



~ A SPACE TO BECOME YOUR STORY

# THE UPPER ROOM SUMMER REPORT 2019





# DEAR FRIENDS,

Greetings from Vienna and Israel (where I, Anson am for a year)! This year, particularly this summer has been for us one filled with extremely rewarding moments. The doors of The Upper Room broke open wider to privilege us with indescribable moments: we had a dynamic bunch of people accompanying us on our engagements this year. And for a change, we thought it's best if you get to know about these events in the words of those who experienced it firsthand with us. In addition, the local community we were working with, galvanized itself turning a setback into a moment of opportunity that could greatly benefit the students we are working for! We've collated snippets of these experiences for you in this letter:

- Benefit concert 2019
- Recording weekend of the musical "Job, Where are you Father?"
- Founding of an official association
- Students update and visit to the villages
- Counselling training
- Youth camp: "Job, Where are you Father?"
- The annual Upper Room camp: "Eph'phatha!"
- Kickstart of a girls hostel and tuition centre
- Prayer intentions
- Where next?

Happy Reading!





# BENEFIT CONCERT

VIENNA, AUSTRIA  
MAY 2019

Around 50 guests were present at the Vienna Archdiocesan Seminary for a benefit concert by **Paula Ruiz Iglesias** and **Lionel Bozek**. The audience was mesmerized by their fusion of classical spanish music, modern jazz and flamenco arrangements. This annual event is a special opportunity for the founders to meet the benefactors of the project to thank them in person, brief them on the activities for the last year and inform them about the plans for next year.



# RECORDING WEEKEND

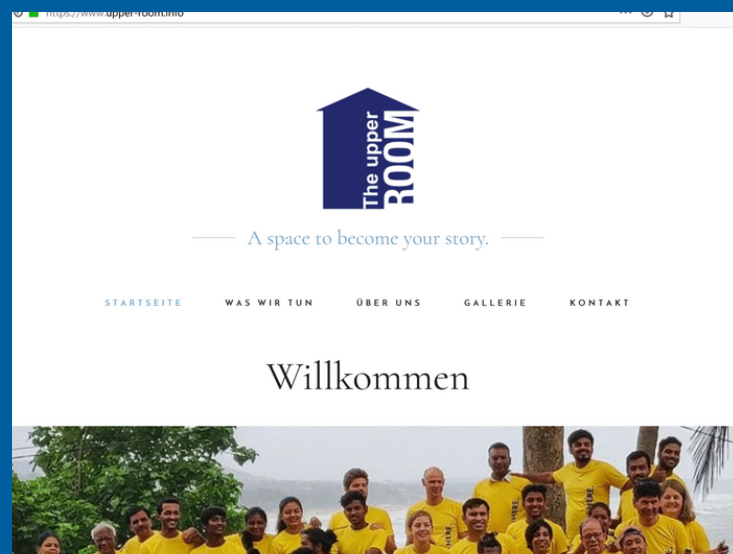
HAFNERBACH, AUSTRIA  
JUNE 2019

In the first weekend of June, we were excited to team up with 10 professional musicians for an intensive recording weekend of our first home production: the musical "Job-where are you father?" Hailing from different parts of Austria, they devoted their time and efforts to contribute to the project. After a continuous run of 50 hours until Sunday the 2nd of June, we could call it a wrap! A big thank you to you dear friends for breathing life into the musical with your soulful music. Our thanks also to **Andreas and Doris Schaberger** who kindly offered their residence and took care of all our meals.

# OFFICIAL ASSOCIATION & NEW WEBPAGE

ST. PÖLTEN, AUSTRIA,  
JUNE 2019

In June 2019 we registered The Upper Room as an official trust in Austria, to make our work more transparent and active as a legal entity. The Upper Room is a trust to support education and intercultural and religious dialogue. With help from **Tobias Gramm** (Thanks again, Tobi!) we were able to launch a new webpage:



[www.upper-room.info](http://www.upper-room.info)

# COUNSELLING TRAINING

VIENNA, JUNE 2019

## "Put it in the silver box"

That's one of many metaphors that **Wim van der Laan**, a pschyo- and physio-therapist from the Netherlands and his wife **Corine van der Laan**, who specialises in child-pedagogy, intruded to us at this weekend. I appreciate how they took on a 12-hour car-ride just to meet up with us in Vienna and share insightful psychological ideas and concepts that we'll not forget about too quickly. Our expectations were fully met! We – that's a young and dynamic team of 7 young people – met over the weekend to gain more insight into what our outreach in India would look like.

