

PARTNER PLAN

Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal April 2014

c/o United Mission to Nepal
PO Box 126
Kathmandu
Nepal

Dear Friends,

Cati writes: Since writing our last partner plan letter we have had the privilege of journeying to two very remote areas in the Far West of Nepal, Doti and Bajhang. This was a two week trip involving a lot of travelling, primarily to see the work of UMN among families with disabled children. The intention was to enable us to give first hand reports back to many of our supporting churches who so generously raised money to help some of these children receive treatment over the past two years.



The age-old terracing spilling down into the valleys of Bajhang

The journey alone opened our eyes to the vast scale of this country since we covered long distances, involving a flight, several days on bumpy roads and many hours on foot in the mountains. Everywhere we saw small isolated communities living off the land, and we were frequently uplifted by the beauty of ancient vast terraces planted with wheat and spilling steeply down into the valleys below like giant staircases. No potentially productive land was left un-tended.

In stark contrast however, the numerous children living with disability, whom we were taken to meet, left us with a turmoil of emotions that were regularly incompatible with sleep at the end of each long day. These included a hostel of over fifty deaf children, living far from their families in the care of a dedicated warden, with his small team of staff. These children have two classrooms set aside for them in a local school which we visited; but finding skilled teachers who are willing to work in this remote village is desperately difficult. Later during our trip, we attended a training session in sign-language and caught just a glimpse into their world of silence. So much enthusiasm and laughter among the folk trying to learn hand signals, yet for the deaf children in Nepal, these are literally a lifeline to future possibilities.

In the same week we walked deep into the hills to visit a young boy, Coran, whose parents were left penniless after paying for an unsuccessful operation on his club feet soon after his birth. Several years later his condition was discovered by UMN and with treatment in Kathmandu he is now running around gleefully like any



Visiting a class for deaf children at Ranpur school

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little boy, his face radiant with a huge smile stretching from ear to ear! His visible happiness was also shared by his parents who have now managed to build a simple home with money earned from vegetable farming. We were given such a warm welcome and came away feeling profoundly humbled by the apparent indifference of this family to their lack of material comfort in light of their son's rediscovered zest for life.



Coran and his mother with the 'before' photo of his club-feet

At another point in the trip we visited a hostel for ten blind children, their lives blighted by darkness and rejection; their world shrunken to an absolute minimum on the margins of society. They are given glimpses of hope by being taught braille and thereby access to education, but without independent means what then lies ahead for these young people? When asked what their greatest struggles were I was told, without hesitation: that of being rejected by their own families.

Malcolm writes: We were in the final stages of our long drive into Doti when we realised that there were stationary vehicles ahead of us on the road. As we slowed down people on foot shouted out to us that there had been an accident. We stopped, and got out to

investigate.

Tragically, it turned out that a lorry had been in collision with a motor-bike, and the motor-cyclist had been killed. His body still lay sprawled on the road. The lorry driver had fled. In Nepal the assumption always is that the driver of the larger vehicle is to blame. This is obviously extremely unjust, not least because here some motor-cyclists drive extremely recklessly. However, the lorry driver knew he risked being lynched by irate local villagers if he stayed on the scene, so he immediately ran off – possibly to the police to ask them to give him protection from a mob. Sure enough, the villagers had set the lorry on fire to vent their anger.



Scene of a tragic accident in which the 'culprit's' lorry is attacked by local villagers

By the time we arrived the lorry was ablaze, and the villagers were resolutely blocking the road. It was explained to us that they would continue to do this until the dead man's relations eventually arrived, and compensation had been agreed between them and the company who owned the lorry. After some time the police turned up, but they made no attempt to clear the road. They did take some desultory photos and made some measurements of skid marks. However I had the impression this was merely to give the impression that they were doing something.

We were told the road would certainly remain blocked overnight – possibly even for days. However pedestrians were allowed to pass through the blockade. So after some hours we removed our rucksacks from the Landrover, and trudged up the hill past the body of the poor motor-cyclist, (now partially under a sheet), and past the wailing women, including the dead man's mother. Her son had been due to marry a few weeks later. At the next hamlet we were met by a hired jeep which the UMN office in Doti had sent to pick us up.

