WMT News Summer 2015

The Newsletter of The Wilkins Memorial Trust

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Namaste and thank you for supporting the WMT in Nepal

The Himalayan nation of Nepal with its ancient cultures and spectacular mountains has always had a romantic image but the country has a turbulent history and despite having received billions of dollars in aid remains one the poorest countries in the world.

A BRIEF HISTORY of NEPAL

For the first half of the 20th century Nepal did not welcome visitors but in the early 1950's it opened it's borders and soon became a famous hippy destinations until King Birendra expelled them in 1975. Nepal is now a popular tourist destination noted for trekking and mountaineering.

In 1959 Nepal experimented briefly with democracy but this did not last long and the Shah kings ruled until 1991. Parliamentary monarchy followed, marred by periods of unrest, but the situation changed for the worse in 1996 when the Maoists declared a 'people's war'. The insurrection lasted a decade leaving 12,000 people dead and 100,000 displaced. A peace deal was signed in 2006 and the Maoists emerged as the largest parliamentary party. In 2008, the Nepalese parliament voted to oust the monarchy and become a republic.

Today

Political instability continues and the politicians have still not agreed a new constitution. Repeated deadlines have been made and missed, the latest being for January 2015. Other challenges are the repatriation of thousands of Bhutanese refugees who fled Bhutan in the 1990's and, on the Terai, increasing political violence of the Madhesi. The Madeshi are a mix of the indigenous Tharu and Maithali and peoples of Indian origin, 40% of whom don't have citizenship or voting rights. They are demanding greater autonomy and more representation in government.

WMT PROJECTS

CBRS works with and for disabled children and young people in Western Nepal and now has 1163 clients and employs 6 field workers. Over the last 18 months CBRS has had a number of visitors from WMT, **Sally and David Lund** in October 2013, **Martin and Glynis Bate** visited in November 2013, **Helena Perry** (WMT supporter) in autumn 2014 and **Tanya Carver** (WMT supporter) in winter 2014/2015

The **WMT-ECCA** project continues its environmental education in schools in Southern Lalitpur and was awarded the Nature Conservation award for 2013/2014 by the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology for its work in environmental and conservation education. Southern Lalitpur is changing and developing rapidly accelerated by the construction of a new road linking Kathmandu to the eastern Terai. The B.P. Koirala Highway passes close to the village of Malta, one of the WMT-ECCA project schools.

Self Reliant Centre (SRC), run by Aparna Bhatta, has organised health camps in poor areas for many years. At these camps, Aparna noticed the high incidence of gynaecological diseases amongst women patients. Many of these illnesses, e.g. pelvic organ prolapse (a weakening and rupture of the pelvic floor muscles), can often be treated by inexpensive means especially if the condition is diagnosed in the early stages. In recent years, Aparna has organised educational and treatment sessions on reproductive health. She has noticed that in the areas that SRC has reached, there has been a dramatic reduction in gynaecological problems.

In 2014, SRC prioritised women's reproductive health and children's dental health. SRC ran educational sessions on women's health that reached 2000 women and girls. It also organised 7 women's health camps at which 500 patients were examined; many received treatment and some were referred to hospital. The cost of medicines in Nepal has increased significantly recently impacting on the work that small charities like SRC can do. But WMT is hoping to raise extra money for Aparna to continue her valuable work.

Dental disease is common amongst the Nepalese and there are few dentists outside Kathmandu. The regular use of toothpaste and brushes is uncommon and most Nepalese will only seek a dentist if they are in extreme pain. SRC runs programmes on dental health in schools where advice on diet is given and tooth care products are handed out to the children

ROSHNA and SHANTI

Roshna is in the last year of her training in public health. She took her final exams in February 2015. Results can take up to a year to be published but we hope she will be able to get a job soon.

Shanti, unfortunately, has had major health problems since June 2014 when she was diagnosed with advanced kidney failure. Jim Alexander and his family, who have known Shanti and Roshna for over 20 years, have been wonderful in the financial and emotional support they are giving Shanti. Shanti has been receiving dialysis at a private hospital.