Wim and Corine offered an assortment of wide-ranging topics like: what becoming bi-cultural means, building a safe place, the difference between biological age and emotional age, the definition and limits of counselling, how to build and use the wall of peace, the definition of "shalom" (peace), trauma healing and dealing with abuse.

**Marlis Resch**, working in active prison-ministry in Austria also shared her wisdom about blessing others and always coming back to peace. But the purpose of this weekend was much more than getting information, it was above all a time to get closer to each other as a team – through sharing personal experiences, praying together, having excellent barbeque (thanks to our grill master – Tobi) and putting the concept of "helping through blessing" in action.

I think I can speak for all of us in saying that we've felt much more equipped and excited to finally go and carry God's love to people – in whatever way. We wanted to introduce our "Upper room" culture, the way we treat each other and care for each other to local youth and get to know and love them. Special thanks to **Amy Liew** and **Isabel Douglas** for preparing delicious meals for us in these two days!



**Judith Gramm** studies Psychology and Pedagogy at the University of Vienna. She finds dancing as a beautiful expression of the heart. Judith beautifully choreographed the musical and held workshops on ideal study habits.





# STUDENTS UPDATE AND VISITS TO THE VILLAGES

ARUNACHAL PRADESH, AUGUST, 2019

Like each year, one of the highlights of our trip is our visit to the villages to exchange warmth and happiness. Taking a cue from our experiences last year, we decided to carry more colours for the children this time around. We wanted to offer them a platform to express themselves without being told what to do or without seeking approval. It was very fulfilling to see them delve deeply into their drawing papers as they brought the hues and tints of their imagination to life. It was also a joy to watch other kids and youth challenge themselves over puzzles and group games. A big thank you to our dear friend **Elfi Reichsiegl** for donating games and colours for the children. They enjoyed it every bit! Thanks also to **Susan Cohen** for donating some of her 'Biju' books for children. The kids loved them.

These visits have become very crucial to our schedule there because it enriches our hearts, deeply teaches us much and offers us a direct opportunity to come into contact with and understand the needs of the people we meet. We are better disposed to help students who truly deserve educational assistance and can better discern the scope of our support to them. **Eva Halo** made it possible through her contribution to bring medical supplies such as bandages to them.



# JOB, WHERE ARE YOU FATHER?

**MIAO, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA, AUGUST 2019**

At the end of an intensive five-day summer camp attended by school dropouts from districts around Miao, Arunachal Pradesh, a successful musical performance of "JOB - Where are you father?" marked the highlight of the programme. During this time, the participants proved their individual, valuable set of talents in numerous group sessions, workshops and daily activities.

A unique model was conceptualized and brought to fruition: using a musical as a medium to encourage young school dropouts to express their struggle and find concrete solutions to their advantage. Much like the participants' display of belief in themselves, the biblical figure Job is a role model for living through a difficult fate in tested times. Both the teenagers' and Job's transformations were made possible by their ability to stand up against challenging circumstances and not giving up their belief despite negative past experiences. These parallel storylines were the motivation for the Upper Room team to write a musical based on the book of Job, which the boys and girls rehearsed in concentrated practice sessions in just a few days, before excellently performing it in attendance of Bishop George Pallipparambil of Miao. "Your performance today is a testimony that one does not become a dropout till he or she gives up in life. Your story is an inspiration to the youth in the last villages of your districts," Bishop George spoke after the show.

With talks such as 'Finding my Why: choosing the right career' and 'Self-Healing: I am more than my circumstances' we managed to drive home two important aspects, their practical future and deeper understanding of self. These talks were complemented by games and workshops such as 'sexual awareness and meditation' and 'how to plan my study time' which served as fodder for honest group discussions and a great platform for integrated learning.







