

Newsletter

Kailakuri Health Care Project

(Kailakuri & the Institute of Integrated Rural Development, IIRD)

October 2011

Who Me?!? Red Tape, Cogs and Christine

Christine Steiner, a very New Zealand Christian from Hamilton (middle of the North Island and one of New Zealand's most rapidly growing cities), arrived in Bangladesh on 12th September to work for the Kailakuri Health Care Project. Of Swiss family origins she grew up in a farming community in the Waikato and like many New Zealanders she has a great love of the outdoors and enjoys amongst other activities tramping, cycling and horse-riding. She is a strong supporter of ecology and environment protection. Christine grew up Catholic but now worships in an Anglican church and typical of most New Zealand Christians considers faith to be far more important than denominational alignment. She has spent most of her working life doing company and charitable organisations' accounts and office management. She has also spent time in developing countries – twice on Habitat for Humanity builds (Sri Lanka and Fiji) and three months in Pakistan with a New Zealand family, home-schooling their children.

The Kailakuri Health Care Project in rural Bangladesh is a very atypical health project committed to the aim of health for the poor by the poor. A large number of people are helped. There is a small 35 bed hospital with a mother-child village outreach programme, a 1200 patient diabetes programme and a small TB programme. A lot of health education work is done. There are 89 staff, the majority of whom are local village people and trained up on the job to do the work of doctors and nurses.

Kailakuri Health Care Project came about through the interaction of an itinerant New Zealand doctor (Edric Baker, myself) with the local community. I arrived in Bangladesh in 1979 and the Modhupur area in 1983, with not too much external luggage, but quite a load of internal equipment (a stable, caring family

background, Christian faith and ideology, New Zealand egalitarianism, schooling and medical education, exposure to the suffering of civilian victims in war-torn Vietnam, communist ideological influence and a lot of exposure to different types of developing country health programmes). The Kailakuri project developed very slowly, initially within the Church of Bangladesh and then as part of a predominately Muslim but secular Bangladeshi NGO, IIRD.

Almost all of the funding, BDT 14,800,000 (USD 200,000, NZD 300,000) per year comes from private donations. The main co-ordinators were Father Doug Venne (American Mary Knoll Mission) and Mrs Libby Laing (retired New Zealand District Health Nurse). Both died early in 2009. Now aged 70, I suddenly realised that not only was I the only doctor but also director and main person for finding funding. The project is essential for the poor and had to survive. The local staff are well-trained and highly committed. Another doctor came, Mariko Inui from Japan, who will continue until March 2013. Two young American doctors, Jason and Merindy Morganson, will come in 2013. But there needs to be someone to find funds, communicate with donors, monitor and co-ordinate funding and supervise office management, someone just like Christine.

In 2009 I was back in New Zealand, touring and speaking to Churches and other groups looking for funds, a doctor and someone to take over English administration and funding etc. In Hamilton I spoke to a group at St David's Church, a very active Anglican church with a strong commitment to mission. The Vicar (Priest) thought of and approached Christine. The idea was completely unexpected but it stayed with her and as she says "God opened one door after

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WEBSITES

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another.” She persevered and here she is with us 18 months later.

According to Bangladesh laws, non-governmental organisations receiving foreign funding have to be authorised and registered with the NGO Bureau. This requires submitting a new proposal every three years outlining activities, funding and foreign staff. Christine’s approval had to await our next approval. The proposal had to be prepared and then screened and accepted by IIRD and then submitted to the NGO Bureau. We then found that there was a new format and so it had to be done again. Approval was gained about six months after submission. Then it turned out that at the final typing, one of the pages got out of order and Christine’s name had been omitted! This required submitting an amendment. Finally after approval had been obtained, Christine had to fill out forms and sign a ‘volunteer’ work contract. Then it was possible to get her work permit. Red tape and cog wheels! When the papers were completed she submitted them to the Bangladesh High Commission for Australia and New Zealand in Canberra, Australia and had her visa within two weeks!

Now she is here, Christine plans to stay at least 6 months. We hope she will stay much longer.

(Edric Baker)
Medical Officer in-charge

A few words from Christine...

Greetings from Kailakuri. I am now nearly at the end of my fourth week in Bangladesh and planning to stay at least six months. I hope that in the time I am here I can be an asset to Dr Baker and the Kailakuri Health Care Project. I will be assisting Dr Baker with the English administration work, co-ordinating funds and working on fund-raising as well as working with the administration staff here, helping them improve their English and computer skills.

So far it’s the staff here who are helping me improve my Bangla skills with, usually, two hours of lessons each day and many stopping to talk to me as I walk around the project. The day starts with an hour in Outpatients Registration with Shapla who is teaching me numbers as well as some Bangla script. I can now write ‘blood pressure’, temperature and weight in Bangla script and am also through this slowly learning the Bangla alphabet. Minhaz takes over in the afternoon, teaching me words and phrases. I think he has a lot of patience, as by the afternoon I am wilting in the heat and my brain feels more like a sieve than the sponge I would like it to be.

In-between times I struggle with a slow internet connection (but am grateful that I have an internet connection), the heat and mosquitos. The latter two are changing each day with winter approaching and with the cooler weather I expect to increase my workload each day.

Current exciting news from Kailakuri includes a front page article in “The Daily Star” – an English National newspaper. This has produced a very positive response including many comments sent into the newspaper. You can see the article on ‘The Daily Star’ website - www.thedailystar.net . I found it easily by doing a search on ‘Kailakuri’. We are hoping that this article will help towards building up some long term in-country support.

My impressions of Kailakuri are that it is an extremely well run Project with staff taking ownership of their responsibilities. It is, I believe, helped by interfaith prayers each morning. Hindu, Muslim and Christian gather together for prayers each morning bringing together the cultures and the faiths of this area.

Christine Steiner
Funding and Management Consultant