



Dharmik Australia Newsletter

March 2008

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“Name Same Kadin Chhe.”

“Thanks beyond the sky and the earth.”

Welcome to our first Dharmik Australia newsletter and thank you, thank you, thank you, for your help and support. Without your support Dharmik Australia would continue to be Mark, Mary-Louise and our two kids trying to help as many needy kids as we could in Nepal. We realize that yes, charity is a personal commitment, but more importantly it is a community commitment. That’s why we are trying to gather more and more support to help ensure Dharmik continues with its commitments and continues to grow into a healthy, well run, ethically and financially transparent organization.

We hope the stories in this newsletter inspire, educate and uplift you as a fellow human being trying to make a difference in this lifetime to the inequality between rich and poor, lucky and unlucky.

Your feedback is important to us. Visit us at www.dharmik.org to leave comments and get updates on what we are up to. Please feel free to share the news about our project with others.

Why Dharmik?

The symbol of Dharmik (the elephant) is all over Kathmandu and Nepal. What better name to give to our charity than Dharmik, which means “the giver of charity”.

Background of Dharmik Australia

In 2007, Mark, Mary-Louise and their two children, Sarah (now 12) and Harry (now seven) travelled to Nepal to live and work for four months. Mark and Mary-Louise worked as volunteers for a charity running ten childrens’ homes. Sarah worked as a volunteer in Nepal’s largest orphanage, Balmandir, one day per week. Her duties included looking after very small children.





Project News

SAI Home

The Sai Home is six kilometres from the Australian Embassy in northern Kathmandu. It is run by a lovely couple and cares for 18 children and now also for twin babies. These people were our neighbours for five months in 2007 and we were so moved by their poverty that in partnership with a local businessman (Narayan Shrestha) we decided to help them.

We wrote to our friends in Australia and because of their generosity we were able to complete the following projects:

- Moved toilet outside and removed the foul toilet smell inside the house.
- Fixed leaking and painted interior walls.
- Paid school fees allowing children to attend local school.
- Created an awning at the entrance to provide shelter in monsoons.
- Provided new bed mattresses and sheets and new school bags.
- Installed roof tank and water pump.
- Connected interior shower to water tank so children could establish proper hygiene routine.
- Filled in dangerous “pond”.
- Medical assessment of each child which showed general poor nutrition and the need for dentistry and vitamin B.

After careful consideration between us, the Sai founders and our Nepali partners, we are also aiming to provide the following support at the Sai home on an ongoing basis:

- Regular meat and vegetables.
- Cooking gas.
- Clothing as needed.
- English school fees. The children are now attending a local school but they are finding it very hard. Three of the kids in the home attend a better school nearby where all subjects are taught in English. The ability to speak English opens up future employment prospects and provides the potential for these kids to make a successful life for themselves when they leave this home. Once we have a sponsor for each child, we will be able to afford English school fees. The race is on because the new school year begins in April.



Founder Birnar



New beds



New school bags



CCRC Home

The CCRC Home is in Kopandole in the southern Kathmandu Valley. It is run by a committee of educated Nepalis who are motivated to help the neediest people in their society. Funding comes entirely from a US based adoption agency (www.ftia.org), with whom we are in regular contact, and with who we are coordinating our efforts on the ground. We were first approached last August to help with a baby milk crisis. We also provided a water filter on a maintenance contract for safe drinking water.

Adoption in Nepal has been frozen due to severe corruption issues which came to light last year. As the political situation in Nepal is very unstable it is not clear when adoption will recommence. It could take years. When it does recommence, CCRC will have access to more funding and will be able to operate successfully. At that time Dharmik will reduce its role.

Currently we are funding the care of two twin babies from CCRC who have relocated to the Sai home on a temporary basis in response to a severe health crisis. (See other story in this newsletter: "Saving Lives").

The situation at CCRC is dire; funding is not sufficient to meet the basic costs on infant formula milk and a staffing crisis is creating fear and uncertainty for all the children. We are working closely with them now to resolve these issues and have employed a local, a wonderful mother figure to be there each day as our representative. We expect lots of good news about our programs there in the next newsletter, so stay tuned!

CPWD Home

Mrs. Mina Bhandari has been running the Centre for Promotion and Welfare of the Disabled with deep dedication and extraordinary effort. Her father used to work for the Indian army, and in the war lost both of his eyes. After caring for him for more than 10 years, Mina decided to dedicate her life to caring for the disabled.