David and Sally Lund's visit October 2013

Sally and David were last in Nepal in the early 1980's when Sally worked at Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara. Their visit 30 years later showed how much the country had changed – especially the massive increase in traffic and pollution in Kathmandu. They arrived just before the Dashain festival (the main Hindu religious festival lasting 15 days) so their first week was a rush of visits before the holiday season.

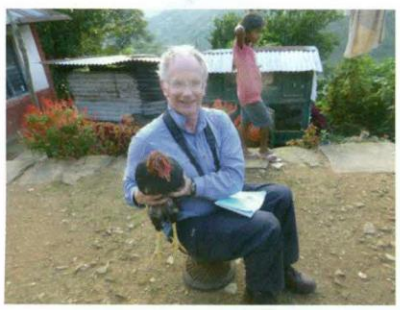
CBRS VISIT

We flew from Kathmandu to Pokhara enjoying spectacular views of the Annapurnas and Machhapuchhare. Krishna, project manager of CBRS, had a busy schedule planned for us with an office meeting; home visits to 7 clients and a Dashain party on our last day.

For our first day of home visits, we were accompanied by Krishna and had the luxury of travelling in a 4x4, after that it was local buses and walking. CBRS field workers visiting clients in remote areas may have a 3 hour bus ride then a long walk ahead of them. Nepali buses are not luxury travel, they are hot, overcrowded and often with standing room only. Not to mention farm produce, livestock and erratic time keeping. CBRS has branch offices in Syangia and Tanahun. In these towns, CBRS has been given free office space in government buildings; an illustration of how closely CBRS works with the government.

We were impressed the care given to clients and how clean the houses of even the poorest with mud floors were. The clients we met were aged 10 and over and had disabilities ranging from muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy and/or learning disabilities. Each client had a long-term plan and the same field worker for each visit establishing a good relationship between the client, family and field worker.

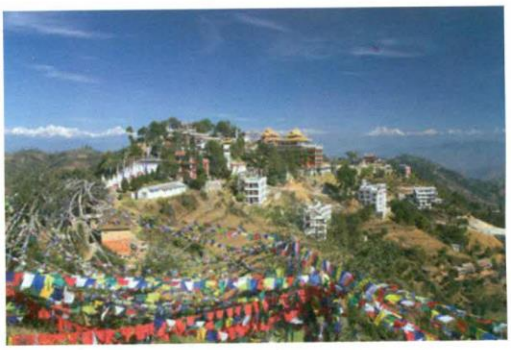
Clients with physical disabilities have a good chance of independent living and earning their own income. An entertaining moment was when a 10 year old was practising on his CBRS walker. Once he got going, the problem was stopping as he gathered speed downhill laughing all the way. Maybe a simple brake would be useful!



It is clients with learning disabilities that are the biggest challenge and it is hard to make progress with them. The WMT-CBRS **I**ncome **G**enerating **P**rojects (IGPs) are particularly important for this group and CBRS tries to ensure that the IGP belong to the disabled client. We were shown some chicken and goat projectss. All the animals were on clean bedding with fresh food and looked healthy. We counted ten goats at one house all starting from one pregnant goat. At another home, David held some large meat chickens that can weigh about 4 kg when fully grown. These could make up to £10 each at market.

Our last day with CBRS was at the office Dashain party. Before the meal of goat and vegetable curries, we had a meeting with the board, the management and the field workers. It was a time to discuss the concerns of the staff and the future of CBRS. Funding is a constant headache and much of Krishna's time is spent completing grant applications. When back in UK, Martin and I try to help in editing and re-writing grant applications into more comfortable English.

VISIT to a WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC at NAM BUDDHA with APARNA



The second week of our Nepal trip coincided with Dashain, the main Nepalese festival and holiday when all schools, offices and businesses are closed. However, we were able to accompany Aparna to a women's health clinic at Nam Buddha. The Tibetan monastery and temple of Nam Buddha are perched on the top of a ridge with the clinic buildings below it. It is a spectacularly beautiful place with views stretching away over mountain ridges and valleys towards the high Himalayas.

Although there is a dedicated clinic building at Nam Bhuddha, there is no money for professional staff or support for those needing specialist care. The clinic is run mainly by voluntary organisations sometimes from foreign countries which can create communication and cultural problems. Whilst we were there, the doctor was Korean with a monk translating. This can cause difficulties particularly with female issues.

