

# Kindness in poverty was truly humbling

**TAKING books and children's clothes to a Nepalese village was an experience that changed their lives.**

Valerie and Peter Shepherd, from St Paul's Church, Sarisbury Green, had travelled the world. But nothing prepared them for the beauty of the Himalayas, the kindness of the Nepalese people and the impact of the poverty they saw.

It challenged their faith and made them think afresh about the material prosperity they enjoyed. Now they're planning another trip.

Valerie, 62, said: "It was a very humbling experience. You meet these people who are very spiritual and appear very content, despite their hardship. They also share the little they have with you, and have a quiet dignity.

"It affects everything that you do. You come home and you look at things in your house and think 'I don't need that. Why do we have it?'. I even feel guilty about wasting food and leaving apple peel on my plate, because of all those living in poverty in the world.

"But it was also a very rewarding experience. Between five of us, we took half a ton of supplies, and to see those children jumping up and down because they were so excited was incredible."

They visited Megauli, in the lowland Chitwan district of Nepal, as the guests of Clinic Nepal. The clinic employs four doctors – in gynaecology, paediatrics, psychiatry and orthopaedics – a nurse, lab technician, clinic manager, project manager, two caretakers, a cook and several trainees. One of its main aims is to reduce the infant mortality rate –



**Left: Valerie Shepherd shows clinic staff the clothes and books they've brought; right: Peter Shepherd in the kindergarten**

currently 82 per 1,000 live births – but it also treats many other ailments.

The clinic also runs projects to build wells to provide villagers with safe drinking water, create latrines to prevent the spread of disease, and run kindergartens for children aged from two to five. It has also helped locals, mainly women, set up small businesses such as bee-keeping and tea shops.

The Shepherds became involved through their daughter, Fiona, a naval officer from Southsea who took part in an expedition to climb Everest in 2003. She wanted to return to Nepal and discovered that the Royal Navy was already involved with Clinic Nepal.

"Fiona met Kevin Shore in the navy, whose parents, Peter and Beryl had set up the clinic project," said Valerie. "Fiona asked if we wanted to come and we said yes. We then had three months to put together supplies, and we trawled around various charity shops buying Ladybird books, children's clothes and toys.

"When we got to Megauli, one of the first things we did was to put some of those things in a bag and take them to some of the displaced families living by the river. We went from mud hut to mud hut, finding clothes to fit each child, blowing bubbles and handing out balloons, pencils and toys. They were thrilled as they often only have twigs and leaves to play with. We ended up with 30 children following us!



them with their reading and writing skills. They were also fascinated to see themselves on the digital camera, and to see their faces appearing on Polaroid prints!

"We're still in touch, and hope to visit again. I've already collected 300 Ladybird books this time, which they use to help the children learn English. I've also persuaded my dentist to send out supplies to create a whole dental

would make a real difference to their lives. It's made me more discriminating about which charities to support! But it was a real privilege to see this all happening."

Peter and Valerie's desire to help comes partly from their Christian upbringing. Peter was brought up as an Anglican, and Valerie was a Roman Catholic. They met in Kuwait while both working for BP, and they also visited Canada, Abu Dhabi, Australia and Alaska with work.

But Valerie's faith took a knock when her mother died, and she stayed away from church for several years. It was only when she moved to Sarisbury Green 11 years ago and became involved with a prayer group that she started the healing process.

"My mother and I were very close, and I was angry with God," she admitted. "But Diana Dow, from St Mary's, Alverstoke, helped draw me back to God through a women's prayer group that includes people from a few churches nearby. We meet every week, and have become very close – almost like a sisterhood, really. We support each other if someone's going through a hard time.

"And Sandy Matheson, the vicar at St Paul's, has influenced me to read the Bible every day and join a church house group. We study the text that he's going to preach about on the Sunday."

● Valerie and Peter already have plenty of children's clothes to take to Nepal. But if you have any Ladybird books in good condition to donate, do contact them on 01489-573212. The couple hope to return to Nepal sometime during either 2007 or 2008.

## my faith

**When Valerie and Peter Shepherd offered to take books and clothes to children in a Nepalese village, they had no idea how much the trip would change their lives - and their faith**

"We stayed at the clinic's guest house for three nights. We also went to one of the kindergartens where we handed out the 100 Ladybird books we'd collected. The children learn everything by rote, and these books really help

surgery using a charity called DentAid."

The trip was no less inspirational for Peter, 66, who said: "It's the first time I've been to a Hindu/Buddhist country and was amazed by how happy everybody was. They are very tolerant and the generosity of people with the little they have is very striking.

"The water project and the latrines are especially important because of the problem of waterborne infections. The clinic is providing them with deeper wells, so they don't drink infected water. And their toilets are simple cess pits, which can then be chemically treated and used as fertiliser.

"It convinced me that it would be wrong to bring people out of poverty by imposing some British-style way of life. You wouldn't want to change the way they live, but changing small, simple things

## Clinic was villager Hari's vision

IT was in 1987 that Beryl and Peter Shore got hopelessly lost while back-packing in the Nepalese jungle.

They were rescued by Hari Bhandary, a 13-year-old from the nearby village of Megauli. He invited them to stay overnight in his family home, but refused to accept any payment.

The couple remained friends with him and realised he had a dream - for the village to have its own medical post. The Shores recruited family, friends and colleagues in the scout movement to help them create Clinic Nepal (pictured right), which opened its doors for the first time in 1997.