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Cati writes: The final focus of our trip involved walking deep into a valley of Bajhang – fording a river numerous times - and then climbing up an unrelenting path that zigzags under a hot sun to reach the village of Leik Gau. Here we were inundated by children with various disabilities, clamouring for the chance of treatment. Some children were carried in on the back of a parent due to being unable to walk. Throughout the morning different people from surrounding villages straggled into the small dark room lit only by sunlight through the crowded doorway, each with a desperate story of daily struggle. On top of this we discovered mismatched expectations as they looked for medicine or the promise of immediate surgery to provide hope.



A necessary part of the journey to Leik Gau

We were floundering with the inevitable questions of why there is such disparity and pain and degradation in place of joy and hope and progress for these young lives? Yet we were also given the wonderful chance of meeting the wee boy Nisan whom we had met so many times in Kathmandu when he was funded by donations to undergo surgery in 2012. Previously unable to walk because of two club feet, Nisan was now fully able to run around and jump into the lap of his dotting grandmother, proudly showing his two feet in happy parallel. The joy and gratitude expressed by Nisan's grandparents (his father is one of countless migrants to India in search of work) was deeply humbling.

Confronted with the huge scale of suffering and need left us both feeling extremely distressed and relatively powerless to offer any guarantees of hope beyond what is being achieved already...slowly. As we made the long journey home to Kathmandu, our emotions also travelled along a rollercoaster of extremes...consciousness of so much need alongside the joy of seeing some lives transformed.



Coran's feet successfully corrected by surgery

We were reminded of the Vision of UMN expressed in the simple words: 'Fullness of life for all in a transformed Nepali society.' May God continue to go ahead of all of us who are trying to make this a reality in whatever way possible.

Malcolm writes: On our way back from our trip to Leik Gau we again encountered the aftermath of a road accident. This time a man had fallen off the roof of a bus. It is technically illegal for passengers to ride on the roofs of buses, but this law is widely flouted, and it is common to see 12 or 15 people precariously perched on the top of a bus careering along the road. (Apparently the roof-top 'passengers' even have to pay the same fare as those inside on seats.) Tragically this poor man had lost his grip and fallen off. The bus had gone on. By the time we arrived some locals had brought a stretcher from a local health post, but they had no transport. They had flagged down a pick-up ahead of us. We could see the man on the stretcher was vomiting. The stretcher was placed across the side-walls of the back of the pick-up. Two or three men jumped in to hold the stretcher in position, then the pick-up drove on to the local big town. We were taking the same route, so we saw the man being carried into the hospital. Of course it was good to know he

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was now in a medical post, but at the same time we were very conscious that such a remote hospital would certainly not have the personnel or facilities to treat serious head or back injuries.

Our arrival a short time after both of these accidents had a very sobering effect on us, and made us reflect again on how travel in Nepal is far more dangerous than in Scotland. There are many factors involved in this. The roads are often in terrible condition, especially during the monsoon. Vehicles are badly maintained. There appears to be no equivalent to the Highway Code, and the few rules that do exist are not enforced. Seat belts are usually not fitted, and even if they are, they are not worn. Many vehicles have no lights. The only device that works perfectly on every vehicle is the horn.

The medical and legal consequences of accidents throw up similar contrasts between Nepal and Scotland. Here in Nepal the likelihood of effective and prompt medical treatment is very slim. There are some good hospitals, but the chance of being near one of them is small. And the legal implications of an accident are very unclear. It seems that the bigger vehicle, or the richer driver, will always be blamed, no matter what actually happened. In light of all this it will not surprise you that we always pray for safety before travelling in Nepal, and give thanks when the journey is safely finished.

Malcolm continues: Very soon we will be back in Scotland. We will be in Duns Presbytery from 23 May to 2 June, and in Dunkeld & Meigle Presbytery from 6 to 16 June. We are looking forward to seeing many of you who read this letter - and above all of course to seeing Megan and Tim, and Angus and Hannah! We have learned a lot in our first two years in Nepal, and we will do our best to share some of those things with you, along with insights into the riches and struggles we have found in living here. Thank you for your prayers, encouragement, and support on our journey so far. Soon we hope to be able to express our thanks to you face to face.

With love and prayers,

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Saying goodbye to Nisan and his grandmother

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