Women's health problems are a real issue in Nepal where poor posture, diet, carrying very heavy loads from childhood, childbirth at a young age and early resumption of manual work after giving birth all contribute to a high incidence of cervical prolapse. This is made worse by the reluctance of women to admit to these problems in front of their menfolk and by the cost of health care.

Aparna runs clinics to help women with prolapses and to teach prevention. She has a small stock of antibiotics to treat infections and a precious supply of soft rubber ring pessaries from the USA. These are much safer and more comfortable than the government supplied pessaries. However, Aparna's main objective is prevention.

She runs classes on basic physiology and anatomy; and explains how posture, exercises and diet can help. Aparna also tries to help women with other gynecological problems such as fibroids but funding for surgery for these types of problems is not easy in a country where there is no NHS. This year, WMT is appealing to supporters for donations to help buy more soft rubber pessaries (see insert). The pessaries only cost **£20** each and help transform a woman's life from the misery of incontinence, pain and rejection back to normal function and dignity.

Martin and Glynis Bate's visit to CBRS November 2013

Martin and I spent six days with CBRS during which time we visited a number of clients in and around Pokhara. We had meetings with Krishna, the project manager, and ran some English language training sessions. CBRS have many visitors who are interested in their work so the aim of the language training was to help the field workers feel more confident in discussing their work with others in English. Martin and I also helped the staff with writing reports in English.

On home visits, Martin and I were able to observe the excellent work done by the CBRS staff and witness the challenges faced by the families and the field workers.

UNIK TAMANG

Unik, now 19, has been a client of CBRS for 14 years and Martin and I met her on our first visit to Pokhara in 2010. Unik has cerebral palsy and her family live in a single room amongst a collection of shacks on the gravel banks of the Seti river. This riverside slum in Simpani is a mainly Christian community; most families having migrated here from the country.

I was pleased to see that, with her field worker, Gobinda's, continuing support Unik had gained valuable skills. Her coordination had vastly improved and she was able to stand up with the support of furniture and brush her hair unaided.

Her father has a basket weaving business that was started with the help of WMT-CBRS **Income Generating Programme** (IGP). Money from this has helped pay for a handrail so Unik can use the bathroom unaided. This has raised her self-esteem enormously. Unik speaks English quite well and was happy to talk about her progress. She is attending a new school and travels there by taxi accompanied by one of her parents. She is certainly a very inspiring young person.

RAJESH

Rajesh is a 13 year old with muscular dystrophy. His field worker is Parbati and she and Rajesh have a very good relationship. Rajesh's family is always very happy to see Parbati on her monthly visits.

During our one hour visit with Rajesh, who is largely bed bound, Parbati aided him in a large range of exercises to make the most of the muscle tone he still has. She also gave him lots of breathing exercises which he attempted enthusiastically. Martin and I were impressed with Parbati's empathy with all her clients.

Rajesh's family have been provided with some chickens through the WMT-CBRS IGP and Rajesh says 'thank you to all WMT supporters for the chickens'. He enjoys having eggs to eat and his mother sells the surplus eggs.

SUBESH

Subesh has been with CBRS for 7 years. When Parbati first met him, he was unable to walk and had no social contact. Initially, Parbati worked hard on improving Subesh's mobility with physiotherapy exercises and he is now walking well. For the past three years, the focus of the work with Subesh has been to get him enrolled in the local school. Parbati has liaised with the school staff and other students to help integrate him. Subesh told us that he was very happy, enjoyed school and had made many friends. The majority of Parbati's visits to Subesh now take place in school and she educates his classmates on disability issues as well.

BISHAL

Bishal Thapa is a 15 year old with cerebral palsy and mild learning difficulties. His field worker is Mahendra. Bishal lives at home with very supportive parents although, recently, his mother had been unwell with gallstones. WMT-CBRS IGP provided the family with some goats and already young goats have been sold for £100.

Bishal has problems with sitting up, coordination and concentration. Mahendra plays a matching-up game, with Bishal and his sister, helping his coordination and concentration. There is a football hung from the ceiling and Bishal is able to play 'bash-the-ball' with his visitors which also helps him sit up straight. Mahendra is encouraging Bishal's parents to take him to the CBRS office so a special support chair can be designed and made for him.

