



CHILD WELFARE SCHEME NEPAL NEEDED IN NEPAL

Douglas MacLagan, founder of Child Welfare Scheme Nepal, shares his reasons for setting up the charity.

BACKGROUND

In 1994 when I was 28, I was trekking through the foothills in Nepal and walked by a small village, Saimarang. I'd ventured off the beaten tourist trail in an attempt to understand and learn more about the education system and problems children were facing in remote areas in Nepal. I was feeling brilliant and very satisfied with myself after the exhausting walk, when a young woman of barely 18 politely approached me with the traditional "Namaste" greeting. With a look of total despair on her face, she pointed to her baby and made a clear gesture that she thought the baby dying, and then handed her to me. I was dumbstruck. I will never forget the look on the young mother's face as the baby went limp, and when

I told her I wasn't a doctor and I couldn't do anything for her daughter. I felt so utterly helpless; I had never experienced anything like this in my life before. That day was a life-changing experience for me, and I promised to do something to help.

THE BEGINNINGS

I started doing research to learn about what was being done in Nepal with regards to the extremely high mortality rate for under-fives. There were no primary health care centers, no roads to access advanced care, and what little care I did find was hardly sufficient. I went back to the UK for a couple of months, sold my house in London, and returned to Nepal to build two new day care health centers, one in Saimarang and one in Warchok, the next village higher up the mountain. These were just simple early childhood learning centers with a primary health care service attached. Together with the local community we selected four young women from each village and trained them up in early childhood development skills, and selected one as a community medical auxiliary.

Mothers could then drop their children off during the day for care and medical checks, and mothers and older siblings could go about their daily chores. Soon, these two centers were the talk of the valley and beyond. Requests for new centers started coming in from all over. Hong Kong seemed like a logical base to start from because in 1996, Hong Kong was a booming economy with many Nepalese Gurkhas protecting the territory.

CWS TODAY

Soon, several donors bought into the idea and I returned to Nepal with my first funding. There are 14 centers now, and others have since copied the concept. I set up an office in Hong Kong in 2003 with the help of supporters, to manage the increasing donations. Today, CWS runs an advanced primary health center and reintegrates street children (mostly young teenagers who are at risk of trafficking) back into their families and society through life-skill and vocational training, and establishes real-life homes for children who have nowhere to go. The Nepalese government and many international groups

have taken note of CWS as one of the leading organizations in Nepal, and a nice recognition of this is that CWS received a prestigious health award 2009 by the "World of Children" in the UNICEF building in New York—a great honor! But the greatest satisfaction we all get is when you see kids smiling again for the little you have done to help lift them up!



Find out how you can help by contacting CWS directly: Suite 303, St. George's Building, 2 Ice House St., Central, 2526-8810, www.cwshk.org.

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