



Namaste

We are well and truly in the monsoon season now with stiflingly hot and sticky days and torrential downpours. Usually the rain brings relief, not only from the heat and dust, but to the parched earth and crops. This year, things are a little different. Yes the rains are much needed as they always are, but they are bringing hardship and further destruction in the wake of April and May's earthquakes. Many people are still living in temporary shelters, some made out of whatever they could scavenge together, others in better, stronger and more weather proof structures - but for all, it takes an already difficult season to a whole different level.

Old style properties that were damaged in the quake are also suffering as the water gets into the brickwork, turning the mud cement to mush and causing further collapse, while reclaimed wooden items like doors and windows warp and rot in the weather. As for the cities roads - when the rain comes down, the roads flood, often in places up to knee deep, making it difficult for everyone to get around safely and cleanly.

Politically, the earthquake seems to have had a positive effect, with most of the parties finally coming together to form a consensus on the country's new constitution. In the 2.5 months since the earthquake they have managed to do what they have failed to achieve in the last 7-8 years and a draft constitution has been written and is now in the process of being reviewed, before the final draft is written and hopefully promulgated.

If you wish to keep up to date with what is happening in Nepal, please take a look at www.thehimalayantimes.com

News From VSN Homes

The kid's had literally just started the new academic year at their new school when the first earthquake hit. The government set a new date for schools to reopen the 15th May, 3 weeks after the first big quake, but alas that was pushed backwards after the second big hit on the 13th May. They finally went back, much to their relief on the 31st May, and spent the first week catching up with their friends and doing creative activities as a way to ease them back into school and to help them process the events of the last month.

We made the decision to move all bar our two class 10 kids Bishnu and Modan to a new school for the start of the new year, as the quality of teaching and discipline had deteriorated badly at Everest. There were a few grumbles initially as it is much stricter and with higher standards, but the kids are getting used to it now and have enjoyed making new friends and catching up with old ones too, as JVM is where BFCH's Pooja studies as well as Jaggu's son Yagya.

June saw our class 12 and 11 kids finally sit their board exams, and for our class 12 boys - finish their school years. Their results should be out in October and December.

BFCH (Brighter Future Children's Home)

Prior the earthquake all was normal at BFCH. The kids did their end of year exams in the first week of April and all bar Ashmita did OK, as they had shown a little more willing to study this time around.

The Nepali New Year was celebrated in style with everyone mucking in to chop, cook and of course eat, the feast they prepared for themselves.

The earthquake of course was hard and frightening for everyone, but we were lucky that BFCH sustained only superficial damage in the in the form of cracked plaster etc. Despite this, the kids and Sita Didi slept in the poly tunnel within the home's grounds for a week, sharing the space with their neighbours as their house was severely damaged. The neighbours continued to stay at BFCH until they were able to make a temporary home to move into.

The kids were naturally quite subdued after the quake and the persistent aftershocks, but soon bounced back to their usual chatty selves. We were extremely lucky and thank our lucky stars that no one was hurt and that BFCH stood up to the shaking it was given.

Sadly this year's veggie crop isn't looking very good, not helped by having one poly tunnel put out of action to be used as an emergency shelter. It is currently being used as store for Temporary Learning Center supplies, for the project we have been working on with UNICEF and Restless Development. The big tunnels out the back are producing some tomatoes, but nothing like previous years.

Thankfully all the kids have stayed healthy over the last few months. Raju had to have a small surgical procedure on the cyst on his leg, that we have been keeping an eye on over the last few years. He was very brave, but in true Raju style, worried about the quality of the food he would be fed at the hospital! All went well and his wound is healing well.

As you know the kids are all growing up fast and in fact, most of them aren't really kids anymore, but young adults. The end of Suresh and Kamaal's class 12 exams also signaled the end of their time with us at BFCH and the start of their real adulthood, whereby they return to their relatives and start making a life for themselves. Both boys wish to continue with their education at university level, and are looking at different options available to them, alongside scholarship programmes to cover their fees. They will leave a big hole at BFCH and we wish them all the best and hope they will come back and visit often.

We had a lovely farewell ceremony for all of our class 12 boys at SSCH, but sadly Suresh missed it, as he was away in Bardiya with his mother, trying to sort out his citizenship issues once and for all. He has subsequently returned, still citizenshipless, and with instructions to go back towards the end of August. Jaggu has been working on getting him his citizenship for over 5 years, as without this his further education and career prospects are very limited. We only hope that come August the issue will be finally resolved in a positive way, thus opening up opportunities to Suresh that he deserves. Once he has his citizenship he can then confer citizenship rights to both Sujana and Bishnu.

