

## NEPAL TRIP TO START BUILDING THE FIRST SCHOOL IN GUY'S MEMORY- April 2013

Photos by Will Clark, Tom Sabbadini, Tony Joseph and Lauren Joseph

On 29th March 31 of Guy's family and friends flew to Nepal to join the people of Dhikurpokhari, a village in the Annapurna foothills, to start building the first 'Guy Joseph Early Childhood Development Centre' (ECDC).

As we gathered at Heathrow on a freezing March evening, it seemed slightly surreal that after more than a year of planning, this long-awaited trip was about to become a reality.



By the following afternoon we were in Kathmandu with Guy's Trust friends from Australia, Indonesia, Thailand and the USA. The impact of what we were doing really hit when I saw everyone together wearing their Guy's Trust T-shirts - the first of many moments of camaraderie and pride, although accompanied by a profound sadness.

Two more days of travelling, and the group finally arrived in

Dhikurpokhari, the village near Pokhara where we are building the first ECDC. The sign on the road above the village (see photo right) provided a tear-filled, reality-check as to why we were there.



As we clambered down the hillside it seemed that the whole village had come out to greet us (see photo below). We gathered in the baking



sun for a welcome ceremony next to the spectacularly situated site - a terraced slice of hillside high above a lush green

valley with views of the mountains and across to Pokhara's lake. Waiting for the local dignitaries to arrive and the speeches to begin, a small band struck up and the village children pulled us on to the makeshift dance floor.

First the Joseph family (see photo right) and then the rest of the group were bedecked with flower garlands and then, after many thank-you speeches and a very moving minute's silence in memory of Guy, we went to bless the site (see photo left) and to break ground.



Then the hard work began! Whilst the local women untiringly carried massive baskets of gravel strapped to their foreheads, we started to pickaxe and dig out the trench for the ECDC's foundations, passing the earth bowl by bowl down the hillside.



The arrival of the brick-making machine (see photos below) caused much excitement although with the brick team averaging one brick every fifteen minutes, the enthusiasm took a temporary nosedive when we discovered that we needed to make 8000!



Back in Pokhara that evening we were delighted to see that Guy's Trust had made it to the front page of the local newspaper - a significant milestone of recognition for the *dalit* community.

By the second day the team was already a little depleted. A few had succumbed to a combination of hard labour, too much sun and Nepali food, whilst four of the trustees headed off to view the site for the second



Guy Joseph ECDC in the village of Dansing. This will be built in the grounds of an existing primary/secondary school and will be started as soon as the Dhikurpokhari team has finished using the brick-making machine. Somehow I think the local people will manage to build the Centre without our help!



As always we were greeted like royalty by children, teachers (see photo right), school management committee, various rights groups and parents. More speeches, more flowers –

the welcome we receive everywhere is both magnificent and humbling and we were reminded yet again just how hard life is here and how the ECDCs will help to lift the next generation out of poverty.

There is a huge need for schools for younger children in Nepal, particularly girls and the untouchable *dalit* class. Despite the government's commitment to free education for all, at least one million children in Nepal, do not go to school. Each Guy Joseph ECDC will provide for 150 children



up to the age of seven preparing them for and ensuring



their entry into primary school. In addition Guy's Trust will be training 25 teachers for the surrounding area, offering education in nutrition, health and hygiene to parents and paying for uniforms and lunches. We will also maintain the

ECDCs for three years, after which time the local community is committed to taking over. Together with Action Aid we will ensure this happens.

Amongst the the hard work, there was much time for reflecting on the paradoxes of why we were in Nepal - the fun we were all having and the sadness underlying the fun; how much Guy would have loved the experience and that we wouldn't be here had he still been with us. And the birds of prey constantly riding the thermals above the valley reminding me of how Guy must have felt paragliding. Tear-filled conversations with his friends revealed that I was not alone.

After a week of hard graft and with the trench complete it was time to say our farewells. But not before the group performed the Harlem Shake! See <http://youtu.be/cquuHa5WrRY>

At the closing ceremony there was no music or dancing because the local people were, "sad to say goodbye".

We sat once again in a bank of seats on the hillside opposite the local people who had turned out in full force to see us off. As I handed the memorial plaque with Guy's name (see photo below) to the team that will finish work on the school the tears flowed again, this time accompanied by an enormous sense of pride.



The hard work has been started. The foundations of both the building and the relationship with the Nepali community have been laid. Once the bricks have dried the local people will work quickly to finish before the monsoon season and in five months the school will be open. But a school is more than a building, and thoughts are already turning to how we can build upon what we've started and continue to support the children we have met. This is the beginning, not the end, and an experience I think none of the group will forget.



**Vicky Joseph**

*With huge thanks to the 'Pokhara 31', to everyone who has donated to or been involved in this project and also to Saskia De Paolis and L'Ecole des Petits for donating school supplies.*

