



Members of the Nepal Thalassaemia Society outside the new clinic. Children present Wendy Pinker with flowers.

Some inspirational reading...

Some time ago we were introduced to the great work of Wendy Pinker in Nepal. With the support of many of her friends from the UK, she has achieved great things for the International Thalassaemia Community.

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I am writing with the most wonderful and exciting news... the long awaited and desperately needed BLOOD TRANSFUSION CLINIC IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL is now OPEN!! Three years ago my dear friend Durga Pathak (Nepal) and I had a dream...it was what seemed like an impossible dream but never the less a dream that we would pursue until it came true.

We wanted to open a blood transfusion clinic for the very sick thalassaemic children of Nepal. As many of you will already know a thalassaemic child has to have a blood transfusion once every two weeks just to survive... Until now it has been a painful and arduous procedure for each and every child and their family.

In Nepal, blood transfusions are not widely available meaning that most have to travel to Kathmandu just to receive a treatment. There are no trains in Nepal and the roads are long, slow and very mountainous... many patients travel over 12hrs by bus every 2 weeks. Others who are more fortunate have been able to afford the costs of relocating nearer to the capital.

On arrival in Kathmandu the patient and parent check in to Kanthi Children's

Hospital in Lazimpat. Kanthi Hospital, like most in Nepal is under equipped, under financed and unimaginably dirty. The stench that hits you on entering the hospital is one that will stay with you forever. The child is admitted to the ward and then the parent has to travel across the capital to the Red Cross Blood Bank to collect a packet of blood.

In the searing heat of the monsoon period, often the blood is off by the time the parent returns to the hospital and the whole process has to start again. It is a long and heart wrenching procedure. Nobody should have to struggle so to help a sick child receive such simple treatment.

After a two-year stay in Nepal I returned to the UK to start my mission. Durga, The Nepal Thalassaemia Society and I had drawn up a financial plan to get our little clinic off the ground. Just £14,000 would be enough to set it up and run it for 2 years offering totally free treatment for every child.

It was much to my amazement that many people already knew of my plan and shortly after my arrival 2 incredible ladies contacted me. Sue Woolston and Ann Brodin. They said that they had heard

of my dream and that they were going to help me – I couldn't believe my ears! There was no turning back now. Without them it may never have got off the ground.

Before long garden parties, casino nights and dinner dances were being arranged. Local people came to my home with offerings of personal donations and my very dear friends Alison and Justine Perkins had donations made to my clinic instead of receiving wedding presents!

Later that year I was to meet a wonderful lady called Maureen Donnison who went with 12 of her friends to visit my family in Nepal and were so touched by what they saw they decided to help too. After collecting sponsorship for their treks in the Himalayas and arranging a very successful ABBA night back home in the UK they were able to donate just the amount we needed to secure the £14,000 target... mission accomplished! Now all we had to do was start phase 2.

In December 2009 I returned to Nepal to meet with Durga and the Nepal Thalassaemia Society (NTS) members.

They had no idea that we now had the funds needed to open the clinic and then I told them they were totally shocked and



elated. I will never forget the looks on their faces.

The NTS committee is made up totally of members who have thalassaemic children meaning that everybody is working for the good of their own family. They are an active and enthusiastic team. They now had one of the biggest challenges ahead – to find a suitable building (very close to the Red Cross Blood Bank), furnish and equip it, find a nurse, a doctor and set up the new NTS offices!

After 12 months in the UK while my son had surgery I returned to Nepal at the beginning of February 2011, more than 6 months after the long awaited opening of our life saving Blood Transfusion Clinic. I finally got to see the fruits of all of our work and... it was far and beyond what I ever could have dreamed of.

Early on the morning of 6 February my husband Rishi, son Tall and I got into a taxi and made our way across Kathmandu near to the Red Cross Blood Bank.

