

NEPAL November 2012

On 8th November Guy's parents Vicky and Tony Joseph, with trustee Lynne Gilbert and her husband Jonathan, flew to Nepal to visit the community where Guy's Trust will build the first Guy Joseph Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC).

After a night in chaotic, polluted, tumbledown Kathmandu, we escaped to the relative peace of Pokhara, the town where Guy learned to paraglide and where he lived during the winter of 2010/11.



Half an hour's flight from the capital, on the banks of beautiful Lake Phewa and overlooked by the massive peaks of the Annapurna range, Pokhara served as the base for our visit to the village of Dhikurpokhari and its *Dalit* (untouchable) community.



Our flight was delayed, as is apparently the norm, but Julie Gurung from ActionAid Nepal and Andy John from the London office were waiting at Pokhara airport. After dropping our luggage at our hotel and a forty minute drive into the Annapurna foothills, our jeep pulled up at a seemingly random spot and we piled out to clamber down the hillside.



An extraordinary sight greeted us. In a terraced field, under a makeshift awning, sat a group of about sixty women and children and a number of local dignitaries - complete with a couple of grannies squatting on the hillside to oversee the proceedings - all waiting patiently for the late arrival of the English VIPs.



We were greeted with cheers and '*namastes*' and presented with floral garlands by, it seemed, almost the entire gathering.



We had anticipated visiting an empty piece of land and maybe meeting a few local people - this rapturous and totally unexpected reception moved us all, including the ActionAid staff, to tears.

Seated at the 'top table', we listened to raft of speeches in Nepalese, which seemed to make most of the women cry too. Although these were obviously unintelligible to us we were able several times to pick out the words 'Guy Joseph' which only served to make the tears flow more freely.



Julie translated wherever possible and explained that without the ECDC, these children of Dhikurpokhari's *Dalit* caste would be unlikely to be able to access education at all.

For the first time we could see that the vision we had had a year ago was truly going to become a reality.

The community told us how sad they were for our loss and how enormously grateful they felt for the life-changing opportunity we were giving their families.



Then an old lady who had no sons, and whose daughter lived far away, told us that she had given some of her land for the school and the community asked Julie to tell us that "all of our children are your children too".



When the speeches were finally over and the children could barely sit still for another minute, we were honoured to be invited by the community for lunch. As we sat in a row, Dhikurpokhari's finest produce was presented to us on brand new metal plates - clearly purchased specially as the labels were still on the eating surface!



After the meal, and having taken off our Guy's Trust T-shirts to present to our new colleagues, we walked a short distance with them to stand on the actual ground where next March thirty of us - our friends, our daughters Lauren and Alex's friends and a large group of Guy's friends from around the world - will descend on this small village to start to build the first Guy Joseph ECDC.



Then more speeches, more tears and the conclusion of an overwhelmingly emotional experience.

The following morning was spent visiting a youth club and a home for HIV-Aids patients, two other projects with which ActionAid's local partners are involved. This demonstrated to us the high level of communal organisation in the district and gave us the confidence that the Dhikurpokhari community would be active partners in sustaining the ECDC and ensuring its continuing success.

Our time with ActionAid officially over, we returned to lakeside Pokhara to stock up with a few essentials (i.e. chocolate) for our forthcoming trek along the stunningly beautiful Annapurna circuit and a further glimpse into the life of rural Nepal with whose people, through Guy's legacy, we will now be forever connected.



Vicky Joseph

With special thanks to Lynne for her wisdom and her unstinting support.