

WMT news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WILKINS MEMORIAL TRUST

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WMT Newsletter Spring 2009

Greetings for 2009 and very many thanks to those who so generously support the work of the Wilkins Memorial Trust in Nepal. Although none of the WMT Trustees have been able to visit Nepal in the last 12 months, we have had first hand news from Jane Schofield-Gurung, consultant to CBRS, and Lionel Pitchford, PWMT Trustee, both of whom visited Nepal in August 2008. We are particularly grateful to Jane for her comprehensive account of changes to the country since her previous visit in 2006 and have used her report to update news from Nepal. Back in UK, WMT Trustees, Sarah and Melanie, were able to experience Nepalese culture and catch up with Nepalese friends at the Himalayan Festival in Manchester at the end of May.

The good news from Nepal is that the Maoist Uprising or Nepalese civil war, which started in 1996, is officially over and, in April 2008, there were peaceful general elections. The Maoist party secured a small majority and there is a multi-party government. On 28th May 2008, Nepal ceased to be a kingdom and is now a Federal Democratic Republic. This brought to an end the 240 year old monarchy and the unpopular King Gyanendra was deposed. There followed months of negotiations to form a multi-party cabinet with Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachandra) of the Maoist party being elected Prime Minister and Ram Baran Yadav of the Nepali Congress party, the President. There had been much political in-fighting about who gained control of which ministry, especially finance and the army. As time goes on, there is today (January 2009) increasing dissatisfaction with the government which has made little (if any real) progress on writing the country's constitution, which was their main target and priority.

While much of Nepal celebrated the ending of the Maoist Uprising, the peaceful elections and the abolition of the monarchy, another political problem has been emerging on the Terai, the lowlands bordering with India. This is the Madhesi movement. The Madhesi people are ethnically similar to Indians and, for very many years, have been largely ignored by the rulers of Nepal, who are based in the fertile Kathmandu valley and mid-hills. The Madhesi feel that they have been treated like second class citizens, e.g. not

being allowed to use their languages of Maithili or Bhojpuri on official business although these are recognised as national languages. There are less favourable rules for Madhesi electing representatives and also the Madhesi are barred from joining the army of Nepal. The Madhesi movement is made up of many groups with demands that extend from less discrimination for the Madhesi to full independence for the Terai. There has been much violence both against the army and police and between groups in the movement. Recently (January 2009), three major groups have united and are pushing their agenda for an independent Terai.

The 2008 summer monsoon brought much misery for the three and half million people of Bihar state in India and Sunsari district in Nepal who were displaced by the flooding of the Koshi river. The Koshi river is a large tributary of the Ganges and it originates in the Himalayas in Nepal. This river has an unstable course and over the last 250 years has moved 75 miles west cutting twelve new channels. The river regularly flooded so in the late 1950s, the Koshi barrage was constructed to prevent the flooding and migration of the river. Downstream from the barrage, there are 150 miles of earth embankments to keep the river in its current channel. The barrage and embankments straddle the Indian border and the constructions were built and are maintained by India. There was a third part to the original plan – a high dam to cushion the flow of water in the monsoons – but that has not yet been built. In August 2008, after very heavy monsoon rains, the overflowing Koshi river burst through the embankments and flooded approx 650km² of land in Nepal and India displacing millions of people, destroying crops and livestock, and causing many deaths. The flooded river then followed an eastward channel it had originally followed 100 years ago.

On the domestic front in Nepal, Jane reported on her August visit that the cost of living was rapidly rising, there were fuel and power shortages and strikes were frequent. Strikes were being called by range of social and political groups for any reason. They were becoming so frequent that a local joke went 'husband and wife have a disagreement at home; so

husband runs out onto street and calls a strike'. The strikes are affecting the economy, particularly those on daily wages, who are usually the poorest in society and do not get paid if they cannot work. Fuel shortages were also affecting the economy – people were having to wait anything up to 12 hours for petrol and often it ran out. The cost of fuel was escalating but, despite this, Jane noticed the number of vehicles on the roads had markedly increased since 2006 causing ever more traffic chaos. Also, due to shortages of power production, 16 hour a day nationwide power cuts have been started from January 2009: this of course will have big negative effects on industry etc.

