



# NEPAL LEPROSY TRUST



## 2015 Report

# *Nepal Leprosy Trust in 2015*

## **Dear friends and supporters,**

For a while we have not had the capacity to put together the comprehensive report that we have sent out in the past, but we thought you would appreciate a brief report about what has been happening in our various areas of work during 2015.

It has been a challenging year which has seen our projects in Nepal facing some difficult situations and undertaking some rather different work alongside the usual. Although often out of the public mind, leprosy continues to be very much a global issue with over 100 countries reporting cases to the WHO each year. SouthAsia is still the global “hot spot”, with 60% of all cases occurring in India and Nepal. Our project in southeast Nepal is in an area where leprosy is highly endemic, and Lalgadh Leprosy Services Centre remains one of the two busiest leprosy centres in the world.



The handicrafts work in Kathmandu has continued to provide employment for about 40 people, the majority of whom were marginalised by poverty, illness and disability, including leprosy, before working for NLT. The lovely handicrafts they produce are exported around the world.

NLT Ireland continues to grow into a vibrant independent supporter of NLT's work in Nepal under the current chairman Mike Winterburn, who began with NLT in 1991, working first with the pottery and then at Lalgadh pioneering the rehabilitation work there. He is supported in NLT Ireland by Vera McEvoy, who brings her artistic skills to the fundraising activities undertaken there.

NLT in the UK continues to be a key supporting partner to the work in Nepal. We have been encouraged to see how our colleagues in Nepal are now able to take all the main decisions about the work there, although they still ask our advice from time to time. We now focus on raising awareness about leprosy, through presentations, publications, our website, fundraising events, and encouraging prayer partners for the work. Many of you play a significant role in this and we deeply appreciate the commitment that you show at so many levels. We hope that you will enjoy reading this brief overview of NLT's work.

## **The Situation in Nepal**

After a busy first quarter in 2015, just as we sat down to begin a UK Trustees meeting on April 25th, we were shocked to hear that there had been a serious earthquake in Nepal that very day, followed by a second shortly afterwards. News trickled through as different people managed to email and phone us, reassuring us that none of our staff had been seriously hurt. Two more earthquakes occurred some days later on 12th May and caused more



damage, but NLT life and property was again spared apart from a few cracks. However, the combined shocks caused the deaths of around 9000 people in several hill districts and in Kathmandu, and also destroyed over 800,000 homes. As a result, some parts of Nepal may never fully recover, and many hill communities, far from help and very vulnerable from lack of shelter and food, are now facing a winter after a difficult monsoon. Apart from the main earthquakes, there have been nearly 500 aftershocks, keeping everybody nervous and concerned that another big earthquake will follow.



We have been enormously grateful for the support that has been communicated to us - both concern and financial - from various parts of the world. That support has enabled our staff to assist in the relief work, taking aid to several affected districts in the hills to some of the neediest folk affected by the earthquake.

There is much more to do, if funds allow, but continued work is dependent on the resolution of a second tragedy to hit Nepal - the general strike and trade blockade. This began in September with the announcement of the long-awaited new constitution which many thought would help Nepal to move forward. However, it has caused much unrest, many people in the south of the country feeling that it does not give them a fair deal. Sadly, their response has been to force a general strike across the south of Nepal which has gone on for more than two months. Alongside this they have blockaded all trade across the southern border with India, crippling Nepal and causing further misery to the poor and those made homeless or vulnerable by the earthquakes.

### **NLT in Kathmandu**

NLT's Kathmandu headquarters building continues to be the base for the workshops that produce the Himalayan Handicrafts, batiks, and felt products, which together provide employment for about 40 marginalized people. The workshop is part of the Fair Trade Group Nepal, and the products are well known in several countries around the world, to which they are exported, and customers regularly come back for more. The workshops also have several outlets through some large shops in Kathmandu, where tourists buy Nepali-made products.