Each participant was offered a chance for personal counselling. It was moving to see how for many of them this was the first time ever where they felt treated with respect. They were open to share many a bitter truth that forms a large part of their everyday life. As a team, we were also relieved that we could assimilate and understand the concrete problems faced by them so that we could find relevant working solutions for the same in the next phase. Activities like a movie or bonfire helped them to relax at the end of the day and connect to each other and the team.

Taking place from Aug. 7th until Aug. 11th, almost 70 local youngsters and around 12 animators aged 13-22 took part in the summer camp, forming a special opportunity for them to turn a new leaf. While many of the participants are facing difficult obstacles in their personal lives and in their study work for school, they have dropped out of school during the last year. At the summer camp at the Cultural Centre, Miao, they bravely confronted their current struggles, showing huge amounts of persistence and compassion for each other. As a result, more than half of them have re-applied for schooling in the next year.

One of the more positives outcomes of the camp is an encouragement to move forward towards the next conceived phase, namely the establishment of tuition centres. One of the primary causes of such a high failure rate among students is widespread corruption in the educational institutions. We have learnt how teachers have never been present in classrooms for a period of 8 years and go undetected by an apathetic system. Many could not speak English: we take this into consideration by integrating an intensive English coaching period into the next phase of tuition centres.

We returned with a sense of satisfaction having achieved what we set out to achieve despite the hurdles that were faced. It was a privilege to watch these young people, coming with extreme self-doubt and transforming this into an indelible conviction of self-confidence and trust. Learning dialogues, songs and dances for someone who has never set foot on stage, these young lives came a long, long way. We managed to do what we wanted to: the spark was lit. Special Thanks to **Sylvia Birkner** for buying us some of the costumes we needed, James and Lorna for getting all the costumes ready for us!

**Philip Gelbmann** works in Sports-media. He organised workshops on sports and teamwork besides managing the stage and actively animated the students.





## DREAM TEAM

# JOB

where are you father?



Thank you **Kiki Ettl**,  
for designing this beautiful  
logo for the musical

supported by:









# EPH'PHATHA! TUNE INTO A RADICAL NAIVETY

LONAVLA, INDIA, AUGUST 2019



“An expedition amidst darkness,  
onto the path, leading to light.”

Beginning of August, each year, The Upper Room embarks upon a spiritual journey to enrich and nourish various distinct ‘faith stories’ of individuals across the country. With its ideas and motives of elevating the minds and hearts, especially of the youth, the community grows, providing space for each to open up from within. In the doing, not only does it help enhance relations, but fosters home to the ones ready to be part of it.

This year, however we had an explicit theme- Eph’phatha! Which meant – ‘Be Opened’. This four day, camp-based retreat held in the hills of Lonavla, touched each and every member of this community in numerous ways. We entered this home, with enthusiasm and anticipation, and took away a complete new perspective which led deeper into knowing oneself. Ranging from the various illuminating sessions and workshops to fun-filled activities and games, we set on a venture to an elevating experience.

There were themes like – ‘God in a gunny bag’, ‘Theodicy’, ‘Science and Religion’ which spoke directly to each present and motivated us into contemplating further into our faith. There were Workshops that spoke of Spiritual conflicts, ones we confront in our daily lives. The activities we joined our hands in, focused on the Grace and Presence of the Divine. Vivid games included in the camp, along with the ‘Treasure Hunt’ fit perfectly in knowing each other around us and helped strengthen bonds. The movie session based on the ‘Ship of Theseus’ was an adventure in itself. Not only did it open up the flood gates to a branch of thoughts, but it took a step further into questioning our Naivety.



Then was the Taizé Evening- A relaxing ambience of tranquility and peace. An environment for self-introspection and reflection. Eph'phatha, a beautiful episode altogether ushered happiness in our hearts. To end on a note of togetherness as one Family we celebrated – The Last Supper. Going beyond this gratifyingly composed happening, we each take back with us a whole heart- Kinship.