During our time in Pokhara, Martin and I were able to meet several CBRS clients and found the experience uplifting, emotional and, at times, quite distressing.

The future of many clients is uncertain but CBRS works to ensure they can live life to the full within the limits of their disabilities and also raises disability issues at community, local and national levels.

CBRS has very dedicated and motivated field workers – many of whom have been there for years and have strong relationships with their clients.

Martin and I were able to interact with most of the CBRS staff, especially during English lessons, and we found the staff and the work of CBRS inspiring. WMT is committed to continuing support of CBRS.

Volunteering at CBRS Nepal – Pokhara, September 2014

Helena Perry

As part of my journey through Asia, I agreed to my friend Sarah Wilkins' idea of spending some time at the CBRS (Community-Based Rehabilitation Service) charity in Pokhara, Nepal. CBRS is well known to Sarah as she is a Trustee of the Wilkins Memorial Trust, one of the main financial donors to the charity.

Having duly arrived at the office gates in the early hours of the morning after an overnight trip from the Indian border, I was shown immediately to the guest room where I was staying, and offered a very welcome cup of tea. Recently the team at CBRS Pokhara took the decision to better utilize two of their unused upstairs offices, and have created two simple but effective guest bedrooms - either for staff that need to stay overnight or for longer-term visitors like myself.

Both rooms are secure, clean and comfortable, with views of Fishtail Mountain as an added bonus! One of the main aims for these guest rooms is generation of much-needed funds for CBRS, and I for one will be advertising their availability to everyone I know who may be passing this way.

During the morning of my first day, Mr. Krishna (Programme Manager of CBRS) and Ms.Sakuntala (CBRS accountant) presented me with a KHADA scarf and welcomed me to 'the CBRS family'. It was a lovely thing to do, and made me feel quite special! Krishna and I discussed a few ideas as to how best I could help CBRS during my stay in Pokhara, and we decided that a combination of English language work and accompanying field officers on home visits would be the best way forward.

My first task was taking the draft copy of the CBRS Annual Report for 2013-14 and helping re-write some of the paragraphs into more comfortable English - making it 'English-friendly' was how Krishna described it! It was a useful exercise for me in coming to understand better how CBRS worked and what it was trying to achieve in the community. Obviously, being a native English speaker, it was much easier for me to put into words the sentiments that were being expressed in these reports.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the team here - and they really are a team, everyone works together to support each other and achieve the CBRS aims - are doing a fantastic job in supporting those members of the local community most disadvantaged in terms of both physical or intellectual disabilities.

The one thing that struck me most was the refusal to categorize people as 'disabled' - all CBRS service holders and receivers are 'people with a disability'; it's only a small difference in words, but a big difference in perception.

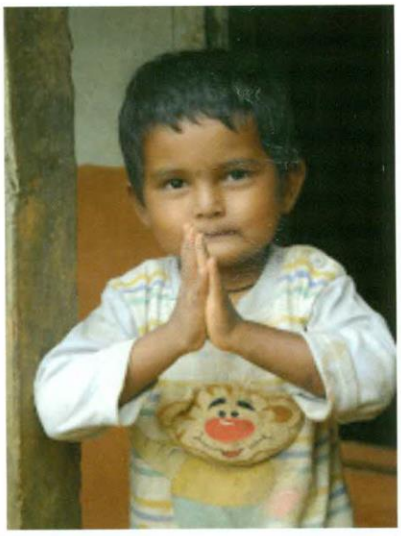
During my first few days in the office I attended a meeting of one of the local Women's Groups. It is really important that these local community action groups are given full support wherever possible, especially those organized by the womenfolk. Women in Nepal are considered for the most part to be minority citizens, and those who are disabled are doubly discriminated against. It was a very active meeting, with good representation from local organizations and authorities, and was very well attended by the local community.

