

## Kathie's Feedback

I have just recently returned from a humbling but fantastic experience at the Dhaka Project. I went there as a Paramedic prepared to do anything to provide whatever assistance I could, medical or otherwise and I am so happy that I went.

It was my first time to Bangladesh and I travelled there with my son Andrew who also went as a volunteer. On arriving at Zia Airport I was amazed to find out that the luggage from all three flights was being unloaded manually as is the custom and that it would take us nearly 2 hours before we received our bags and our visa and were able to leave the airport. We were greeted outside by the delightful Jewel who is The Dhaka Project Volunteer Manager; we were then introduced to the Dhaka



road rules in a hire taxi with no seatbelts and a broken windscreen, exhilarating to say the least! We were dropped off at our accommodation which was clean, safe and comfortable; it even had the internet and air conditioning, which was a very nice bonus. As it was a Friday and the school and clinic were closed we spent time exploring TDP area and Dhaka itself by way of walking, rickshaw and some very perilous driving in a Tut Tut (CNG they call them in BD) with a really crazy driver. On our journeys we were hit by a bus, hit two pedestrians and side swiped a few other vehicles. Fortunately no one was hurt; all this road chaos just seems to be the norm here in Dhaka.

The next morning we were introduced to the staff and all the children after which I went off to the clinic and Andrew was asked to take some classes due to the urgent need for teachers.

At the Medical Clinic I met Dr Jahid the Dhaka Project medical doctor, his nurse, the dentist and Julie the Health Facilitator who is an angel from Australia volunteering her services and doing such a wonderful job in helping these children and their families with all the health issues. I applaud her!

The clinic is extremely basic in its set up. Having worked as a paramedic in New Zealand and more recently in Dubai, with the very best of medical treatment on hand in both countries, I was saddened at how little they have in the way of basic assessment tools and treatment. Andrew and I had bought medical supplies and equipment that we thought would be useful for the clinic. Included was a Nebuliser as Dr Jahid had said that they



needed one but unfortunately I didn't know that there would be no Ventolin, Atrovent, Combivent or even Oxygen or Inhalers..... I could have so easily brought these meds with me and there are so many children with respiratory issues that would benefit greatly from these medications. Dr Jahid is a wonderful man and so caring of the children but he can only work with what is available to him. Each morning I went with the doctor and we started at the Nursery and examined each and every child, beginning with those who were obviously unwell. Dr Jahid provides a prescription for their medication which is either provided for or paid for by TDP. We then repeat this procedure at the Kindergarten and then the Pre School. All the small children line up when we come in and most of them are so very excited to see us. They come in one by one with their tops all pulled up showing their little tummies and ready to have their chest auscultated, they all know the drill. I was really surprised to see that even the pre schoolers are provided with uniforms but most of them still tend to wear their own clothes underneath. After we finished with these three groups we walk on over to the school where the clinic is situated. The children all arrive in groups from their class and I would estimate that we see at least 80 children per day. The health problems are many including severe cardiac and respiratory issues, digestive disorders, skin disorders as well as numerous cases of other illnesses caused by hygiene factors and living conditions. The children all have comprehensive records kept of their health and they are all immunized. Obviously the clinic and its staff are providing a valuable service to these children.



# RSF-THE DHAKA PROJECT

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I also went with Julie and Jewel to the Children's Hospital in Dhaka (another scary Tut Tut ride) to visit Ridoy who is a child from TDP Nursery and his mother. We took their food for the next few days and also collected Ridoy's prescription and went and purchased his medicine and took it back to the ward. Absolutely everything has to be provided by the family for the patient (TDP is funding this little boy) and nothing is free except a few limited beds. The hospital was probably the most personally distressing situation that I witnessed. It is extremely overcrowded, dirty and rundown and lacking in any visible hygiene standards but I am sure all the mothers with their babies were very grateful to be there. I saw a baby who couldn't have been more than 5 kilos lying on the desk top among the grubby germ ridden patient files, being cannulated and the same needle used over 3 or 4 attempts. Despite of all this misery I couldn't believe how friendly and interested most of the mums and the children were in who I was and where I was from. They are all so extremely poor yet offered me their water and fruit.

My best memories are of the happy, laughing children who greet you every corner you turn practicing their English with "Good Morning, how are you, I am fine" and just the overall friendliness and easy going way of the Bangladeshi people who live in such utter poverty but remain so accepting of their circumstances. I felt totally safe and respected the whole time I was there and constantly reminded of how much I have in my own life and how fortunate I am. I will definitely be returning soon!

Living in Dubai I had read and heard many wonderful things about the great work that Maria had done in setting up and running the Dhaka Project but actually seeing what is being achieved there shows that "yes one person can make a difference". Maria and her supporters are apart from educating these 597 children, providing medical and dental care, clothing, weekly food parcels for the family, hygiene programmes, family support and even housing when able.

Any medical people or in fact anyone reading this blog and considering going to TDP do it, it is food for your soul!

*Kathie Minchin*