Nepal is still the world's 12th poorest country but there is an increasing class of very rich Nepalis with luxury homes and 4x4 vehicles. The divide between the rich and poor seems to be widening with most of the population, earning less than £13.75 a month, very concerned about the cost of basic items, their job security and affording the next meal. The economic downturn is very much dominating the news in the west today but its effects are felt world-wide especially in countries that largely depend on international aid. As the main source of income for Nepal is still aid and development money, the new Nepalese government (despite some Maoist slogans claiming no western aid is wanted) will have to work co-operatively with foreign governments. Much of the development work will still have to be done by international and local NGOs, working collaboratively with the government. However, as many charities are experiencing a reduction in income, it seems inevitable that development projects will have to be pruned. The weakening pound also means the exchange rate is not so favourable for donation money.

WMT is determined not to curtail the support of our projects in Nepal during this difficult financial period but, at the same time, we are unable to expand our sponsorship of existing projects or take on new ventures and our reserves will not last forever.

WMT provides funding for projects in health, education, conservation and income generation. We aim to help people help themselves by supporting income generation projects and our involvement in educational programmes such as the WMT-ECCA school programme. We are currently, with PWMT, supporting Rosna in her vocational training as a Health Assistant and Shanti in her teaching job in Duckachap. WMT also supports the work of CBRS with disabled children in western Nepal and have helped Aparna with her health education programmes and the SRC health clinics. WMT works directly with local NGOs and individuals who are all Nepalis, and experts in their fields and know the needs of local people. As Nepal emerges from years of 'civil war', and now fights the economic downturn and fuel/food shortages, it is important to keep the momentum of peace and hope going. In a small but focused way, WMT is supporting those working for a better future for the people of Nepal and it is your donations, no matter how small, that enable us to continue this valuable work.

Nepalese Festival In Manchester

Two trustees, Sarah Wilkins and Melanie Hicks, attended the Nepalese Festival held in Manchester Town Hall over the last weekend in May 2008. The whole of the town hall was given over to the festival, with stalls and talks as well as goods, food, and cultural activities taking place. WMT had a stall in the grand surroundings of the Mayor's Parlour, where we displayed information on our work, sold goods and cards and were able to meet with other people interested in Nepal and how we try to help. Jane Schofield Gurung and her family came along and were next to us on the stall. Two of Sarah's friends, Rosa Carcaterra and Mo Oakley gave invaluable support by helping out with manning the stall so that we could take it in turns to visit other stalls and attend some of the lectures and shows. The sale of the leather goods from the Village Leather Training project went very well and we sold out of practically everything. Cards were sold in aid of the schools library project and a Nepalese friend of Sarah's from Wales, Dawa Sherpa, who was promoting his brother's trekking company in Nepal, kindly sold lots of cards for us as well helping to spread information about our work.



Rosa Carcaterra on the WMT stall

New WMT Logo

After much discussion last year we made a decision to update the WMT logo. The previous one has been in place, barring a few minor alterations since the charity was founded 15 years ago and we felt it would benefit from an update – The new logo is slightly more

contemporary with brighter and clearer imagery to raise awareness and attract people to support our work. We hope you like its first airing on this latest Newsletter!



working in partnership
with the people of Nepal

The Self Reliant Centre - SRC



The Self Reliant Centre is a Nepalese NGO that provides community health services to poor villagers and runs programmes on health and environmental education for both school children and adults. The NGO also works with women's groups providing trainings in empowerment, sustainability, income generation, health and legal procedures. In 2008, women's health education sessions were conducted on a regular basis in Lamjung, Sindhupalchoak and Kathmandu districts. The co-ordinator of SRC is Aparna Bhatta who works tirelessly to help the under-privileged of Nepal.

The SRC has a purpose-built health clinic in Bhotechaur that was constructed with funding from Rotary International. Last year, WMT helped with repairs to the roof which had been leaking during the monsoon. The clinic provided health care for



over 3,000 patients between April 2007 and April 2008 and has 12 members of staff. Funding for the staff salaries comes from the Bright Future Foundation but Aparna is always searching for resources for running the training programmes and to provide staff for the other smaller SRC clinics at Chabahil, Changu, Sarbodaya Sewa Kendra, Sirung and Rainoskot.

Before the permanent health clinics, SRC provided all this health care through mobile health camps. These 2-3 days camps are run in rural villages and are still used to bring health services to poor communities. In August 2008, two women's health camps were conducted, one in Melamchi and one in Bhotechaur - with approximately 200 women benefitting from them.

