

Report on visit to Nepal Dental Project and Bhattedande Village Development Project. November 2010

Both these projects are accredited through Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS).

Introduction

Just some basic introduction: as a volunteer I have been working on the Nepal Dental Project since 2000 and started as a member of a RAWCS dental team but quickly moved on to setting up local dental training and education programs for local personnel to safely provide basic dental treatments, and for teachers who would be able to deliver oral health messages in their classes. The political situation put a stop to visiting RAWCS dental teams in 2003 so it was easier for me to travel alone to Nepal, and work in with local situations and advice. Not always with great safety but fortunately and somehow the work continued.

Nepal Dental Project

The dental project, set up in the mid-90s by Dr Malcolm Deall, supports a local Non Government Organisation - Community Health Development Society (CHDS) Nepal - to provide basic and preventive dental care to the poor people in Kavre and surrounding districts. CHDS, under the leadership of Mr Bishnu Shrestha, operates a fixed clinic in Banepa, the commercial centre of Kavre, and utilises portable dental equipment for remote village visits. While raising some private fees in the Banepa clinic, the team relies heavily on external donations - \$ funds and dental supplies and equipment - for its survival. The dental care provided in the camps in villages and schools is free of charge. The team consists of two registered Dental Assistants - mid level dental operators (Bishnu and Sunil Napit) - two Dental Nurses and two administrative and finance staff.

As well as the fixed clinic and remote field camps we have established a preventive school based dental program at Bhattedande village school, with funds from the International College of Dentists (Australia) supporting a school based toothbrushing program, and funds from the Pierre Fauchard Foundation supporting one dental clinical camp at the school per year. The Foundation funds (applied for each year) are also used for camps in other villages. The funding situation is always precarious and the Nepali team is working on half salary, just to keep going, as they are committed to helping the poor and marginalised communities.

The Dental Camps November 2010

The majority of the Australian team left after the toilet project activities (see next section). My husband (Paul Pholeros, an architect) and I travelled to Pokhara with the CHDS dental team to provide dental camps in the Amar Singh school for blind children. We (Bishnu and his team and I) had visited the school in 2005, so it was great to see some of the kids again, now older and growing up, but still with great potential. It is very moving to see how the team copes with the blind kids, and to see the patience and understanding they demonstrate in explaining everything to them using touch and quiet language.

The team also provided dental camps at the villages of Aanpghari, Sunthan and again at the Bhattedande school. Bishnu and his team work hard to focus on preventive care, and as a part of this we have developed a teachers training manual, to support particularly the Bhattedande school teachers who are supervising the toothbrushing program, but which can be used in many schools.



Bhattedande Village Development Project

A separate project is the Bhattedande Village Development Project, just completed, which aims to improve sanitation in Bhattedande that has a population of 400. Since 2007 58 toilets have been constructed in the village, under the management and coordination of CHDS, and using local teams at all levels. There are 38 septic systems and 20 biogas systems, with the biogas systems using the methane generated from the waste breakdown to provide at least two hours of cooking gas per day for the householder, generally the woman. Each toilet building has a 500 litre rainwater collection tank and an external tap for handwashing. Great improvements in lifestyle and health for the villagers have been demonstrated. The project uses local Nepali teams, at all levels, and has created jobs and skills development, using funds raised in Australia. More information on this project can be found on the Nepal page at www.healthabitat.com

So, to November 2010. A team of nine Australians visited the toilet project and participated in the “final” project ceremonies. Discussions were conducted about how to continue the project in other nearby villages, focussing on the Tamang villages. The Tamang people are the ethnic group in Bhattedande village, and they wish to see their brothers and sisters in other villages achieve improved living conditions. They are considered to be one of the Indigenous groups in Nepal, and in a somewhat discriminatory caste system are seen to be lowly villagers and farmers with no great expectations for achievement. Hence they often miss out on much needed assistance and support to improve their lives. However, as this project revealed, there is no shortage of interested and hard working people who, given the chance, will develop skills and leadership. This also has a flow-on to greater education expectations for their kids.

We as “foreigners” are useful in Nepal for our skills, which we work hard to transfer to motivated locals who then carry on with the work all the year. Our role is then to provide ongoing professional and technical support and to try to raise the funds and supplies so that the poor and marginalised communities of Nepal can be helped by their own people, to relieve the low access to much needed dental care.

And really the dental health as part of overall health, won't improve until people have access to basic sanitation and water supply.

So, thanks to the generous donors and supporters, and we look forward to more activities in 2011.

Following are some dental camp photos from Bishnu.

Sandra Meihubers
January 2011



CHDS Nepal

Remote Community Dental Health promotion and care program



PFA supported dental camp photo report - 1

CHDS Nepal

Remote Community Dental Health promotion and care program

