

BENGAL BULLETIN

The Newsletter of The Leprosy Mission Scotland's West Bengal Project Partnership

Issue 1 - October 2008



Welcome to the first issue of The Leprosy Mission Scotland's Bengal Bulletin.

TLM Scotland has recently entered into a long term partnership with 2 projects in West Bengal, India. This partnership means that TLM Scotland has committed to providing a significant proportion of the funding needed by **Purulia Hospital** and **Bankura Vocational Training Centre**.

It is our hope that this new agreement will enable Scottish supporters and volunteers; and even staff and trustees; to gain a deeper understanding of how things really work in the projects that we support. We will all be able to get to know the different members of staff and follow how their work progresses and the long term benefits this brings to their patients and all those affected by leprosy.

We will be able to see the impact that our prayers and donations here in Scotland are having on the work of the projects and on those we serve. Ultimately we would like

to see TLMS supporters gain a real sense of partnership with everyone at Purulia and Bankura and consider themselves an integral part of delivering the care available at these two sites. To be standing alongside those affected by leprosy and those seeking to serve them.

Bengal Bulletin will be published twice a year and will be full of stories and photographs giving a broad insight into the work at Purulia and Bankura. In this first issue we will be focusing on Purulia Hospital and what better way to make Purulia come alive to a Scottish readership than through the eyes of a young Scot who spent the summer there.

Ben Tattersall is a medical student at Glasgow University. He travelled to Purulia for his elective and was the first Scot to visit the hospital since the Partnership started - he tells us that the staff there are as interested to see how this relationship develops in the coming years as we are.

TLM Purulia leprosy home and hospital cuts a lonely figure. One of the oldest of TLM's charges across the world, the hospital was set up in 1888 to serve the needs of a sizeable population of leprosy patients, living in a predominantly rural area roughly the size of Scotland. The township - the largest for hundreds of miles - tolerated the hospital's presence provided it was placed on the very edge of town, and separated from the general populace by uninhabited land. Those it served were shunned by their communities - neglected at best; persecuted at worst. The hospital took them in and provided them with treatment, shelter, and protection. Those working there showed them kindness and respect, and gave them back their dignity at a time when they were reviled by the rest of society.

Today, the hospital still stands sentinel on the outskirts of town, separated from it by a sizeable stretch of lush emerald green paddy fields, and shielded from view by a stretch of trees inhabited by mischievous monkeys. The township has become much more accepting of its presence and the work it carries out. What has not changed is the dedication of those who work there, who provide treatment, kindness and respect to those who need it, and devote their lives to the cause in the name of the Lord.



Ben in Bengal

I am a medical student from the University of Glasgow, and I visited TLM Purulia in May 2008 to work there for two months for my medical elective, a requirement of my course. I chose to work with TLM as my church at home in Dundee, St. Mary Magdalene's, donates to TLM, and the more I learned about TLM's operations,

the more interested I became. I was amazed to learn that so many people across the world are still affected by leprosy, at a time when many in the West regard it as an ancient, long-gone disease of Biblical times. I felt privileged when TLM sent me to Purulia, and I went out there keen to learn not just medical facts of leprosy, but also to learn about its sociocultural consequences, and see the human face of the disease.

I'd never before undertaken such a mammoth journey, to do such a thing, in such a country as India. I was filled with a mix of excitement and trepidation. What would it be like? Would I be shocked by what I saw? Would I be accepted by those at the hospital, staff and patients alike?



Hundreds of questions spun around my head as I took the 27 hour train ride across the subcontinent from Delhi to Purulia.

Any worries I had melted away when I met the staff, who took me in and accepted me as part of the team from day one. This helped me a lot to cope with the dramatic difference between the hospital settings I was used to in Glasgow and the situation in Purulia. The hospital itself is basic, but clean and well maintained. Over the years it has shrunk in size, but still offers a wide range of services for leprosy patients ranging from general medical services to physiotherapy, ophthalmological services, and prosthetics. The hospital also deals with general medical cases.