The headquarters staff, led by Mr Kamal Shrestha (pictured), the CEO of NLT Nepal, also provide a range of support services for the various projects of NLT, especially for Lalgadh Leprosy Services Centre, 120 miles away on the south-eastern Terai. This involves sourcing equipment and supplies in Kathmandu, liaising with the various government departments involved in our work, organising and hosting NLT Executive Board meetings that have to take

place periodically, and overseeing funds coming from abroad, ensuring their safe distribution to the various projects. We are all grateful to Kamal and the support staff in Kathmandu for faithfully undertaking these tasks, which contribute greatly to the smooth running of NLT.

The Lydia Children's Fund (LCF) continues to support around 90 young people aged from 5 to 18 years old in school. For these children, some of whom have no living parents, the Fund enables them to receive an education which they could not otherwise access. This is a very positive input for their future and we are enormously grateful to all those who sponsor these children through the fund. It really is life-changing for them. Pictured is Dr Ram Gurung at his graduation from medical school - an old Lydia Children's Fund boy.



Our headquarters at Kathmandu has also initiated several vocational training courses for people seriously affected by poverty. These have trained people in skills including bead work, felt making, beautician work, tailoring, candle making, baking and adult literacy. The trainings have been popular and we hope to be able to continue them, although finding the necessary funding for them has become more difficult in recent years.

A Social Support programme provides help to about 50 people who are vulnerable due to poverty, age, sickness, or disability, and who lack any support network. This programme provides small payments, and in some cases sheltered accommodation, and is backed up by monitoring from the headquarters staff

This year has been especially difficult for the NLT staff because the authorities in Kathmandu decided to go ahead with a road widening scheme. Those of you who receive our newsletter will know about this already, but essentially the government plans to widen many of the roads in and around Kathmandu, including the one our office is on. This means that about 8 feet needs to be cut off the 80 feet wide frontage of our 3-storey building, reducing the depth of the building from about 22 to 14 feet. Kamal has been able to extend part of the building back by 5 feet to increase the remaining space and aid stability, but it is a difficult task. He has also had to demolish another small building within the new road-line, but has added a new workshop on the roof of an adjacent building. This work began in late 2014 and is still going slowly on, because: supplies are difficult to obtain during the blockade, the earthquake meant the builders went back to their villages to repair their own homes, and available funds for the work are nearly used up. The work needs to be finished soon, otherwise the authorities will be threatening our building with bulldozers!



Fuel shortage is now a major inconvenience in Kathmandu. Recently one of our vehicles had to queue for 3 days to get a ration of 15 litres of fuel. Businesses throughout the city are being crippled by the shortages, and taxi drivers are inevitably having to charge astronomical prices to take passengers anywhere. Everyone is hoping that the government can resolve its differences with the Terai people in the south very soon. In the meantime, the work at NLT Kathmandu continues as best it can.

## **NLT at Lalgadh Leprosy Services Centre**

2014 was another very busy year with record numbers of patients of all kinds visiting our centre at Lalgadh - almost 80,000 by the end of the year. Over 9,000 of those were people affected by leprosy, of which 1,166 were new cases diagnosed at Lalgadh. Another 3,000 people affected by leprosy visited our satellite clinics which take our referral services closer to their homes. This means that we handled over 12,000 visits from people affected by leprosy who needed our help.



At times this high demand puts our staff under considerable pressure and there are regularly days when more than 500 people come for help - the record is over 600 in one day! People affected by leprosy always get priority, so they are not hindered by the many others that come for help.



Leprosy remains highly stigmatised in the region, and continues to change people's lives at many levels irrevocably, through disablement, disfigurement, and the resulting ostracism from family and community that can occur. NLT has established more than 100 self help groups throughout our work area to tackle this stigma, and these have had a very positive impact on the communities where they are based. For people affected by leprosy who live in these areas, their story has been much happier, as these communities now have a better and more supportive understanding of leprosy.