CBRS

CBRS works with and for disabled people, particularly children, in Western Nepal. Based in Pokhara and working predominately in the districts of Kaski and Syangja, CBRS has recently expanded into the district of Tanahu. CBRS's co-founder and UK-based consultant, Jane Schofield Gurung, visited Nepal in August 2008 and has sent us a comprehensive report on the work of the charity.

CBRS has been busy working on its on-going community based activities which include:-

- 1. rehabilitation of disabled children – home visits, therapy sessions and providing equipment.**
- 2. sustainable livelihood – increasing opportunities for income generation and vocational training.**
- 3. inclusive education – enabling more disabled children to develop through access to education.**
- 4. rights, empowerment and social inclusion – giving a 'voice' within their community to disabled children and their families. CBRS is working in partnership with Handicap International to pilot a new approach to social inclusion activities.**

CBRS has a new project manager, Mr Padam Shrestha, who has many years experience in community development projects. The former manager, Mr R K Dhamala, left in October to study in USA. WMT wishes RK well in his future career. CBRS has recently benefited from the expertise and help of Sarah Bentley, a children's physiotherapist from the UK, who has voluntarily spent time with CBRS staff in 2008 and 2009. Her support and input has been greatly appreciated by the staff of CBRS.

CBRS now has the 'David Hicks Memorial Training Centre'. This was officially opened in August 2008 and is named in the memory of the late husband of WMT's honorary treasurer, Melanie Hicks. A very generous donation from a friend of David's, Ted Wilsher, helped CBRS purchase the buildings and land of the CBRS Centre in Pokhara. In 2008, Handicap International selected CBRS as their national level training organisation for Nepal. Since then, the training centre has been in almost continuous use.

Searching for funding is an on-going process for CBRS now that the charity no longer has its main donor, ICCO. Jane has set up a new trust in the UK, the Western Nepal Disability Trust, which is a registered UK charity and which will hopefully develop a wider support base for CBRS.



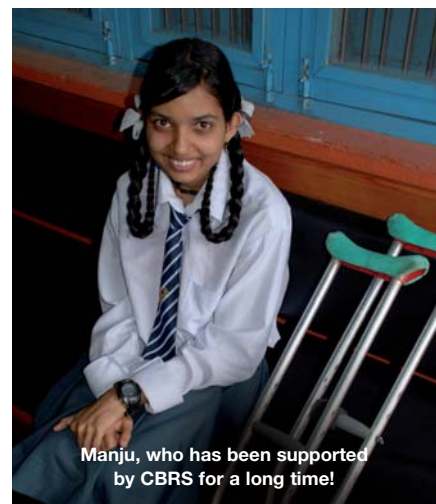
Bijaya (CBRS staff) (on left) and Ruk Maya (on right) - support for running a sewing business and training others in sewing



Training drama - participants on a training arranged by Handicap International show a drama which they have written about disability



Some CBRS staff, committee members and disabled friends



Manju, who has been supported by CBRS for a long time!

Death of John Cox

It was with great sadness that the WMT trustees learnt of the death of John Cox in November. John was Andrew Wilkins's uncle and he had been a founding trustee of WMT. In recent years, John resigned as an active trustee due to ill health and the difficulty of attending WMT trustee meetings but remained deeply interested in the trust. John's family kindly had the funeral collection for WMT and the mourners were very generous. Some of John's children and grandchildren are planning to travel to Nepal to visit the WMT projects.



Ecca Camp Kaleswor Session

The WMT-ECCA project involves schools in ten VDCs in Southern Lalitpur, a mountainous region between Kathmandu and the Terai where on 28th September 1992, the PIA plane crashed. The aim of the ECCA programme was originally to fill a gap in the school curriculum, namely conservation and environmental studies. Nowadays, the official school syllabus includes environment studies.

The ECCA programme expands on the environment message taught in schools by working with small groups of children known as 'ECCA campers'. The ECCA counsellors run ECCA camps in the school and, once trained, the campers spread the environmental message to the whole of the school and, via the students, to their parents and the rest of the village.

At ECCA camps the students discuss many subjects, from conservation and nature studies to health, drama, music and sustainable income generation. ECCA also helps schools find funding for projects that improve the school compounds such as fencing (goats cause much damage to the school gardens and nurseries), drinking water tanks and toilets.