One of the regular CBRS three-monthly Program Review Meeting (PRM) and staff training weekends was scheduled to take place in the latter part of September, and it was agreed that I would take part in assisting staff members with some English practice as part of an afternoon session. All of the staff here speak English to some degree, and obviously some are more fluent than others. Krishna thought that it would be helpful if we spent a little time encouraging staff to practice introducing themselves and their role within CBRS in English, and this actually went down very well with the staff themselves. We had some fun along the way, learned some new words and phrases, and I had the opportunity of meeting those staff members who work in the field offices outside of Pokhara.

Fortunately for me, the Dashain Festival was celebrated during my stay, and it was a wonderful opportunity to join in and really be part of 'the CBRS family' in a social setting. The main celebration at the office was held the day after the training weekend and everyone was invited to come for lunch of freshly prepared goat. It was an honor to take part in preparing and cooking the lunch - apparently topping and tailing green beans is my specialty! - and about 40 members of staff and family came to enjoy the afternoon.

I was keen to join one or two field co-coordinators on a home visits - to have the chance of seeing CBRS work put into practice. My first day out in the field was spent with Ms. Yau Maya, near Mahendra Cave. The children with disabilities we visited in this area all live in a village community some way out of town about an hour's walk uphill. These clients are extremely poor and have no extra money for hospital visits or physiotherapy treatments; CBRS supports where it is most needed - home visits with physical exercise plans, assistive equipment, advocacy for medical relief, income generation activities to help the families attain financial independence. There was such a positive attitude from all the clients towards CBRS, it was a joy to see what a difference this work makes.

A few days later I went out with another field coordinator, Mr. Gobinda, in Pokhara city. Here we visited two children who each had different serious physical disabilities - but neither of whom let it put a damper on their being boisterous, active and interested in anything but doing their physiotherapy exercises! However, patience and commitment pays dividends, and is very evident in the way that the families put in so much time and effort to co-operate with the dedication of the CBRS field staff.



My last day attending home visits was spent with another field co-coordinator, Ms. Bishnu, in Shyangja District. Two very different clients here: one a young boy only 3 years old (Mr. Spandan Chaudhari), and one grown woman in her thirties (Ms. Kisori Gurung), both with quite severe physical disabilities. Again, it was wonderful to see how CBRS supports each client individually in different ways, either with direct physical manipulation exercises and educational activities, or advocacy and support in achieving medical attention for those requiring more than physical education. In each and every home visit that I attended, it was evident that the work that CBRS does for the disadvantaged in the community is paramount, is supremely effective, and is worth every penny spent.

I have had a wonderful time here in Pokhara these last few weeks, and I offer my grateful thanks to Krishna and my CBRS family for making me so very welcome, and for giving me the chance to help support their wonderful work in a small way during my visit.

Namaste!

Martin and Glynis Bate's visit to SRC November 2013.

Visits with Aparna.

Aparna continues to work with great enthusiasm supported by health assistants. Her work falls mainly into two categories, **women's health projects** and **dental health education**, both of which are necessary as there are limited government health programmes in Nepal.

We arrived with hundreds of toothbrushes, many tubes of toothpaste and boxes of paracetamol and ibuprofen, the majority of which had been donated by friends and relatives. Aparna was grateful for new supplies, which she will distribute as part of her work.

We were able to see Aparna working in two different situations - a women's education session followed up by a clinic in a communal hall in Patan and secondly, a women's clinic in a purpose built Red Cross building.

During our first visit we were accompanied by our friends Donald and Lesley Gillon. They have supported WMT financially for many years, wished to visit the projects and wanted to help with advice and training. Lesley has worked as a nurse in women's reproductive health in the UK for a long time so she was keen to spend time with Aparna and offer her support. She was able to advise Aparna about the latest techniques and knowledge and care of women with gynaecological problems.

Aparna was concerned that due to the forthcoming elections the health camp would be poorly attended. She said that a normal attendance would be 80-100 - the attendance that day was 40. She commented that it would have been higher had the session not coincided with the water tanker delivery. Water is a scarce commodity in Nepal and twice a week water tankers arrive for locals to buy water to fill up their tanks at their homes.

While Aparna gave her presentation, the women listened with interest and the session seemed to be well received. This was followed by exercises. These fell into two categories - pelvic floor exercises and a feel good self massage. The session ended with the women looking happy and chatting freely with one another.