2015 began in a busy way, and visit numbers in the first quarter were even higher than in 2014, both for leprosy and general cases, promising a challenging year. We were encouraged by support from American Leprosy Missions with a USAID grant to improve our out-patient buildings and equipment. The existing ones were never designed to cope with such large patient numbers. This project was approved in the middle of the year and is now under construction. It will greatly ease the crush in the out-patients' area, and will improve the examination rooms and make things better for everyone.

The second quarter of 2015 was similar to last year despite the earthquake and its far-reaching effects. However, the third quarter shows the effects of the strike and



blockade, as lack of fuel and transport made it very difficult for patients to travel. Visits by leprosy patients were down by about 700, and general visits were down by nearly 5,000. We do not have the figures for the final quarter of 2015, but they are likely to be low by comparison to last year, which means that many leprosy affected people will not have been able to access help when they needed it. This is a sad reflection on the way that political disruption always affects the poor most.

Another sad effect of the current troubles in Nepal is the postponement of the **hand surgery camp** that normally takes place during November. It was tentatively rescheduled to January, but this has had to be cancelled until there is some sign that the political disputes will be resolved. This camp enables people with deformed or disabled hands to receive corrective surgery from a leading UK surgeon who gives his time each year to support our staff and facilitate this work. It has transformed many people's lives during the last five years, and it would be tragic if this were unable to continue.



The **In-patient department** at Lalgadh includes 60 beds for people

suffering from the acute complications of leprosy. These beds are always full. Additional beds have been added to cater for more of the general patients who would like to use our services. We hope that these will also contribute a useful income to support the leprosy work, in the same way that the out-patients work does; but this will take time. Using donations from a number of churches, they are also building a new ward for children to provide a better environment for them. This will have two wards of 6 beds each.



In 2014 Lalgadh served nearly 700 in-patients, of which about 170 were general patients. 2015 started similarly, but the numbers tailed off from September. It is likely that the 2015 total will be about 75% of 2014's.



The work done in the in-patients department mainly addresses the acute complications of leprosy: dealing with severe reactions, managing serious ulcers, and providing corrective or reconstructive surgery to reduce or correct deformity in people's hands, feet or face. This is usually life-transforming. A patient stigmatised because of his clawed

hands for example, leaves Lalgadh with straight fingers and no obvious deformity - and so is able to return to his community without stigma - although he may still have reduced hand function.



The **Self Care Training Centre (SCTC)** is still a key service for patients who have been damaged by leprosy, as they learn how to live with anaesthetic hands or feet or other problems, without making things worse. There are many skills that they need to learn, which help prevent further ulcers and damage. Two weeks in the SCTC teaches them the main skills, and also links them to a self help group local to their home. Earlier this year a young boy, after two days in the SCTC, realized that his mum, dad and sister must also have leprosy, because he had learned the signs. He went home and brought them back for checking. It turned out that they all had the most serious kind of leprosy, so they also started treatment and joined the training straight away.



Those of you who follow our news and prayer letters will know that our staff, both at Lalgadh and Kathmandu, decided to pitch in and help the **earthquake relief effort**. The Kathmandu group linked up with a local church to take aid and support into the hills south of Kathmandu where there was much damage; and their efforts were greatly appreciated. Likewise, some of our staff at Lalgadh have relatives in the districts most affected by the

earthquake and, after some survey visits to find out what was needed, they organised the purchase of food, blankets, medicines, tarpaulins and zinc sheets (for shelter) from the local markets, and ferried these into the hill districts north of Lalgadh. This was done using money that was donated towards relief work, and in close cooperation with the local authorities: to avoid duplication and make sure that the most needy were catered for. From May to September there were 9 relief trips by the Lalgadh team which delivered 300 tonnes of supplies to about 7,000 families, some only a few kilometres from the border with Tibet. This is a tremendous achievement and we honour our staff for their incredible efforts in the face of great difficulties. They hope to continue this work once the political scene has settled, because many people are still in great need.



