

The McMillan Family Visit to The Dhaka Project

Theresa's Story

Our family, **The McMillan's**, are privileged to have met **Maria Conceicao** to learn about the **Dhaka Project**. These talks developed into an interest in providing any help that we could to contribute to her work. Besides helping to write proposals, provide medical advice and raise awareness about the project among our friends and colleagues, **we visited The Dhaka Project at the end of November 2007.**

We have 3 children between the ages of 11 and 15, all of whom were very excited and a little anxious about visiting Dhaka.

Like most expatriate children living in Dubai, they weren't sure what to expect while in Dhaka. Maria's encouraging words and palpable love for the people in the Dhaka Project led us to believe that helping out with the Dhaka Project would be a wonderful opportunity to give and to learn.



Prior to our arrival in Dhaka we packed about 400 kg of school supplies and clothes for the families in **Gawair**, a small community in Dhaka. Once at the airport, Maria was able to add an additional 100 kg. So we arrived in Dhaka with a total of **500 kg** and **25** bags and boxes! Despite our concerns, moving through customs was no problem; possibly due to the fact that there were many officials traveling through the airport to assist those affected by the cyclone that had recently hit the more southern parts of Bangladesh. Upon leaving the airport, The Dhaka Project Staff welcomed us and loaded our parcels into vans, just as our own family might do! What a relief to have had their help. Once at the guest house, our children (*and us adults too*) were exhausted and slept! As mentioned in previous accounts, the guest house was very comfortable with internet up and running!

Over the course of 6 days **Ron** helped with teaching the Project Medic and updating him on more recent approaches to medical assessment. They went to purchase medical equipment and in particular, an otoscope that the medic could use to examine ears and throats to look for infection. Ron also began to discuss with Maria the changes that would be needed in the new building that, at that time, she had hoped to house a medical clinic along with the school on the upper floors. As you know, these plans have since changed and the building will be entirely a school!

I worked primarily with the nursery and school staff teaching about health and safety, hygiene, and infection control. Our girls worked and mostly played with the children in the nursery, preschool and school. Much fun and learning was had by all!





The Dhaka Project is a wonderful example of a community development project that addresses aspects of life that contribute to the health and wellness of this community. When developed in an impoverished community such as Gawair and the slums of Dhaka, *education, clean water / sanitation, hygiene and safety, employment, supportive community environment and housing* all serve to improve the health and quality of life of the community there. The activities of the Dhaka Project can serve as a model for development in similar areas of the world. It is through Maria's advocacy that these things are possible!

Besides the beautiful people here, I would say the one thing that I notice most is how Maria treats the children and their families with kindness and respect, without preference. She's very strict, very fair and very kind. Truly this has been a most wonderful experience and privilege. It's a blessing really. We are so grateful to the people of **Gawair**, the project staff and to Maria

for her generous time in teaching us the meaning of giving.

Bye for now and we hope to return soon!

Theresa McMillan

Ron's Story

From a medical perspective, in terms of the children, the families and the population that the project is trying to reach, there is an urgent need for high quality medical care. This would require establishing a medical center within the Dhaka Project to serve this population. ***There would be a need for significant funding for medical supplies, equipment and provisions*** made for staff recruitment, education and training. *There presently exists a basic first aid station within the primary school staffed by a dedicated Medic who provides, in addition to first aid, some primary care including immunizations.* We inspected a 3 story building that could possibly house such a medical center. However this building may be required for the school and then the nursery



would be suitable for a larger expanded medical facility.

On a personal note, I was impressed with the Dhaka Project overall and the commitment and dedication of Maria and the staff to the children as well as the training programs for the parents. It was a great experience for all of us. The children exude happiness and are in a very nurturing environment for health and education. I would love to return and assist as needed!

Ron McMillan M.D. F.R.C.P.(C)

Catharine's Story (Age 15)

It is very easy for one to find out the current events of the world. Occurrences such as war, poverty, and natural disaster can be read, watched, and heard. They are they incredibly easy to access; one look at the daily newspaper proves this. I commend those who are able to report these articles to the public, however feel as though while sharing these stories, they neglect the most important part: The people involved. Newscasters can easily read out statistics, but to really know the people involved in such events we must get to know them. We must find out how alike we really are and how our global neighbors live their lives. This was the fuel behind my November trip to Bangladesh.



Bangladesh is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its location and under-development have caused its people to experience serious hardships. Some of these include natural disaster as well as poor quality of life. When I traveled to Bangladesh in November, it was for the soul purpose of helping and teaching but also enjoying and learning from the people who lived there. I have never in my life done something like



that; however doing such a thing always seemed natural. My family and I traveled to Bangladesh in order to volunteer with a growing charity called the "Dhaka Project". The project began when Maria Conceicao visited Dhaka, Bangladesh for the first time. She was surprised by the poverty in the slum areas, and since then has been seeking ways in which to end it. She begins by bringing these former slum dwellers into stable housing, and then providing them with schools, training centers, housing developments, and other amenities. Her practical approach is leading the way and creating self-sustainable families and communities.

With Maria's encouragement, 500 kilos of donated goods, and unimaginable excitement we set off for what would become one of the most memorable adventures that my family and I would ever embark upon. The Dhaka team met us at the airport as soon as we arrived, and were helpful and compassionate ever onward.

They helped us throughout our entire stay, as well as seeing that all of Maria's goals were reached to perfection. We stayed in Dhaka for 5-6 days, and for those days we focused simple teaching, community development, work and play with kids, and also office stuff. It was an exciting and worthwhile trip that I will remember forever.

The world of Dhaka was different, but during my stay there I learned more about our similarities than anything else. People are people, we are all incredibly the same and therefore *need to defend and protect one another*. Its our job as human beings, as members of a common family. Poverty can be conquered. This rings true in Dhaka, and can therefore ring true in the world. If we all make an effort to make poverty history, our joined effort can accomplish more than imaginable. If we can make small steps toward this goal, then they will eventually measure miles in the race against poverty. Giving back to the world in this way was amazing. I learned so much and am excited for my next mission.

Elizabeth's Story (age 13)

The world of Dhaka was definitely a different world than the one I live in. I had a great time contributing to this project, and seeing the way poor people in the world live. Being with all the kids was one of my favourite parts of going to the Dhaka Project. They are smiley, smart, fun, beautiful kids, who need love from everyone, and all have dreams for themselves. Those kids and their open arms made my trip that much better. I really enjoyed helping Maria plan activities for the kids, such as "Let's Clean Bangladesh Day", hygienic sessions, movies, and dance parties. I loved making their lives a tiny bit better, making friends that I will never forget.



Elizabeth McMillan

Claire's Story (age 11)



Well when we got off the plane and went into the airport, it was very different. Much more different than the Dubai airport! Then after we went through customs we went outside and some people drove us home. Their names were Jewel, Russell, Nayan and Mr. Azad. They were very friendly and the driving was CRAZY! Then we got to the place that we were staying at and my family and I all had a nice nap. The next day we went to see the kids in the nursery! All of them were so loving! And during our time at Dhaka we went to different schools to see and play with the children but also to just see the schools. Dhaka was a very special and different experience. I felt good being there because I was helping the kids and I was helping to build up their community to make it a better place. I learned that kids can be so happy with the smallest things. They were so eager to learn and happy to be able to go to school. I would love to visit again.

Claire McMillan