CPWD is an amazing place to visit. It is obvious they have meagre financial means, yet each of the babies in their care does well and the older children are looking happy and smiling. We are supporting them with a monthly lentils donation and also infant formula milk. We would like to provide physiotherapy for the five severely disabled children. When we have more sponsor funds this is how we will allocate that money.



CCRC Home outside



One of the children



Disabled children



Other Homes

We are also supporting six children who do not live in the main three homes. Two of them have a very sick mother and their father was recently killed in an electrical accident. We were asked specifically to sponsor their school fees by our local Nepal partners. The children live in the same building as our office, which has been donated to us.

The other four children are the children of Surita who works for us each day at the CCRC home. As part of her salary package we are supporting her children's school fees. In Nepal, one needs to consider the whole environment of the people one supports, because unless the whole environment is stable the system will fall down.

Other Projects

There is no shortage of projects in Nepal, but we have had to slow down our growth to match our financial capacity. If we were to find a large amount of money, the next project we will support is a village water supply in rural Nepal, four hours from Kathmandu. More than 200 people live there.

Mark has visited there twice now. These people are locked into hours of daily labour gathering water, which could be spent improving their health and education if only they could fund the solar water supply.

The engineer's plans are already approved and the government will pay half the cost, but they need a donor to support the other half. We need \$19,000 for this project.

Saving Lives (by Mark McIntyre)

We never thought we would be dealing with life and death. After all, we are supplementing the good work already being done by local Nepal-based charities. On Friday 25th January 2008, Mary-Louise and I met with the CCRC committee, who run a small orphanage in Kopindole, a suburb of Kathmandu.

After discussing the basic running of the orphanage with the committee, we asked to see the children. Entering the baby room, things looked pretty much normal by local standards. I started looking for the twin girls Ganga and Jamuna. I had first met these



Surita's daughter



*Mother and child from
Bhuban village*



twin babies when they were three weeks old, in September 2007. Now they were nearly five months. My friend Micheal had visited in October and said they were looking thin which worried me, as another baby in this same orphanage and of that age had just died.

The twins were in their cot. My God, their faces were so terribly thin and they had such a look of anguish on them. They looked like the faces of old people. Frightened, tiny little human beings trapped in a hellish existence and it was not on a television documentary about Africa - it was right in front of my eyes.

There was just one committee member still there with us. I looked at her and looked at the twins and asked; "Please can we relocate them to the other Dharmik-sponsored Sai home until they are strong again? They are a happy home and properly registered. We will pay for their care."

It turned out it wasn't going to be that easy: problems with paper work, plus the CCRC committee had to agree. In the meantime I asked Yuzeena, our Dharmik employee in Nepal, to call the committee members and lobby them to agree to the temporary relocation. The Dharmik-sponsored Sai home mother, Bursa, and the eldest girl Kopila were on standby in case we received permission to move the twins.

By some miracle they agreed to the relocation. Sunday morning Mary-Louise flew out to Australia, at 2pm on Sunday afternoon I had approval to move the twins. The babies were collected by Yuzeena, Bursa and Kopila and were in their new home by Sunday afternoon. It was so cold, being mid winter in Nepal, so I immediately purchased a heater, a filtered water dispenser, some blankets and clothes, nappies, formula milk and other baby essentials. It was a very happy time seeing those babies in a situation where they were being picked up and held and shown love in a way that babies need.

In Nepal, babies' bodies are massaged with oil. This had not been done previously to these babies. It was shocking to see how thin they were – their faces looked healthy in comparison to their bodies and arms and legs, but we were hopeful that with good care and nourishment they would flourish.

I went to visit them next morning and one of them had diarrhoea. I rang a doctor I know and she advised taking them to a nearby children's hospital, called Ishan. I was all for that because I wanted to ensure they had no other medical problems.



Ganga and Jamuna – how they were found



5 weeks later



The doctor immediately put both babies onto various drips and medications. They remained in hospital for seven days. Hospitals in Nepal are very different from Australia. The family take care of the patient and stay overnight in the room, bringing food and so on. The doctor prescribes the treatment; the family buys the medicine (no prescription required) and takes it back to the hospital where the nurses administer it. So, everyone who could visited the twins in hospital; me, Yuzeena, Narayan, Narayan's family, the kids from the SAI home. It was nerve wrecking in the beginning not knowing if they would survive. The doctor stressed that we had got them there just in time.

