

Doing it for the kids

By [Anna Whitehouse](#), February 2008

*She's the Emirates Airline flight attendant who sits at the helm of the **Dhaka Project** – a charity that helps under-privileged people in Bangladesh to lead healthy and fulfilled lives. Hailed by some as a national hero, Time Out finds out that all **Maria Conceicao** is bothered about is solving a funding crisis and helping 'her little children'.*

We've heard that there are funding issues. Is this true?



Yes, the last few months have been very challenging and difficult, but that's just what happens when you are a small organisation – it's hard to get grants and funds.

What's the problem?

After the cyclone hit Bangladesh last December the cost of rent, food and everything else went up horrendously... a kilo of rice went from Dhs1 to Dhs2 overnight and our existing school landlord doubled our rent and then evicted us.

What can people do to help the project?

Give your time, skills to us and help set up fundraising events, donate clothing, shoes, toys, blankets, towels, toiletries ... Or simply spread the word.

You've become somewhat of a national treasure. Does this bother you?

The success of the Dhaka Project is down to the people who have stepped out their comfort zone to help, individual supporters and my employer Emirates Airlines. The real treasure is my team of 60 staff that run around the clock 24/7 full of commitment to bettering the lives children.

What's the toughest thing about working on the Dhaka project?

The demand for help is so big and sometimes it's hard to select those who need the help first. It's so hard.

What's the reason you continue?

There's always the hope that a brighter future is growing inside the little

hearts of my children. I also know they are in a better place than when I found them.

What's the saddest thing you have seen recently?

The last two months have been very cold and thanks to the contribution of Emirates Foundation we were able to distribute over 3,000 blankets. Sadly in one village 30 children died of the cold in just two days.

What's next?

We're trying to establish a sustainable health service out there. We need medically trained people to come in and help run a community health centre here within the slums. So, we're talking doctors and nurses who can teach my team members basic first aid and visit Dhaka to help with illnesses such as pneumonia, gastroenteritis, typhoid, dengue fever, conjunctivitis, fungal infections, gynecological disorders and vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and more. If you feel unable to come and help us the least you can do for us is to send this message through to your network of medical friends, institutions and medical bodies.

How can people get in touch with you?

I spend most of my time in Dhaka so email is the best:
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