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Australia-Nepal Mental Health Network
make a difference

Australia-Nepal Mental Health Network



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Dear Friends,

I am writing to you, our generous donors and sponsors, to offer special thanks for your support of the work of the Australia-Nepal Mental Health Network throughout 2015.

As you will no doubt be aware, 2015 has been a bad year for the people of Nepal. Since April, Nepal has experienced 2 major earthquakes and more than 100 aftershocks, which to this day continue to hamper the process of rebuilding and recovery.

As a result of these natural disasters, an already fragile government has destabilized even further. Relationships with neighbouring countries have deteriorated resulting in severe trade embargoes, which are causing shortages of food, fuel, medical supplies and other essential goods.

In amongst all this, we have continued to work with our wonderful local partners, whose enthusiasm and dedication has never waned despite their personal difficulties.



A small team from Australia (shown at left with the medical director and director of CViCT – Centre for Victims of Torture and Trauma) also enjoyed an action packed two week visit to Nepal in November. The team (including Pradhan Ji – see next page) worked extremely hard during their stay, but came away with a strong sense of pride in their achievements, and with feelings of deep respect for the people of Nepal, whose resilience under such hardship is remarkable.

The focus for our work in 2015 was around physical and psychological recovery from the earthquakes. However, this was not exclusive, and we also worked on our long-term initiatives to improve the mental health and emotional well-being of the people of Nepal.

The following brief report gives you some idea of our activities this year, which your donations helped to sponsor. However, this list is by no means exclusive.

1. Direct funding to key local partners and local organizations providing **front line care** with provision of essential goods, including medications, following the earthquakes.



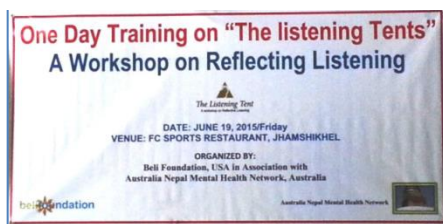
At left, Gyanu Bhatta distributing immediate post-quake medical first aid funded by ANMHN in villages in the Gorkha region, April/May 2015.

At right, Chhahari Nepal, a street-front NGO for people with a mental illness and a shelter for a woman made homeless by the quakes.

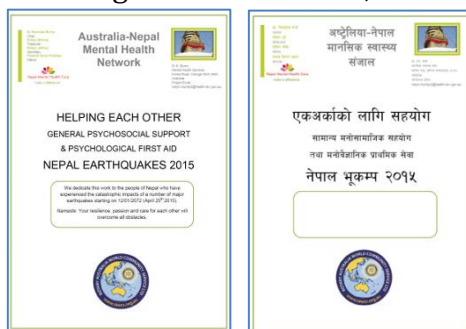


2. Funding of training and education to **front line workers in psychosocial interventions** following natural disasters post the quakes and in November 2015.

Photos show below the banner for the combined Beli Foundation USA and ANMHN workshop post-quake where Prabhat Kiran Pradhan represented ANMHN; and at right Pradhan Ji working with primary health workers in Maidi in November.



3. Publication of a **report summarizing best practice psychosocial interventions** following natural disasters, including translation into Nepali, and distribution to key non-government support agencies. The report has been well received and well-utilised.



The report was compiled by ANMHN with the assistance of experts in disaster recovery and child and adolescent mental health (thanks especially to Sharon Jones, CNC C&A MH), and using evidence based resources from Australia and W.H.O. It was translated by our good colleague and public health graduate Anil Shrestha.

4. Convening of an **annual forum for key mental health agencies** in Nepal.

The focus for this year's forum, the second Australia Nepal Mental Health Exchange at Hotel Annapurna was the responses to psychosocial needs of earthquake victims and their families. The forum brought together key organizations working in mental health care, government representatives, academics and the Australian Ambassador. The Ambassador once again kindly welcomed delegates on behalf of the Australian Government.



The Australian Ambassador His Excellency Glenn White is at right of the photo talking to Dr Burns, Pradhan Ji and Ms Robyn Murray.