Each participating school has a Nature Club which is run by the 'ECCA campers' and counsellors. These clubs are the core for disseminating the ECCA message. The Nature Clubs have regular meetings to discuss green issues, organise school cleaning programmes, maintain the school gardens and arrange interschool events such as drama and quiz competitions. They also promote eco-friendly technology such as smokeless stoves and develop income generating projects e.g. the Ashrang coffee tree nursery and cardamon farming. There is co-operation between the ECCA Nature Clubs and other organisations now working in the schools and setting up clubs such as the Red Cross and RECOD.

As well as supporting the ECCA programme and Nature Clubs in the schools, WMT is also helping to buy books to stock the school libraries. When we first visited the area, the

school 'libraries' only had a handful of books kept locked away in the office. Now most of the schools have functioning libraries that are becoming increasingly popular with the students. We regularly get requests for more books and are hoping, with your generosity, to purchase a selection of titles for each of the libraries. While we have received some very generous offers from supporters to donate books, most of the books requested by the schools are in Nepali; also, sadly, posting books to Nepal is very expensive.

Fortunately, most locally printed books cost around 80p to £2, so small donations can go a long way to build up the libraries. In some communities, the adults are also requesting access to the libraries and asking for books on agriculture and income generation. In the future, we hope to be able to develop community libraries.



Children from Dukkachap



4 Room Toilet Sankhu School

Rosna And Shanti

Last summer, Rosna took her school leaving certificate and we were delighted that she achieved a first class pass. Rosna decided that she would like to follow a career in nursing/health care and Aparna has been helping her choose suitable training. One of the better training courses, starting in September 2008, was offered by Tansen Hospital, an UMN hospital in Western Nepal. Lionel Pitchford (Helen's brother and PWMT trustee) was in Nepal last August and assisted Rosna with her application to Tansen. Although she did well in the entrance examination, there were unfortunately only a very few places allocated to students from Kathmandu and Rosna missed out by one position. However, in December, with Aparna's help, Rosna applied for and was accepted on a three year Health Assistant course in Shankarapur Academy. She started the course in January and is enjoying it. Rosna's education is supported jointly by PWMT and WMT.

Shanti was a home help to expatriate families for many years. She was employed for a long time by Mark and Becky Pickett, a British family, who were extremely kind

and helpful to Shanti and Rosna. When Mark and Becky returned to the UK, they kept in touch with Shanti by telephone. Becky is fluent in Nepali so it has been very useful having her to help us communicate with Shanti, especially last summer and autumn when Aparna was away. Unfortunately, early last year, Shanti lost her job with an UMN family from

Kenya and was unable to find new employment as a home help. Aparna found Shanti a new job as a teaching assistant to disadvantaged girls in Duckachap, a village about an hour by bus from Patan where Rosna and Shanti live. Shanti is enjoying her new job and the children love her; she is known as 'Shanti Madam'. WMT is sponsoring Shanti's position at the school.



Glossary

CBRS

Community Based Rehabilitation Service – an NGO based in Western Nepal working with and for disabled people particularly children.

ECCA

Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness – a school centred conservation and environmental education NGO.

NGO

Non Governmental Organisation

PIA

Pakistan International Airline – the PIA plane crash on 28th September 1992 was in Southern Lalitpur, about 20 miles south of Kathmandu.

PWMT

Pitchford and Wilkins Memorial Trust – a trust run by Helen's family.

ROSNA

Rosna was orphaned at birth, deserted by her family and, as a sickly baby, was nursed back to health by Helen Wilkins. She has been adopted by a Nepali lady, Shanti Gurung.

SRC

Self-Reliant Centre - an NGO that provides community health services to poor villagers and runs programmes on health and environmental education

UMN

United Mission to Nepal - Andrew and Helen were in Nepal with UMN.

VDC

Village Development Committee – a local government – similar to our Parish councils



The Wilkins Memorial Trust

57 Forest Edge, Buckhurst Hill, Essex IG9 5AE.

Registered Charity Number 1038323

The Wilkins Memorial Trust was set up following the death of Andrew and Helen Wilkins and their three children, Hannah, Naomi and Simeon, in the PIA plane crash on 28th September 1992.