On many occasions I held those babies and the look in their eyes was one of such deep humanity. From horror to humanity – there is just no explaining the communication between us at those moments.

So now they are living as part of the Sai home family. The Sai home is the first children's home we supported in Nepal.

Everything happened so fast. Now came time to reflect on what all this meant, what to do now and to calculate what kind of budget I had just committed Dharmik Australia to. What about the other children still in CCRC?

The cost of saving lives

Over the next two weeks I pieced together the strategy and some kind of understanding as well. The minimum wage in Nepal is about \$1.50 a day. It was a shock to find out that baby milk, in Nepal, where all food is a tenth of the cost of food in Australia, is priced at \$1.50 per day per baby. How could a poor family hope to keep a non breast fed baby alive? Maybe these twins came to CCRC because the mother had trouble breast feeding? Then I calculated the milk budget for CCRC, who have seven other babies. The milk budget is more than their total annual budget for all expenses! No wonder the babies were malnourished, there was simply not enough money for milk. Imagine the frustration and desperation you would feel if you could not put food into a babies mouth in one's care.

Our budget just for the twins is \$370 per month until we hand them back to the CCRC home. This is the ongoing cost, there were other costs for the rescue and medical expenses. Just to cover this cost we need the sponsorship funds from 16 sponsors. So far we have 9.



Improving the situation

One of the problems at CCRC has been high staff turnover and poor staff standards. Is that any wonder when they have so little funding? Our strategy at CCRC is to provide a staff member and to try to fund as much milk and nappies as we can afford. Our Dharmik funded, staff member has been at CCRC since February. This kind and skilled lady is giving the babies and older children a sense of family and is effectively our representative in that home.

Can you help

I never realised how much money this all costs, and all my plans to very carefully control costs failed when confronted with the reality of those twins not on a brochure or a documentary but in front of my face.

Sponsorship is so easy for any Australian even a child. \$1 per day is nothing to us and nearly a days wages over there. A school class could band in together and sponsor a child for \$1 per month each. This is not another World Vision. This direct, the babies are real There are so many more who need our help. Please join up as a sponsor and your money will pay for stories like this one with happy endings.

Volunteer News

Dharmik was founded by Mark and Mary-Louise but soon after running the Buddhist Masters art exhibition as a fund raiser in October 2007 Dharmik was flooded with offers of support by exactly the right people to establish itself as a committee based association with a long term future in helping the people of Nepal.

What makes us different is we give no donor money to our first world volunteers. Everybody funds their own expenses and gives of their time freely. This means all donor funds arrive in Nepal undiluted. (we do have some minimal compliance costs in Australia).



Julie is in Nepal now and will stay until the end of March 2008. She has a very full program and has made a commitment to continue to be involved in these Nepal projects on her return to Australia. She is the Director of SDN Children's Services in Sydney who deliver high quality child care services, as well as programs for children and families who need targeted support. Her background and experience is perfectly suited to Dharmik Australia's aims and objectives. While in Nepal she will investigate a balanced diet for the children and babies at CCRC and also establish a partnership project with Bal Mandir (the oldest and largest Orphanage in Nepal) to assist them in creating a volunteer program to help fund their significant program. We are developing links with organisations like this in order to facilitate cooperation within Nepal between our partner organisations and existing experienced local organisations. Julie is also managing our AUSAID relationship and compliance objectives. We expect to be approved by AUSAID for the OAGDS (Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme) within 18 months.



Nicia is a senior executive in corporate advertising in Australia and in the UK before that. She is liked and respected by her friends and colleagues and brings a huge amount of enthusiasm and experience to Dharmik Australia. She has resigned from her job and will travel to Nepal from April to June to help the underprivileged by building infrastructures for orphan children. In her own selfless way, she will be doing all this "off her own bat" - using her own money and time to personally ensure that she can make a difference to the world.

Nicia is setting up the sponsorship program; the set of procedures which will ensure good communication between sponsors and sponsored, and give everyone the confidence that their donated funds are being used in the best possible way. She will also be overseeing our partnership agreement with CCRC coordinating between FTIA, Dharmik, and the CCRC committee.