On the whole the kid's behaviour has been good and they have been helpful and supportive through the post quake months. The one exception is Bishnu, who as she gets older becomes ever more headstrong and refuses to listen to anyone in a position of authority. She has started to dress in a manner that is culturally unacceptable, especially in a village environment - chopping 3 pairs of perfectly good jeans into very short hot pants is one example - and continues to spend more time in front of the mirror than anywhere else. We are very worried for her and are afraid she will get herself into trouble, but regardless of who tries to talk to her about her behaviour, she just shuts down and won't listen or interact.

Finally the kids have just done their first set of exams at their new school and we await with anticipation their results.



From temporary EQ shelter



To TLC storage facility

SSCH (Shining Stars Children's Home)

Like their BFCH brothers and sisters the SSCH crew also celebrated the New Year in style with festive food and fun times.

Five of our SLC kids (Lokshara, Shanta, Sher, Hari & Mandir) sat their SLC exams in March, and after completing them, headed back to Humla to spend their long vacation with their families. All of them really enjoyed their time, doing things they normally wouldn't do like mushroom hunting, helping on the land and looking after little brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews etc. The time they spend with their families, is not only culturally very rich for them, putting them back in touch with their roots and culture, but a great opportunity for family bonding. It also makes them realise just how easy their lives are at SSCH and how lucky they are for the opportunities that are given to them. They all made it home in time for their SLC results and once again, our kids did not only themselves proud, but us too. First division passes for all of them - whoo hoo!

The rest of the school kids sat their end of year exams in early April and all did well except Hira, who failed most of his subjects. Every year Hira sadly fails his exams and every year we sit down with him to discuss his options, what he wants to do and how best to serve his needs. Despite being several years behind, the eldest by a long way in his year group and his constant failing, he has always stated that he wanted to stay in full time education although his academic efforts have not always reflected this. This year we had a breakthrough and Hira finally admitted that school was not the best place for him and that he didn't want to return in the new year. He has always loved cooking and so after much discussion and some investigation into what was available, we enrolled him in a cooking course, which he is loving. This will also enable him to return to his family in Humla, when the time comes (probably this autumn) with a great skill and earning potential.

Already his new skills have come into their own, as during the long break due to the earthquakes, he, Sunita and Raj took responsibility for the SSCH kitchen while Jaumaya Mummy was looking after her sick mother, Tule Dai was sick with EQ related stress and anxiety and Dashrath on leave to repair his broken home. We are super proud of all of them for stepping up and taking on the responsibility, but especially of Hira for sticking at it. He has always been helpful, but not always with the greatest attention span.

The holidays were spent with the usual activities - playing football, reading, hanging out, picking berries in the woods and helping in the garden etc. Mina, Pragati, Renu and Lal took part in a week long story writing course in Badikhel, organised by Read Nepal which they all really enjoyed, and the 'big boys' went on an outing to Bhaktapur.

Like BFCH we were lucky to get away with only superficial damage to SSCH, although putting new tiles on the roof over the water tank, will be a bigger job than filling in the cracks in the stairwell. Hari removed the few tiles that were left as they were a falling hazard and it is currently covered in tarp to protect the roof struts. The longer term plan is to replace the tiles on that section with PVC ones, as they will be less of a hazard in the future as they can be screwed into the supporting beams.

The veggie garden is looking good and beginning to bear fruit - or perhaps we should say veggies, and the fruit trees fruit such as peaches, plums and apples - yum!

At the farewell ceremony for our class 12 boys, we said a sad goodbye to Ashok, Rajendra, Moon and Mahesh. We also said goodbye to Dhirendra as well, who although only just going into class 12, is going to live with relatives in Kathmandu as they now have space for him. It was a bitter sweet occasion. Sad as always to see your kids grow up and leave home, but also a proud time, knowing that we have done all we were able for them over the years, and that they were going into the world to make their way as fine young men, as prepared as anyone can be. Family members joined us for the occasion and we celebrated with cake and gifts of photos for each of the boys. We wish them all the best for their futures and hope to see them often.

