

Forestnews

Dalai Lama visits home

By Miranda Robertson

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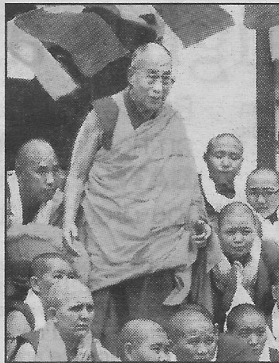
CHILDREN waiting to be cared for at a home in India built by a Hyde-based charity were awestruck when the Dalai Lama unexpectedly dropped in to see them.

The Lotus Flower Trust's home for destitute children, the Basgo Nunnery in Ladakh, welcomed the surprise visitor, who blessed the home and talked to the children.

Laura Cowdery, who works for the trust, said: "This was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for everyone at the home."

The Dalai Lama has been travelling through Ladakh, north India, for the Buddhist Kala Chakra festival. During this special time he holds Buddhist seminars across the country. It is a huge event so the Ladakhi people have been busy repairing roads and preparing for his visit.

John Hunt, CEO and founder of the trust, said: "This will have been the happiest day of the nuns' lives and is wonderful news for the Lotus Flower Trust and, of course Winchester College, which



His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Basgo Nunnery in Ladakh

funded and worked on the construction of the nunnery."

His Holiness blessed the nunnery and addressed the nuns and visitors, who were served with butter tea, cold drinks and daysil (sweet rice) by the nuns.

Nun Dorje said: "We all had a very special time in the presence of His Holiness."

Ms Cowdery added: "By definition, Buddhist nuns in Ladakh are beggars. While Basgo is a nunnery, it is most importantly a home for children from very poor parents who cannot afford to bring up all their offspring.

"The Ladakhi people face many challenges, not least the environment, as the area is prone to earthquakes and avalanches, as well as enduring extreme weather conditions.

"The nuns provide destitute children with a good education – when they are 18 they can choose to stay as nuns or revert to normal life. They also offer lessons in basic Buddhism, yoga and meditation to tourists. In addition the nunnery will serve as a refuge for Ladakhi women who have suffered abuse."

Winchester College has raised £69,000 over the last two years to pay for the home and nunnery for 60 destitute nuns, ranging from seven to 32 years old.

The buildings are very nearly complete with the exception of the temple, which needs a further £16,000-£20,000.

The inauguration of Basgo Nunnery will be held on August 4, after which the nuns will move in.

As well as building homes and schools for destitute children, the Lotus Flower Trust offers individuals, schools and businesses life-altering trips.

To find out more go to lotusflowertrust.org