Mark continues to spend all his spare time overseeing the growth of Dharmik Australia. He has had three trips to Nepal in the last 12 months and has another three planned so far for 2008. Mark is coordinating the big picture, working with the rest of the committee and the Nepal partners and Nepal employees to get the best possible outcome for the people we are supporting. In January 2008 Mark met with His Excellency Graeme Lade, the Australian Ambassador designate to Nepal, and spoke about the work of Dharmik Australia and sought general advice on working effectively in Nepal. Ambassador Lade was very generous with his time and we





hope to bring more good news about Dharmik Australia's positive contribution to Nepal in the future.

To fund his personal expenses in Nepal Mark is outsourcing Australian IT projects to three teams in Kathmandu and is planning, with Narayan, to grow coffee in Rural Nepal to support local industry. This supports local commerce and helps ensure that donated funds will only ever be spent on actual projects in Nepal.

Narayan Shrestha is a local Nepali citizen and is our Cultural Advisor. He volunteers his time for meetings with each of the local charities we support and he has donated the Dharmik Kathmandu office rent free. His support in negotiating reasonable rates for medical and dental care and navigating the Nepali compliance process is very valuable and without it we could not operate as effectively. He founded Lucky Thanka in 1986 where many types thankas are available like Tibetan, Newari, Chinese, Japanese etc. <http://www.luckythanka.com/> He employs nearly 200 artists and ensures they receive fair wages.



Mary-Louise is volunteering much time and energy into Dharmik. She is running the Nepal product sales and taking groups of trekkers to Nepal (see Travel section) as well as promoting group sponsorship and keeping track of our membership register.



Michael visited Nepal in late 2007 and was so impressed by the work Dharmik was doing that he has volunteered to prepare this newsletter and other graphic arts projects.

Verena is in Nepal in March 2008 and will investigate the use of music therapy with the children. She has masters level qualifications in this area and work experience at Sydney Children's Hospital.

Fund Raising News Buddhist Masters Art Exhibition

When Mark was in Nepal during September he was entrusted with twenty Buddhist Master Works in order to stage an art exhibition. The Michael Commerford Gallery in Rushcutters Bay just happened to have a two week window in which to promote this beautiful Tibetan and Nepalese art. We ran the exhibition and raised over \$2000, also meeting some wonderful new friends who are now part of the Dharmik committee.



Made in Nepal Products

In order to raise funds for Dharmik Mary-Louise imports hand-made art, crafts and clothing from Nepal. Products include singing bowls, ornately carved wooden prayer wheels, master painted Buddhist Thangka paintings, clothing, a range of funky felt products, exquisite leather bags and backpacks, hand engraved slate wall hangings, original pashmina shawls and a wide range of hand-made paper products. Mary-Louise has personally taken the time to visit each factory and develop a relationship with each manufacturer, ensuring the essence of fair trade practices are in place.

These beautifully crafted Nepalese products help provide employment in Nepal and bring much needed income to Nepal. To date, each event held by Mary-Louise has been a sell out success.

50% of all profits from sales of these products is donated to Dharmik. The other 50% goes towards paying the expenses incurred in running the events. Therefore there is no personal gain made by selling these goods. Contact us if you are able to help run these events and to find out where and when the next event is being held. mlp@dharmik.org

Nepal Trek – holidaying with a conscience

On 14th April, 2008 a group of eight women will be joining Mary-Louise in Nepal. Over two weeks the group will be trekking in the Everest region and visiting the amazing city of Kathmandu. The aim of their trek is to reach Tengboche Monastery. At 12,650 feet Tengboche is an exquisite Buddhist Monastery situated on a beautiful plateau in the Himalayas. Tengboche almost bows down in prostration to Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) and her accompanying Himalayan sisters, Lhotse and Nuptse. Tengboche is en route to Everest Base Camp.

The group will be practicing daily yoga to help ease their muscles into the 8 day trek. Back in Kathmandu they will be visiting orphanages supported by Dharmik as well as taking in the magnificent sites of Kathmandu. One of the highlights of the trip is spending time with Mark and Mary-Louise's Newari friends in their home and learning to make traditional Newari cuisine, including Mo Mos.

Money is being raised for Dharmik by participants gaining



sponsorship for each leg of their trek. Mary-Louise is donating profits from the trip to Dharmik.