Finally for SSCH - we are in desperate need of funds to maintain the running costs of the home and to provide for the children's education to the end of the year and into future years. I know so many of you are already giving or have given, but if only half of the people who receive this newsletter donated **\$20 each**, our worries, for this year at least would be alleviated. So why not give up a bottle of wine, or a meal out and **help us secure the future of our SSCH kids**. For further details on the best way to make a donation, please contact Kate at kate@vsnpj.org.



What VSN has been up to

Despite having closed our volunteer programmes post EQ we have been crazily busy, organising the logistics and build of Temporary Learning Centers (TLCs), toilets and WASH facilities for schools in rural Lalitpur and more recently in and around the Kathmandu Valley.

Although originally we were allocated 13 TLCs to coordinate and build within the southern Lalitpur area, that number has more than doubled to 29, with more possibly in the pipeline! The reason for such a dramatic increase? The fantastic job that our teams have been doing, creating well built, quality engineer approved buildings within the stated time frames and under budget! In fact in several cases, we were asked to take over projects from other partner organisations of UNICEF as the quality of their work was substandard.

Alongside the 29 TLCs our teams have also either completed or are in the process of completing 21 toilet and WASH stations.

While visiting the projects, its wonderful to see such happy, grateful teachers and it is they who are spreading the word that VSN is the team to request as we make the best TLCs etc :). Coordinating multiple schools and all the necessary supplies, building and teaching etc in rural locations with very poor transport infrastructures in the mid of the monsoon season is no easy job. Knowing that we have been declared the 'go to team' and our standards the ones to copy, makes all the hours, mud and difficulties worthwhile. We are super proud of and extremely grateful to everyone who is involved with this project and who are helping us get kids back into school in safe, weatherproof structures.



Our New Recovery & Rebuild Volunteer Programme

As well as working on the TLC programme we have been busy pulling together a new post earthquake volunteering programme to start in the middle of September, hopefully once the monsoon rains have gone.

This programme will build on the work we have been doing over the summer season in the rural community education sector, giving volunteers the opportunity to work as part of a team rebuilding and/or repairing existing schools, community buildings or water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. Given that the recovery from this earthquake will take some time, some project work will be in constructing sturdy semi-permanent structures for use while the government finalises plans and budgets for permanent buildings.

We will be running our placements in rural Nepal, not necessarily within the Kathmandu Valley and we are currently working with the necessary government departments to finalise where they need us most and the exact projects they want us to work on.

These are group placements and volunteers will be providing unskilled labour to support local skilled labour and community members in such activities as lifting rubble/construction supplies, clearing sites, carpentry, painting, making or laying bricks, mixing cement, securing tin roofing, securing bamboo framing, digging etc – generally mucking in where needed.

This programme is not for the faint hearted as the project(s) you will be working on will be in rural village locations with few amenities. Accommodation during your placement may vary from project to project. Where possible you will be placed with a local host family, where you will both sleep and eat. Where host families are not available, you will live "camping style" in temporary structures made out of corrugated tin sheets, much like those used by locals who lost their homes in the earthquake. In this scenario, supported by a local camp coordinator, you will as a team, be responsible for preparing and cooking your own meals, collecting and purifying water, camp security, health and hygiene etc. All accommodation, regardless of whether with a host family or "camping", will be basic and almost definitely on a shared basis and quite possibly dormitory style.

All registrations for this programme are via GVN in order to allow us to effectively coordinate the logistics behind each group. Registrations are taken on a first come first served basis, filling each group with the minimum number of volunteers required before opening a subsequent group. For further details please either refer to their website www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal/ or contact Fiona Millar at fiona@gvnmail.org.

If this is not your cup of tea, but you still want to support our efforts, why not make a donation to GVN's earthquake appeal on our behalf and help us reach as many rural communities as possible with our Recovery & Rebuild Programme www.gvnfundraising.org/events/nepal-earthquake-appeal/e49173

This is a fantastic opportunity to get down and dirty helping Nepal rebuild its education sector one school, toilet and WASH facility at a time, therefore touching the lives of thousands of children into the future.

And Finally

These last few months have been difficult for everyone on many different levels, but knowing we are supported and not forgotten, despite Nepal having fallen off the newsfeeds has made all the difference.

Thank you all once again for your continued love, support, donations and messages. Together we will help rebuild Nepal one brick at a time.

With love and best wishes
Kate & the VSN Team



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