The reduction in size is not related to a reduction in workload. In recent times in India, the National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP), along with the ongoing efforts of TLM and similar organisations, drove down the numbers of leprosy patients to such a low level that the Indian government declared the disease successfully eliminated in 2005. However, although extremely successful in ameliorating leprosy patient numbers, 'eliminated' sadly does not mean eradicated, and leprosy still poses a significant public health problem in India, especially in West Bengal, where a large number of registered cases live. As in the past, the hospital still serves a massive area and a largely rural population, even taking in patients from as far afield as the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Bihar. This is primarily due to the fact that since elimination was declared, the NLEP campaign was disbanded, leaving general hospitals ill-equipped to provide the specialist care that leprosy patients need. As such, TLM Purulia is still the only hospital in the region capable of providing such care. This results in patient numbers which would make anyone working for the NHS think again before complaining about being overburdened.

Staff Dedication

Although welcome on any day of the week, leprosy patients are generally seen on a walk-in



basis on leprosy out-patient days, which take place 3 times a week. It is on these days that patient numbers soar into the hundreds. In relation to

Please Pray

- ✦ For Mr Nanda, the hospital superintendent and his staff team. For energy, enthusiasm and wisdom in all their work
- ✦ That all patients will receive the individual care and support they need
- ✦ That the partnership between Scotland and West Bengal would continue to develop and strengthen

these numbers, the hospital could be said to be hugely understaffed; for instance there are only five full-time doctors working at the hospital. It is on these days that their dedication truly shines. The hospital will remain open until every last patient is seen, with all departments staying open in case a patient requires their expertise. In this

way the hospital functions as one unit, with everybody sharing the workload. I asked many staff members what motivated them to work with TLM in these, often difficult, circumstances. Their answer was uniform and simple: God. They are there to serve the people in His name, no matter how hard that work can sometimes be.

A Variety of Experience - Medical

During my time in Purulia I was privileged to see many leprosy patients in the clinical setting. I learned so much about the various complications of the disease, and how it should be treated. I helped in consultations, discussed treatment options with the doctors, and performed clinical examinations of patients. I also had the opportunity to join the resident ophthalmologist, in the operating theatre. It was here that I observed cataract removal in leprosy patients, and even performed a tarsorrhaphy (eyelid lag correction) and scleral suturing myself, under supervision. What always made me so happy when I was there was to see the difference such work made to those



This man's left eye is permanently blind. An operation, like some of the ones Ben helped with, can prevent this from happening to others.

TLM Scotland has committed itself to providing **£50,000** towards the running of Purulia Hospital in 2008. Our appeal in April together with other fundraising activities have raised over **£10,000**.
Please help us to reach our target.

affected by leprosy. Cataract removal enabled the blind to see. Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) stopped the crippling march of leprosy in many, enabling them to carry on with their lives. The hospital also helps large numbers of children suffering from leprosy. Many of these children were given MDT before physical impairment had set in, thus effectively stopping them from having to lead a life of disability, pain and exile.

- Elsewhere in the Hospital

As my remit of what I wanted to learn extended beyond the medical sphere, I also spent time with some of the other departments that provide leprosy patients with the full complement of treatment options in Purulia. I did this as I felt it was important to know how the other parts of



Exercises for hands and feet help to maintain mobility and prevent disability in the future

the hospital operated, so I might better understand TLM's work. I spent time with the physiotherapists, learning how they managed those disabled by leprosy, and helped them regain some vital movement and prevent further injury. I worked with the prosthetics team, who showed me how they make new legs for those leprosy patients who have had to have amputations. I saw the joy on patient's faces when they were able to walk again, sometimes for the first time in years.

- In the Community

I also had the pleasure of joining the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) teams and the Women's Empowerment project, and rode out with them deep into rural West Bengal to see how TLM helps those beyond the walls of the hospital. The aim of such projects is to provide help to those who need it to reintegrate into their communities, help them with housing and employment, and give them back a sense of self-worth. TLM provides money to help build houses and start sustainable business initiatives, such as goat-keeping, which provide self-perpetuating long-term financial benefits. Education also plays a huge role. TLM staff use their time in the communities to help local people understand that leprosy is not the deadly beast it is often portrayed to be, and helps show that those with leprosy are safe to live alongside and can contribute to the economy and community at large.



