



## ALAN AND MEGAN BARKER



SEPTEMBER 2024

# Mixed emotions

Hello everyone.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, our latest newsletter.

As we write, we have just returned from the 4-day retreat that we mentioned in our previous newsletter. We were both asked to be on the organising committee of this retreat for families with disabled children. The aim of the retreat was to give the families a fun time and for the parents to get a break too. Here in Nepal, families who have a person with a disability are often shunned by their wider families and their communities because, according to the strong beliefs in *Karma*, it is thought that the family must have done something wrong and so 'deserve' (a kind of punishment) the disability. To be able to let these families come together, spend time together, share their experiences and help them realise they are not the only ones in this situation was one of the other main



objectives. For many, being already poor and then having a disabled child, life is very challenging. We heard several heart breaking stories of their struggles.



AMAZING TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS at the family retreat

As well as the 6 of us on the organising team there were 25 other volunteers, mostly young people, who were each assigned a family to support during the 4 days – playing with the children, helping at mealtimes, and generally making themselves useful. This also had a big impact – that each child was worthy to get that attention and that they, as families were welcomed and helped, not rejected or blamed. We organised separate sessions, including games, for the parents and then 2 age groups of children. It was hard work and 'full on' for the 4 days, but it was definitely worth it to see the families enjoying themselves and relaxing. It was great to see a change in attitude about who they are and gaining self-worth and confidence. The whole programme was sponsored by 'Joni & Friends' who also support the 'Wheels for the World' wheelchair distributions that Megan helps on.



Large gathering at the family retreat

Also, as we write this letter, Nepal has been experiencing several days of incessant rain, which resulted in devastation across the country. Here in Kathmandu, most of the rivers and streams burst their banks causing flooding in many places, with people, houses and belongings washed away in the floods. As of 30th September, it's reported that in 3 days, 192 people have been killed, with 30 still missing in the swollen rivers and under landslides. And on top of that there are thousands who have either lost their homes or are made temporarily homeless as the rivers inundated homes with mud and water. Many are also still without clean water or electricity.

We spent most of the weekend helping friends clear out their ground floor flat from water and mud that was several inches thick. The water and mud encroached on their place quite slowly, so they were able to move some of their things upstairs to their landlord's flat and lift heavier furniture, like beds, up onto plastic chairs out of the reach of the water. It is going to take a long time for everyone affected by these events to get back to some level of normality.



So much devastation as rivers burst their banks

That's reflecting on what's been happening here, now here's what's coming up in the next few months:

In October, Megan will probably be travelling back to Rukum to finally finish off the 'Wheels for the World' wheelchair distribution programme that was cut short in June because most of the wheelchairs were late arriving and then the rains came.

In November we might both be going to Rukum, as we are hosting a colleague from the BMS UK office and we are going to be taking him to see the earthquake recovery work there that BMS has been contributing to. At that time Megan may also be giving additional support at the hospital for the ongoing therapy needs there.

We are getting excited about Christmas this year as our whole family will be coming to Nepal! As part of our ruby anniversary celebrations, we are going to get together as a whole family for the first time in 2 years. There will be 15 of us – 8 adults and 7 children. It will be the first time any of our grandchildren have visited Nepal.



So much mud in people's homes

**For those who pray:**

First of all, we **give thanks** that:

The family retreat was a success and that the families that came were able to relax and enjoy a short time away in the midst of their difficult lives.

We were in a position to help our friends affected by the floods and providing a dry safe space to sleep.

We ask you to **join us in prayer for:**

All those affected by the floods and landslides for them to get the help they need and get back into their homes or be provided with somewhere to live.

Our ongoing work here, especially with travel plans coming up after all the floods and landslides.

The families that came to the retreat to be able to access the ongoing help and support they need in their new found confidence.

Thank you, as always, for your friendship, love and support

Alan and Megan

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