was conspicuous for its bold though unsuccessful attempt to open yet another branch for the ITI village. The same year also saw the gradual decline of the Youth Club for senior boys. The year 1972 on the other hand was a bad year for the Y.C. due to the sudden and unforeseen shortage of personnel. The staff number dropped from four to one. However by the end of the year the new staff managed to raise that dangerously low morale of the Y.C. The following year the Y.C. received a great help through divine intervention and the kind generosity of ITI Principal Mr. Chanda- a room in the ITI hostel and the permission to use the playground. Brothers managed to follow up the boys of Gairigaon by spending one hour there. From 1979 onwards however even this had to be stopped since the playground was taken by H.M.T. Company.

The Y.C. so operated from the ITI village. The people of the three villages enjoyed the benefits that a mini town- Tung could offer and therefore were very much different from the simple-minded villages around. In spite of this rather comfort loving attitude of the people one must say that they were open, frank and helpful. The religion of the people is mostly Hinduism with a minority of Buddhists and a handful of Catholics (two families and a few ITI students). People mostly followed one type of business or other while few lived by farming. They were generally poor though the boys seemed to have enough pocket money.

The register attendance of boys was 150. But it should be noted that they were only very regular members. Weekly attendance usually counted up to 80 to 100. The boys were not like the respectful, simple members of other Youth Centres. In ITI Tung they tended to be mischievous, fun loving and bit sophisticated. But they responded very quickly to trust and responsibility. They were generally very honest and helpful.

There was meagre attendance of girls- about 4-6. Even among these the usual attendance was 1 to 2. This might have been due to the fact that the only room we had was crowded with boys.

The number of weekly activities was very few since boys required a constant assistance of brothers. We provided the boys with various indoor games and football. They got a fair chance to develop their musical talents. Once in a while Housie was conducted for all. Distributing 'Prakash', library books etc were also included in the activities. Prospects for singing class were very little, since the boys were too shy. Distributing medicine was also one of the major activities.

The most important event in the youth centre was the Parents Day. Then came the lucky dip for fund-raising. The annual sports day conducted occasionally the educational apostolic film shows too were often highlighted. It is noted that these occasions received a full response from the people, though voluntary helpers were very few. The prospects of the ITI Tung youth Centre were great. The people were in fact waiting for a brother with a high degree of dynamism who could take up leadership and wake up the people from their dormant state. It had been a long conceived dream of the present staff to open a branch youth centre for the Gairigaon boys with a special club for young men and big boys. However, in spite of the intense desire of the young people due to the unwillingness of the Gairigaon school authorities we had not received permission to use school ground. The Y.C. in general received a full response from the people and had great prospects. The only difficulties encountered were due to the peculiar attitude of the people. But this was overcome when got close to them.

THE WANDERING GROUP (MERRY BAND)

The Youth Centre apostolate at its tender years lacked much organization and the so-called "Merry Band" was not in vogue. The brothers nevertheless were enthusiastic in conducting the yearly 'Parent's Day' and Lucky Dips. Such emergency situation called for

extra personnel- mainly musicians who belonged to other youth centres. So in conformity to the old adage 'necessity is the mother of invention', the Merry Band was born in 1970.

The immediate cause of its birth was the excellent suggestion, which proceeded from the then Rector Fr. K. A. Joseph. Initially the group started with two permanent members; the programme consisted mainly of magic show. In 1971, it offered many musical items with a little thought. The programmes were successful and appealing to the audience.

Certain other motives enshrined in the mind of the founding Fathers were noble and apostolic. The extra aim of the group was to impart an 'idea which is good' acceptable and Christian in spirit, by means of magic, music and dramatics. With this view at the back of their minds, they would concentrate on a particular theme and build the whole programme around it. The group aimed at materializing in their own way the sublime aim of the youth centre activity "Be good and so good".

At present though such ideals are not obliterated totally, it is not that conspicuous. The group conveyed a moral irrespective of the setting and the programmes. The wandering group had been fully occupied all the through the scholastic year. They were also an invaluable assistance to the brothers on "Parents' Day" and Lucky dips. The future of the Merry Band is a bygone past yet it can restart in a promising way if the best talents of the House are diverted and channelled towards the formation of such group.

FEW MORE YOUTH CENTRES:

Besides these Youth Centres there were also few more whose history is known very little. They are Ramity (1978-'87), Bagora (1970-1980) Murma (1968-'80) Pachas Bigha (1983-'84), Chattakpur (1970-'77), Kottidura (1974- ?), Dilaram (1965-'80), Ratomatay (1986-?), Sepoydhura (1968- '77), Tera Number (1973- ?), Egara Mile (1981-'86) etc.

DAYA, KURSEONG (1986- ?)

A Drug Awareness and Youth Action Association was established according to the felt need of the youth situation in the Darjeeling Hills. It worked in close collaboration with CRIPA of Darjeeling. An Exhibition on Drug Addiction was held from October 30- November 1, 1987. The Awareness programmes was carried out through Inter School Essay Competitions on Drug Dependence too.

SCS – a burning and shining flame in the Balasun Valley Youth Centre apostolate from 1963–2003

S.N	Name of Youth Centre	Started	Closed/Functioning
1.	Gorabari	1963	Functioning
2.	Rangbul	1963	Closed
3.	Margaret's Hope	1963	Closed
4.	Shanti Rani	1963	Closed
5.	Sonada-Amarjyoti	1964	Functioning
6.	Beltar	1965	Closed
7.	Dilaram	1965	Closed
8.	Phoolbari	1965	Closed
9.	Gairi Gaun	1966	Functioning
10.	Balasun	1967	Functioning
11.	Ringtong	1967	Closed
12.	Murma	1968	Closed
13.	Mundakottee	1970	Closed
14.	Bagora	1970	Closed
15.	Chattakpur	1970	Closed
16.	Jorkhola	1971	Closed
17.	Nalichor	1971	Closed
18.	Tera Number	1973	Closed
19.	Kottidura	1974	Closed
20.	Bansgari	1974	Functioning
21.	Mamring	1975	Closed
22.	Mundakotti Bansgari	1975	Closed
23.	St. Mary's	1975	Closed
24.	Rangmook	1976	Functioning
25.	Daya, kurseonong	1976	Closed
26.	Sunwaar Busty	1978	Functioning
27.	Ramity	1978	Closed
28.	Arubotia	1978	Closed
29.	Chimney Busty	1978	Closed
30.	Darjeeling	1978	Closed
31.	Goethol's Siding	1980	Closed
32.	Buttaketty	1980	Closed
33.	Kalej Valley	1980	Closed
34.	Egaro Mile	1981	Closed
35.	Kharia Busty	1983	Functioning
36.	Pachas Bigha	1983	Closed
37.	Ratomaty	1986	Closed
38.	Malibusty	1999	Functioning
39.	Eke Block	1999	Functioning

40.	Deoraly Busty	1999	Functioning
41.	Chaitapani	2000	Functioning
42.	Naya Busty	2000	Functioning
43.	Raghubir Busty	2001	Functioning
44.	Ceders	2002	Functioning