

# A STAR FOR LOMBOK... Helping Kids Shine!

Tucked away in a small laneway in Kerandangan Valley, just a few minutes north of Senggigi, is a very special place known as “Tanah Bintang”, which roughly translates as “Star Land”.

On a small parcel of land, two separate two-storey buildings house a number of classrooms, meeting areas and workspaces where children come willingly to learn new skills that will hopefully help them build a future.

Yayasan Tanah Bintang is the inspiration of German national, Nadja Groelly, who first came to live in Lombok in 2005. In 2008, Nadja and her friends recognised a need to give something back to the local community where they were living and so they started a reading circle to help local children overcome reading problems. Literacy is a major problem on Lombok and the island has one of the lowest levels of literacy in Indonesia.

Gradually news of the reading circle spread and the group expanded, forcing Nadja and her friends to find a larger space to accommodate their group. Fortunately, the Village Head of Kerandangan offered them use of some space at the village office and they were able to continue teaching children to read and to enjoy the written word. Group activities also expanded to include creative classes, art and craft lessons.



Art Classes

Eventually however, the effort of carrying books and equipment to temporary premises several times a week became too much and Nadja began to look for a better solution. She spread word amongst her friends and contacts in Europe and donations began to pour in from generous people keen to see this project thrive.

Their first project saw a flood of donations of toys, books and games for the children, as well as the distribution of clothing and blankets to around 300 people in the community.

In the midst of this activity, sadly Nadja’s mother passed away from cancer. However, the family asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the yayasan in her memory.

With this support, Yayasan Tanah Bintang was formed (a “yayasan” is a non-profit organization in Indonesia), the land in



Children learning English

Kerandangan was purchased and, by late 2010 donations from Germany and Switzerland, together with support from the German Embassy in Jakarta, allowed the yayasan to build a permanent place where children and adults could gather to further their educations and learn new skills.

Today there are around 120 children and adults attending classes and workshops at Tanah Bintang. Ages range from just 4 years old to 18 years. The classes are all offered free of charge to Indonesian people and the yayasan is staffed by volunteers who donate their skills and knowledge to the community.

The yayasan does not replace the role of local schools in education and children still attend their usual schools, where most classes take place only in the morning. In the afternoons, they can choose to take advantage of a wide range of extra-curricular classes including English language classes (for children and adults), reading lessons, German language, sewing, cooking, singing, art, guitar and flute, and more.

On the day we visited, a group of Indonesian children were in one of the upstairs classrooms learning to speak English and another group sat in the open area of the rear building taking art classes from well-known local artist, Karyana.

Nadja proudly showed us some of the beautiful bags and wallets being created by students, made out of recycled plastics and packaging. The yayasan teaches the community about rubbish and waste management, as well as showing them ways to recycle waste materials and turn it into attractive and useful products.

Wonderful products are created at the yayasan using plastic coated coffee packages, foil lined packets and milk containers.

Shortly afterwards, another group arrived to take cooking classes in the small but well equipped kitchen, where youngsters are taught to cook local Indonesian cuisine as well as western dishes. The students also learn about the importance of hygiene and food handling in the kitchen. These skills will help students who wish to work in restaurants and hotels in the

future, as well as those who may gain employment as maids and cooks in private homes and villas.

Until now, the classes have mostly been open only to people in Kerandangan and nearby areas but the yayasan was recently able to purchase a minivan and will now be able to expand their role to reach more children in need. The van will operate on a regular route to provide transport for people from as far south as Sandik and as far north as Mangsit, as well as areas in between. This is a huge advantage, as some students do not have any transport and have difficulties getting to Tanah Bintang regularly.

In addition to the yayasan’s educational work, they also have a programme where 52 local children receive schooling thanks to “godparents” in Germany and Switzerland. The godparents sponsor a local child and provide funds to pay for their schooling, as well as transport, uniforms, books and other monthly expenses.

Many young people in Lombok, especially in the villages, are poorly educated because their parents can’t afford to send them to school; thus the low literacy level on the island. Even those children who do attend primary school are often forced to drop out of high school, with costs running to around Rp 300,000 per month per child. For the majority of people, who earn their living as farmers and fishermen, this expense is simply too high, especially if there are a number of children in the family.

Classes are held at Tanah Bintang every afternoon, from Monday to Saturday. The yayasan also runs Indonesian language classes for those wanting to learn to speak Indonesian, available to non-Indonesians for a small donation.

Please contact Nadja if you wish to visit the yayasan, or to learn Indonesian, or if you are interested in volunteering your time and skills to a good cause.

Naturally, paying monthly expenses, and buying equipment and supplies, is an ongoing struggle and Tanah Bintang always needs donations to continue their projects. Every little bit helps to brighten the future of Lombok children, so please give generously. Nadja can be contacted by email at: [nadja.groelly@web.de](mailto:nadja.groelly@web.de)



Enjoying food prepared in the cooking class