The **community development work** at Lalgadh has been a major part of our work for 15 years, ever since we recognised that the key to beating leprosy lies in changing the attitudes of ordinary people living in the community. This work has already improved the lives of many destitute people affected by leprosy, but has also transformed whole communities. The key has been to empower people affected by leprosy to help their communities actively in practical ways. Many of them were marginalised and treated as human debris, not to be included in village life and certainly not useful. Our major community development programmes - firstly STEP and now RECLAIM - enabled them to work together and initiate projects in their own villages, including water supply, sanitation, non-formal education, and road repair. They have also started income generating projects with help from Lalgadh, to improve their own livelihoods, and these activities have greatly changed the

community's perception of them as people. Their communities have realized that, even though they might have a disability and have been ostracised in the past, they are in fact useful people, worthy of respect, and still able to contribute to community life. There are now over one hundred groups of these people, involving around 2,500 individuals. Their work is benefitting many thousands more, and has significantly transformed lives and whole villages.



Alongside this work, the **Village Alive Programme** is working with 6 extremely poor villages in our work area. These are in bad shape, but each has a nucleus of trust in one of our existing self help groups connected with the village. Our field staff have worked with these communities to find out which problems they see as most important to change in order for the village to see an improvement. Predictably, these have focused on health, education, sanitation, and unemployment. Our staff have then helped villages to start farmers' groups, women's groups, and adolescent groups, and to choose volunteer health workers that we can train. These rural

health "champions" have been trained using principles learned from the a successful Community Rural Health Project in India, helping to bring transformation to the health status of these six villages and benefitting many hundreds of people. The groups have run savings schemes which have enabled various members to start businesses and carry out village projects including the building of proper toilets to improve the sanitation in the village and make new water supplies. Our team has helped them to advocate at the district centres for help with road improvements and education materials, and the combined effects of these inputs have made a very real difference to these six villages.



There are several other small projects going on to support people affected by leprosy, but there is not space here to describe them all. We have supported local schools, provided water supplies to several very poor villages, repaired the houses of vulnerable patients that were damaged in the monsoon, provided leprosy training to various groups, including village leaders and doctors, and we continue to provide





care to several vulnerable old people affected by leprosy in the Care Haven near the church in Lalgadh.

All the work of Nepal Leprosy Trust is done in the spirit and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same love that inspired Eileen Lodge to begin her work amongst people affected by leprosy in the first place. Eileen herself had her 90th birthday this year and is still living in Kathmandu and being cared for by a team of four Nepali carers. Different visitors from NLT UK and NLT Ireland see her from time to time while in Nepal and although her memory is unreliable, she can still enjoy a good laugh. She is pictured here with Kamal on her 90th birthday earlier this year

There are many stories from amongst our patients, some very sad, and some very heart warming. Many have found new hope amongst our staff and the other patients at Lalgadh, often after the most difficult experiences of rejection by family and friends. Many patients come up from India because the name of Lalgadh has reached a long way, and is known as a place where the staff will care for you and treat you with kindness, something that they have often almost forgotten. Some have been so drawn by the love they find amongst the staff of NLT that they have searched for the source of that love and have found the Lord Jesus for themselves.

We thank all those who have supported our work over the years, whether with prayer, donations, or sponsorship, and we do want you to know that your support means a huge amount to all the people involved with NLT. The donations for the earthquake relief have been a great encouragement, and our little team has been able to use those to do an amazing amount that has made a very real difference to many thousands of people. Do please pray for our staff at this difficult time in Nepal while they try to deliver their services to people despite the shortages and difficulties. Do also especially pray for the many thousands in the hills of Nepal who will be in want of food and shelter during this Christmas time, due to the problems caused by the dispute and blockade in south Nepal. Pray that the Christian community in Nepal will be able to help and encourage their neighbours, and will be salt and light in a dark and difficult time.



***From NLT UK we wish you a very happy and blessed Christmas, and a prosperous new year.***



# *Thank you!*

A very heart felt “thank you” is extended to all our Donors from NLT  
- a small Christian charity doing a big job in Nepal.



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