A Message from Katherine Parker – UMC Missionary in Nepal

Last week I joined two days of meetings discussing the links between domestic violence and trauma with mental health and suicide. We looked at the importance of integrating interventions such as promoting parenting skills, improving school conditions, dialogue directly addressing harmful social norms and engaging men as partners. It was very sobering to review the status of women in Nepal but encouraging to look at how the various interventions we are using can build on each other. A reflection follows.

I am grateful for your support in sending me back to Nepal for the next three years to continue this journey. Our Christmas appeal this year is for funds to support these Mental Health interventions. At the end is also an opportunity for you to help us raise funds by creating a “cause” and promoting it among your friends on social media and by email.

Your sister in service for Christ,
Katherine

Why focus on women’s mental health in Nepal?

One of my first conversations in Nepal six years ago illuminated the issue of the status of women. I learned that even one of our top female staff in the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) cannot go and visit her mother without permission from her in-laws. A 2011 study in rural Nepal on gender-based violence found that three-quarters of women require permission to visit outside the home. Half the women surveyed also reported suffering violence in their lifetime. Last year in Rukum, when we tried to intervene in a case of domestic violence, we were rebuffed by the community with comments that this was normal and not a situation requiring particular intervention (the women also chose to address her situation without our support).

The encouraging end of our conversation was seeing the value of offering interventions at various stages that are promotive for mental health and building coping skills. We discussed how to expand the parenting education program (ICDP) to engage more fathers; we looked at a model to train village-level helpers in specific counseling skills related to domestic violence, and how that might also help in providing listeners to respond to individuals triggered by our broader sensitization activities. It was a great two days of sharing our learning from a range of projects.

I was also excited to see the following video from our work in the Terai (lowlands of Nepal), that highlights another example of how child clubs (like we have been using in Rukum among 12-16 year-olds) are empowering youth leaders to intervene on these issues such as child marriage. In the video, you can hear Kismati’s fear and disappointment with the threat of an early marriage, and the encouragement she felt when her peers intervene on her behalf. I am reminded of Ranjana (see story on page 4), an orphan I’ve worked
with in Rukum who has also been supported through her particular difficulties by her club peers. What an amazing impact these child clubs (youth groups) are making in their communities. I am given hope that through our work together, we can make a difference in the lives of girls like Kismati and Ranjana.

I continue to explore my new responsibilities in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team based in Kathmandu since my return to Nepal two months ago (small dark orange central area). I was able to reconnect with Rukum friends during our Annual Learning Review in October (dark green-purple split location). There have been a lot of changes in UMN and many people have moved from one office to another, so I hosted a gathering at my home with 18 staff and family members who have been part of the Rukum family. This included both current and past staff members and five children. It was a joyous occasion and my attempt at making enchiladas went over quite well.

While I will continue slowly negotiating how I can maintain a strong relationship with a specific field office in my new role (although probably not with Rukum), I am also enjoying being back in Kathmandu for the foreseeable future. It means that I am able to regularly join a bible study with fellow missionaries and get together for other social gatherings. I am finding a bit more balance between work and self-care than I have had recently.

My work permit and visa for Nepal continue to progress slowly and I am hopeful that they will come through soon. But, what was a straightforward process in the past has become much more complicated in recent years. I would appreciate your prayers that I will get my work permit in the next two weeks and I will be able to complete the process before my tourist visa expires next month.

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