The Ambassador at left welcoming delegates and talking about the Australian Government's contribution to post quake recovery as well as his own experiences in the earthquakes.

Below at right discussing the emotional impacts of the earthquakes is Dr Surendra Sherchan, Director, Mental Hospital, Lagankhel, Lalitpur and Dr. Chhatra Amatya, Former Director of Management Division, Ministry of Health, and Founder, Chhahari.

Below at left is Peter Warren, ANMHN, senior psychologist presenting on a service model for coping with psychological consequences of trauma.





Robust and respectful dialogue was a key feature of the forum. Photo at left shows from left Peter Warren, Sushil Gurung, Prem Nath Bhattarai, Bidya Bhandari, Nanette Fogarty, and Sujen Man Maharja.

The delegates rated the Exchange as excellent and confirmed the need to meet again as government and non-government sectors to build coordination across the sectors.

5. Provision of **master classes to the faculty of psychiatry and psychology at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital.**

Taking guidance on what would be of most value from Dr Mita Rana, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Director, Psychology Department TUTH, Dr Saroj, Senior Psychiatrist and Head of the Department of Psychiatry TUTH, and Mr Suraj Shakya, Clinical Psychologist TUTH, the ANMHN provided a day of master classes for the students and faculty members.

Dr Rana wrote afterwards: "I hope all is well with all the team members of the Nepal Australia Mental Health Network. We extend our fondest gratitude to you and all the members for the master classes on mental health. The residents and the faculty found them very useful."



6. **Village visits in Dhading district**

The villages of Maidi and Dhola are typical villages in the foothills of the Himalayas. During our visits we provided training and supervision in mental health care provision to local health workers and mental health awareness training in local schools.

We also provided small amounts of funding for medications in cases of extreme economic hardship, and some basic essential items such as clothing and medical supplies. Some of our funds were used to pay translators and local health assistants who accompanied us.



Photos show young children joyfully wearing beanies knitted by some wonderful women from Orange and Sydney. Also below are Dr Nick and Sujan Shrestha, manager, Maidi Health Post.



At left Dr Nick presents birthing equipment for the midwives to Ali, manager, Dhola Health Post; below is Bidya Bhandari, social worker, Peter and Pradhan Ji at the school in Maidi, teaching children about dealing with anxiety.



Photos show some of the team in Dhola, at the health post, and the tents at Maidi.

We were ably cared for in Nepal by our in-country support, Prakash Aryal and his team from Hike Himalaya Adventures.

In addition to these activities, we plan to use the funds raised for future projects including:

- Seed funding for **Nepal's first mental health hot line** with Dr Arun Kunwar (see below)
- Funding for service provision for **key local partner organizations** including Chhahari, CViCT
- Mental health first aid **training**, train the trainer sessions in Kathmandu
- Further work with local organisations with the **police and for prison staff** (photo at right shows Pradhan Ji with senior police at the police hospital in Kathmandu after the earthquakes).



An exciting venture is the **collaborative work we are beginning with Dr Arun Kunwar**, the only child psychiatrist in Nepal. Arun has started a suicide hot-line on a volunteer basis with other doctors and psychologists and also facilitates preventative work in schools and with school teachers. Just this year, due to his unstinting efforts, Arun has been gifted land to build the first public child psychiatry clinic in the country at Kanti Hospital in Kathmandu. Photo shows Arun and the team at the site.



Please be aware that none of the funds raised were used for travel to Nepal or living costs for Australian team members in Nepal. These expenses were covered by each team member individually. Members of the team in 2015 were Dr Scott Hedley, Samuel Lopes, Peter Warren, Nanette Fogarty, Robyn Murray and Dr Nick Burns. We acknowledge the auspice of Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) for our work.

To all our generous donors and sponsors we again give heartfelt thanks. Without your support we simply could not have accomplished any of our goals. We wish you all a safe and prosperous new year.

Namaste and best wishes,

Dr Nicholas FRANZCP MBBS
Chair ANMHN

PS Like us on Facebook and watch for the launch of our website!