We didn't really know where we were going and it was hard to make out where we were with all the dust in the polluted air. The taxi dropped us in the area we were heading to and we walked aimlessly, not really knowing where to look... Then from the corner of my eye I saw it!!!!... In big red letters... "Nepal Thalassaemia Blood Transfusion Clinic".

Goose bumps shot over my body from head to toe. There it was as real as life... my dream... in a little dusty old side street in the heart of the capital of Nepal... Oh my word... whoever in a million years would have thought this would happen!

I opened the gate to find everybody waiting – society members, parents, nurses and most important of all – the children.

It was amazing... a moment in my life I will never ever forget. I was greeted with flowers and dozens of smiles. We went into the building and had a tour around.

First the meeting room, a very simple, clean spacious room with lots of chairs to be used for meetings, resting and private consultations. Then the examination room, again very simple, a room used by the doctor if a child gets sick whilst having a transfusion.

Then the office! Well, it was so grand I think the whole country could be run from there! There was even a computer and printer, all lovingly covered with cloths to protect them from the dust. Then the moment of truth – the transfusion room. Wow, what a wonderful surprise it was. It was the most beautiful, brightly coloured, clean, bright, airy, cosy room you could imagine – I was moved to tears instantly.

We all sat (about 40 of us) and talked about how things were going and how life had changed so much since last the time we all met. The parents talked of how their lives have been made so much easier and the children told stories of how they look forward to coming to Kathmandu for their fortnightly transfusions!!!! It was like a fairy tale.

Previously a transfusion would take all day and possibly the next day. Now the patient's carer just makes one simple phone call to the clinic the day before they are able to come to Kathmandu and Paras (our secretary) calls the blood bank and the blood is prepared for that particular child.

The blood is then collected later that day and stored ready for use the next day. The next day the patient arrives and after a few checks the transfusion begins... and thanks to our wonderful nurse there are no tears to seen or cries to be heard and it's all over in 4 hours. And to top it all, it's totally free of charge.

Cartoons, movies and Nepali music are played all day. It is like a holiday for many of the children who don't have the privilege of a TV or electricity in their own homes. The children have all become friends and it's like a big family all with the same illness. The parents sit and talk and compare stories, worries and concerns.

Amazingly, two of the older children now walk alone to the clinic so their parents are after many years of being tied now free. It really is a miracle to see.

This little clinic has truly changed the lives of each and every child and parent we support and it's all down to YOU... each and every one of you who has made even a single pound in donations or has bought my jewellery or helped at one of our many fund raising events – you are the ones who have made this possible.

Every single penny has come from the UK and it has come from one of you. It has cost just £13,500 to open and run the clinic for 2 years and... we almost have enough for another year!!!! I can't thank you enough for all of your support and I dream that we can continue to raise the funds for the years ahead.

Every penny you donate goes direct to the clinic fund and not a single penny goes for administration because I do it all myself. I thank you for your continued support from the bottom of my heart.

My next mission is to try to raise the funds for all the children to have the next stage of their treatment. Chelation treatment is the removal of excess iron caused by having blood transfusions on a regular basis.

It is essential for the prolonged life of a thalassaemic. At the moment only 10% of our children are receiving this treatment and all are by donation. It costs just £30 per month or £360 per year.

I would like to thank all those who have already sponsored a child for these costs... your love and support has given a new lease of life to an otherwise very sick child.

Thank you with all my heart x

If anyone would like to know more about our clinic or make a donation please call Wendy Pinker on 07836 572 062 or email pinkyland_2000@yahoo.co.uk

Special Note: The oldest thalassaemic in the UK is about 60 years old... the oldest known thalassaemic in Nepal is Paras, he is 23. We want to change these statistics and make a more wonderful world for all the thalassaemia children of Nepal.

You can't change the world... But you can make a difference in your own space.

If any of our members or readers would like to assist Wendy and the clinic in Nepal in anyway, please contact Thalassaemia Australia on 9888 2211 and register your interest.