This trip will be running again in April 2009. If you are interested be sure to book early as places are limited.

Raising Voices for Dharmik

One of our members, Verena Clemencic-Jones has an angelic voice and created a music CD featuring the Om Mani Pafme Hum mantra. She has been selling the CD for Dharmik and has raised \$240 from the sales!

Be Inspired for Dharmik

Two lovely people Sami and Steven run iinspire.com.au marketing funky art canvas and greeting cards. They are giving a percentage of sales to Dharmik Australia, click on the “Be Inspired” link.

How you can Help

It is really amazing what has been achieved in less than one year. We urgently need donations and especially sponsorship. Our web site is very focused on sponsorship at the moment – that is because we are doing great work and seeing great results but we need help to continue this work. Now that we are involved in baby welfare our costs have doubled overnight (see Saving Lives story). Sponsorship is special for these reasons:-

- For you, because you can spend just \$1 a day and be part of Dharmik’s grass roots highly effective programs in Nepal. You are part of our team and together we are changing one little corner of the world in a positive and real way.
- For us, because we spread the risk of our income stream across multiple donors and therefore we can make long term commitments like education and food supplements in Nepal.



We have many types of supporters and every act of support is valued hugely by us and by the people of Nepal. Ways you can help are...

- Sponsorship \$31 per month via Pay Pal <http://www.dharmik.org>
- Sponsorship \$31 per month via regular monthly credit to our account
- Single donations

Dharmik Australia Incorporated
ABN 19 235 956 280
Bendigo Bank, Princes Highway, Milton 2538
NSW Australia
BSB: 633-000 Account No: 131 979 437
SWIFT CODE: B E N D A U 3 B

Are you a member of a Group?

Local groups are gathering together to sponsor children supported by Dharmik. Students attending their weekly yoga class at Mollymook Beach, on the NSW South Coast, contribute \$1 each at each class. This is then totalled every month and deposited into the Dharmik account to support one of the orphan children.

The Buddhist Manjusree Centre members on the NSW South Coast gather every Tuesday night to meditate, and drop a \$1 coin into the Dharmik box. Manjusree is worshipped in Buddhist beliefs as the founder of Nepal and the God of Education. What better way to develop their karma, than by supporting one of our Dharmik children?

Just think what \$1 can buy in Australia. Think about how much we waste in one week? Please help us to support these children and help your group bring dignity and opportunity to another human being's life, with education health and hope.

If you are a member of a group – it could be a Bridge Club, book reading group, walking group, scout group, mothers' group, netball team, school class or whole school – then consider how far your combined \$1 contributions could go. Please visit our website www.dharmik.org or contact us and speak with Mary-Louise about your group sponsoring a child. You can also be one of the growing list of individuals sponsoring a child, we need your help.



Nepal Background and Politics

The Kingdom of Nepal has an ancient culture and has been ruled for most of its history by a royal family.

Nepal, the 12th poorest country in the world, is also a landlocked country (China, India and Bhutan) and is home to the world's highest mountain range and mountain, Mount Everest. It's population is approximately 30 million. Both Hinduism and Buddhism are practiced side by side, with a growing interest in Christianity. It is one of the least developed nations in the world and one of the poorest. Despite their poverty and lack of infrastructure and resources, the Nepalese people continue to generously share their country and open their borders to more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees and hundreds of thousands of Tibetan refugees.

In 1996 leaders of the Maoist United People's Front began a violent insurgency with the aim of overthrowing the monarchy. Additional turmoil struck in 2001 when the royal family, including King Birendra, were gunned down by Crown Prince Dipendra, who then turned his gun upon himself. The king's brother, Gyanendra, became king.

In 2006 the parliament voted unanimously to curtail the king's powers. In the same year, a peace accord was signed to end a 10-year Maoist insurgency that left more than 12,000 people dead. The government and Maoist rebels signed landmark peace accord on November 20, 2006, marking an end to the civil war that claimed at least 12,500 lives.

An interim parliament was established in January 2007, which includes Maoist leaders. Democratic elections are due to take place in April 2008.

Strikes and demonstrations regarding fuel shortages, lack of water and cooking gas etc, continue to be held regularly and randomly, making daily life unpredictable. To date these strikes and demonstrations have not caused any threat towards tourists and foreigners. However care should be taken and advice sought from local embassies if travelling in Nepal.