

Gorkha Earthquake

VOSH Nepal Recovery project

March 2-12th 2016



The Gorkha earthquake in April 2015 was the worst natural disaster to strike Nepal since 1934. Ten eye doctors and six general volunteers from Canada and the United States were in Nepal March 2-12th to help earthquake survivors by providing them with free eye care and prescription glasses donated by Canadians through the Canadian registered Charity TWECS Canada/VOSH BC. The team left for Kathmandu on March 2 with only a carry-on, because their luggage carried 10,000 prescription eyeglasses and optometric equipment. We arrived late in the evening of March 3rd after 30 hours flying through Hong Kong and Bangladesh. Signs of earthquake destruction and reconstruction were everywhere. Everywhere were sheets of corrugated metal, stacks of concrete blocks, and endless piles of bricks. We saw a lot of bright shiny new corrugated roofs.

Everywhere were signs that the Nepalese people are putting their lives back together. It made us even more determined to bring some relief from



desperate poverty and distress to these people, with no strings attached. On March 5th we headed out from our hotel in Dhulikel up into the mountain villages of Sindhupalchowk district, which suffered some of the worst destruction of the earthquake. Almost 4 hours on a dangerously narrow road, we arrived at the top of a rocky mountain ridge. In a dusty clearing we saw a

signboard with before and after pictures, showing a once-sturdy pre-earthquake school reduced to rubble. It had been replaced with rough tin



sheds and two US military tents that have held up well for the past year. Here we set up the first clinic and provided 165 villagers in Thulo Sirubari with eye examinations and new eyeglasses, before the setting sun forced us to close the clinic and we headed back to Dhulikel on treacherous mountain roads.

Our second clinic day in the village of Kunchuk, Sindhupalchowk, 3 hours drive into the mountains

started at 10:30 am in another corrugated school, mainly with children and older ladies and gentlemen in the line. By the hot midday sun, true to our host's prediction, dozens of other women began arriving en masse - those who had finished caring for their fields, homes and children then trekked to our clinic site. It pleased us that they had made the trip. By the end of the

clinic our doctors had seen 265 individuals including the principal and the teachers who were very happy to receive new eyeglasses.

Lubhu, Lalitpur in



Kathmandu

valley is known locally for its schools, and we set up our 3rd and 4th clinic day at a school where the cool, dark rooms of a concrete structure made good clinical settings for the VOSH doctors. Hundreds waited in the hot sun of the day while our clinic hummed along, like a well-oiled machine. We had an outstanding day 3, serving 410 patients, and dispensing 271 pairs of eyeglasses. On day 4 the word got around in the community that North American doctors were here and 515 more residents came out and received 355 prescription glasses.





Unlike other projects, where VOSH has had the relative luxury of a fixed clinic location, and often were indoors with electricity, in Nepal we have become mobile, creating "pop-up" clinics and breaking them down at the end of an exhausting day. The rough dirt-floored sheds, tents and corrugated shacks that host us here were challenging for the ODs,

who ideally require a darkened room to accurately complete certain types of testing. Without reliable electricity, many worked with battery-powered instruments that can require increased skill to use. Hour after hour the ingenuity (taped-up garbage bags, cardboard, and other light-blocking tricks), patience and professionalism of these doctors was awe-inspiring. Some of them needed to be begged to take a lunch break or a drink of water because taking a break might mean someone wouldn't be seen at the end of the long clinic line.



The fuel shortages continued in Kathmandu. People wait for hours (better than when it was 8 days wait) for their ration of fuel. On Day 5 we traveled west to the rim of Kathmandu valley in a municipality called Tarakeshwar and set up a clinic in a multilevel building that was a school before the earthquake. The building was condemned because of the earthquake damage, the children are being taught in corrugated tin shacks while waiting for repairs to be completed to the school. We saw 370 local residents including the school staff and dispensed over 250 pairs of eyeglasses. On day 6 we returned to Tarakeshwar and had our best day yet by seeing 642 patients and dispensed over 400 pairs of glasses.

Our final clinic, day 7 was back in Lubhu, Lalitpur in a different school, this was our finest day. Our volunteer doctors their interpreters and helpers

worked an incredible ten hours without breaks to see over 656 residents and dispensed over 470 pairs of eyeglasses. Some of the students we saw were



orphaned by the earthquake and at the end of the long day, before we returned to our hotel, we visited their home and gave shoes, clothes and bags of rice to ladies who care for them. As usual on a VOSH project the resourcefulness of our veterans prevailed. We crammed ourselves, our baggage and precious eyeglass boxes into the back of a bus each day and headed out on the road to do

what we could to help relieve the suffering of others. In 7 days of intense clinics we were able to give care and eyeglasses to over 3,000 people in 5 different locations. Our VOSH team was comprised of capable, kind and caring people from Canada, the US and especially Nepal who provided a desperately required service, I am grateful and humbled to be part of such an impressive group.

Dr. Marina Roma-March

VOSH Reserve, Nepal Recovery project 2016