In providing this space, The Upper Room, brings together individuals who with the proceedings of this camp, grow; grow into persons greater than themselves; grow into a family. And that is what distinguishes The Upper Room from commoners; its ideology and implementation, and how it makes a place in each of our hearts, wanting and waiting for the next theme to be announced.

The virtue of The Upper Room lies within its unbiased view on religion and faith; You may arrive from different regions, with different beliefs and varied faith stories and you will depart with the same; only this time more coherent and with a lucid credence. It's a space, where faith isn't celebrated as a religion, but as a community.

So here I stand, filled with content up to my brim, looking back to this amazing weekend. The beauty of such an endeavor, the growth of a family and the acceptance of a home. Words fail to describe the extent of such a retreat and the impact it has on our lives. Tears spring out, when we look back to these times and smile, to a new chapter embossed upon us. The speciality and humility of every part of the retreat, the feelings it induces, the love it cherishes, and the people it brings together; is the reason why my heart resides with it, craving to be part of its next. Thus, with having tread this journey, I urge each of you to be part of such an enlightening experience.

*"The mind once enlightened cannot again become dark." -Thomas Paine.*

Thank you very much **James and Lorna Samuel, Diana and Robin Fernandes** for all your help with the camp.



**Ashley Reis** is currently pursuing an under-graduation in Engineering and is passionate about science and reality. His take on life is, life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself.



## KICKSTART GIRLS HOSTEL AND TUITION CENTRE

JAIRAMPUR, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA OCTOBER 2019

One of the many positive outcomes of the Career-Music Camp "Job, Where are you Father?" (in August 2019) was an encouragement to move forward towards the next conceived phase, namely the establishment of 'tuition centers' for boys and girls, so that they could get back to a formal education. In the months of September and October we began work to establish these two centres. We are happy to announce as of now that they are progressing impressively!

We started off with an English speaking course put together by **Diana Fernandes and Regina D'Cunha** while beginning the academic curriculum in the consequent weeks. We make an attempt to suit every child's need while involving the local community step-by-step to make this centre self-sufficient, atleast in as much as is possible. Because of its small size, a residential tuition center offers an advantage of smaller groups with scope for better, focused guidance.

**Diana Fernandes** headed the kickstart programme for the girls in October and was able to set a timetable for them, took sessions on their strengths and abilities and also on uncommon themes such as menstrual hygiene. The 8 girls are cooking for themselves, taking English classes, having recreation times where they play different games and fixed study hours to improve in studies. In the next week the same model will be implemented for boys as well.





# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

We want to thank everyone who is supporting The Upper Room financially, emotionally and through prayers. Through all of you we were able to reach out to a lot of young people in 2019:

20



Students in the age-group from 6-23 years are being offered financial support for their formal education in schools or university



70



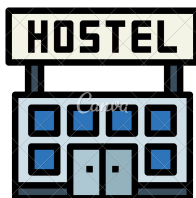
youngsters, who dropped out of a formal school system along with local youth as animators participated in the Career-music-Camp: "Job, Where are you Father"

55



young adults spend a week at: "Eph'phatha!" - a 5 days - retreat to the hills

2



hostels and tuition centres were established to prepare 20 young drop-out students for the public exams.



150



school students, many of who have been addicted to drugs will be part of our musical camp in February 2020 in India. The school director has invited us to organise an intervention programme.



## NEXT STEPS

Where does it go from here?

- February 2020- Camp for school students, many having a history of drug-abuse
- End of February will be an overnight refresher-camp for the Upper Room community in Mumbai
- February to April will see many of our 'dropout' students answer their crucial public exams
- We are currently supporting 20 boys and girls in their education and plan to continue
- In Summer 2020 we plan to have the annual retreat and also camps for youth in North-East.
- We are going to have a couple of talks, benefit concerts, and plan a meditation day based on the book of Job during lent in Austria

## PRAYER INTENTIONS

We are very thankful for all your support and request you to support us in your prayers:

- For all the children and young people who are connected with The Upper Room - for their education, families and personal growth
- For us and all who are organizing, preparing and planning the camps and activities - for strength, patience and creativity
- For peace in countries with a difficult political situation

**ANSON & GEORG**

*Founders, The Upper Room*

