

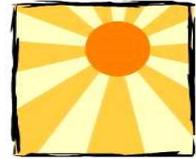
New children's choir at school in Neukölln

The Buddhist order, Shinnyo-En, supports long-term social project in Berlin

Berlin – Bringing joy to children from socially less privileged backgrounds and offering them an alternative to television and hanging around on the street: this is the main concern of a new children's choir project in Neukölln. This choir was formed in May at the Sonnen-Grundschule on the initiative of the Buddhist order Shinnyo-En and endowed with a long-term budget. Andreas Fiol who, along with Hideo Takamo, works full-time for the Japan-based order in Germany, says: "Shinnyo-En supports countless social and cultural projects all over the world and in the process works with institutions such as the Red Cross and the United Nations, as well as with the Catholic church. We have also been active in Germany for a long time. It was important to us to support a project in a city like Berlin, precisely because there is a greater need for social commitment."

The choir has 25 members, all children aged between five and nine. The project had the fortune of welcoming Stephanie Bugiel, who already leads the renowned Gropiuslerchen children's choir. Stephanie Bugiel: "The project at the Sonnen-Grundschule especially interests me because it links the musical element with the social. It's not just about the children making music together. Over and above the music, we are trying to increase their tolerance when interacting with one another and give them – just like the school – a sense of community and self-confidence." The headteacher of the primary school on Dammweg, Renate Lauzemis, is also excited about the project. "The schools cannot deal with the problems in the "Kiez" all by themselves. This is why we are delighted that such a project can be realised with Shinnyo-En's help."

The choir's members meet regularly for rehearsals once a week. Later, there are also to be as many opportunities as possible for the children to spend their free time with one another. The project's main goal is for the children to enjoy singing together and to learn in a fun way that people from different backgrounds and different religions can have fun together and bring pleasure to others through music.

Shinnyo

Shinnyo-En – The group responsible for the project

Shinnyo-En is a Buddhist order founded in 1936, whose tradition is rooted in Shingon Buddhism, a branch of the faith which is over 1100 years old. The order's founder, Shinjo Ito, was consecrated in the Daigo-ji monastery in the old imperial city of Kyoto – now a UNESCO World Heritage Site – and it is here that he is honoured by his own temple. Serving people is one of the principal concerns of Shinnyo-En. Berlin has a special significance for Shinnyo-En.

This summer, the order will be putting on a ritual Buddhist ceremony here in Berlin for its growing number of followers from all over Europe and beyond; representatives of other religions have also been invited and the programme will also include appearances by choirs from the world religions as a symbol of their solidarity.

Andreas Fiol: "In the Buddhist faith, "unity in variety" plays a crucial role. Berlin, which 20 years ago stood at the centre of German reunification, is a symbol for this. This is why Shinnyo-En is particularly concerned with making a social commitment in this city, as we have already done in other parts of the world. Providing help for children stands at the centre of this commitment, as it is they who will shape the future. For this reason, there is no time limit on the project. We want to provide sustainable support."

The Sonnen-Grundschule

85% of the primary school children at the Sonnen-Grundschule come from an immigrant background. Lauzemis: "Since many of the children come from families which do not offer them any great educational chances, we are working together with institutions and artists who can help the children to experience and value culture (art, theatre, music). We aim to enhance the children's sense of self-worth and help them to develop their personality. They should be able to identify with the school and their "Kiez". With this educational credo, we want to contribute to integration and the prevention of violence."

For any questions:

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