The bonus of having so much time in Purulia was the level of interaction I was fortunate to have with many leprosy patients. The language barrier was difficult to overcome, but not impossible. Fortunately there were enough local people who spoke enough English to translate. It also helped that many of those I spoke to found my pathetic attempts to speak the local lingo hilarious; laughter helped to break the ice, and many spoke to me in frank terms regarding leprosy and how it had affected them.

What could my donation help to provide?

- £12 - two cataract operations
- £25 - food for all hospital in-patients for 1 day
- £50 - prosthetic limb plus physiotherapy
- £125 - reconstructive surgery on a hand or a foot

I would like to become a partner in TLM Scotland's West Bengal Project Partnership.

Gift Aid It!

I am a UK tax payer and wish The Leprosy Mission Scotland to be able to reclaim tax on this and all subsequent gifts AND

on all gifts made in the 6 years prior to this declaration

Please note that you must pay an amount of income tax and / or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax reclaimed on your donations in the tax year

Signature:

Date:

OR

I have already signed a Gift Aid declaration for TLMS

Please turn over for giving options ...

I would like to know more about other ways to support The Leprosy Mission Scotland

Please tick any of the boxes that you would like to know more about

I would like to **pray** for the work of The Leprosy Mission. Please send me a copy of ASK (TLM's International Prayer Diary)

I would like to arrange for a **TLMS speaker** to come to my church/group. Church/Group Name:

Please call me on to discuss a suitable date

OR

Please send me more information to pass on to the church/group leader

I am interested in finding out more about **World Leprosy Day**

Please send me a pack when it becomes available

OR

Please let me know of any events happening in my area

I would like to become a partner in TLM Scotland's West Bengal Project Partnership.

If we have addressed your bulletin incorrectly, please correct below

Option 1: Regular Gift

I would like to donate regularly towards the West Bengal Project Partnership.

Please call me on to arrange this over the phone

Please send me a Direct Debit form

Or, you can set up a regular donation online at www.tlmscotland.org.uk

Option 2: One Off Gift

I enclose a cheque made payable to TLM Scotland to the value of

£125 £50 £25 £12 other £

OR

Please charge my credit / debit card with the above amount

Card Number

Expiry Date / Start Date /

Issue Number Security Code

If you prefer, a secure credit card donation can be made at our website www.tlmscotland.org.uk

Please complete the Gift Aid Declaration overleaf and return the slip to The Leprosy Mission Scotland



give with confidence



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One such story was that of Kumala. Kumala contracted leprosy when she was only three years old. Her parents had consulted a local witch doctor, who gave her tablets which did not help. She was brought to the hospital and abandoned, her family wanting nothing more to do with her. In light of these circumstances the hospital took her in and let her live there in the Mercy Home. Under their care Kumala was given back her childhood. She learned to read and write, made friends and in her spare time helped staff with jobs such as cleaning. As she grew up she took an interest in the work of the occupational therapy department and the cleaning and skin scraping of ulcers. Over time she learned how to do this work herself, and for many years now she has been employed by the hospital in this role. Although she does know where her family reside and that her parents are alive, she knows that her family or their community do not wish to associate with a 'leper'. However, Kumala is not concerned as she feels that TLM is her family, having shown her love and given her support throughout her life.

Kumala asked me to pass on her story to Scottish TLM supporters. She also has a prayer request: *"The Leprosy Mission started with prayer, and through the efforts of missionaries working in God's name. Today TLM still helps many, and I ask you to pray that this good work continues. May TLM go from strength to strength, helping those, like me, whose lives have been affected by leprosy"*.

From November there will be a video of Kumala on our website.

My time at Purulia is one that I will never forget. I have seen that leprosy is still a very real and serious problem. TLM Purulia has a vital part to play in continuing the fight against leprosy. However, it will be a long road and so I join Kumala in asking TLM Scotland for their ongoing prayers and support to help the hospital and their dedicated team to continue their amazing work.

Will you join the partnership today?

Together we can enable Purulia Hospital to provide the right care for years to come for people like Kumala and the hundreds of patients who arrive every week.

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