



**From: Lion Patrick Hamblin, LCIF Coordinator, District 105D.**

## **Introduction**

This is the third of my newsletters with the aim of giving all members a better understanding of LCIF – our own Charity. This month I would like to let you know how Lions assisted with the Nepal earthquakes, which struck some ten months ago. It is a little long but I urge you to read to see how our organisation and our members responded to a major disaster.

## **Nepal earthquake**

A 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked Nepal last April 25. Two weeks later, another 7.4 magnitude earthquake struck the country, and thousands of aftershocks continued to rattle the region in the following months. This devastating series of earthquakes shook the country's infrastructure and the spirit of the Nepalese people.

Known locally as the "Gorkha" earthquake, it killed more than 9,000 people and injured 23,000. Entire villages were leveled, historic sites were damaged or demolished, and nearly 8 million people were left homeless. Compounding the disaster, landslides and avalanches soon followed, including an avalanche on Mt. Everest. This was the worst natural disaster to hit Nepal in nearly a century. Though experts had warned for decades that Nepal was vulnerable to a deadly earthquake, the country was woefully unprepared.

Right after the first earthquake, Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) awarded a US\$100,000 Major Catastrophe grant to the Lions of Nepal. Major Catastrophe grants provide significant funds for disasters with major international impact and can be used to address both immediate and long-term needs.

More than 1,500 Nepalese Lions were at a district conference when the initial tremors started. These local Lion leaders formed a committee to organize relief efforts, collecting whatever materials they could find. Lions were able to quickly assemble relief kits, which included rice, salt and mattresses. European Lions sent water purification tools, and Indian Lions sent tarps and solar lights. The Lions of Bangladesh sent 7,000 blankets, and the Lions of Gujarat in Pakistan provided 5,000 relief kits. Packing centres were established in Gorkha, Dhading and Nuwakot so the kits could be distributed.

Though many of them were victims themselves, the Lions of Nepal immediately went to work. The Lions quickly realized that the community blood supply was insufficient to keep up with the increasing demand. They organized blood drives, collecting more than 4,000 pints of blood in a single day. The collection quickly surpassed storage capacity at many blood banks.

Within three days, clubs throughout Nepal were engaged in relief operations. Just as materials were running low, more began to arrive. Working together, Lions established additional packing centers at Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, Butwal, Narayanghat, Pokhara, Birganj, Janakpur and Biratnagar. In addition to the rice, salt and mattresses, these centers packed tarps, noodles, blankets and other materials. Teams of Lions distributed more than 17,000 relief kits in the affected areas, serving individuals, families, schools and health centers.

Heavy rains poured down in the days following the earthquake, so the tarps included in the relief kits provided much-needed shelter. Lions built shelters in several communities and even served meals there. Many people were reluctant to re-enter their homes, afraid another earthquake or aftershock could destroy any building that might still be standing; they slept outside in tents and makeshift camps.

With the funds from LCIF and the concentration of Lions in Nepal, gathering supplies was not the most difficult part of the relief operations. The difficulty came in getting the supplies from the packing centers to the victims. Nepal is a mountainous country with many isolated communities, so moving supplies through the rugged terrain presented a serious challenge. Many of the residents had to come down from the mountains to collect their kits. Lions also

used helicopters to deliver supplies to the most remote areas. On the way back to the packing centers, those helicopters transported people who needed medical attention.

"When we reached the places others had not yet reached, the people welcomed us with open arms. It looked like they were smiling for the first time since the quake," says Lion Pankaj Pradhan, a past council chairperson of Multiple District 325. "All of them shared their hardship stories with us. Through their heartbreaking stories, we could see their resilience. They were extremely grateful for our support."

Getting people to load, unload and carry relief supplies proved problematic, so local Lions did most of the work themselves. Lions carried materials on foot to areas that were not accessible to automobiles, working amidst the tremors and aftershocks to ensure that critical supplies made it to the people who needed them. Lions were even working in the area of the second earthquake's epicenter, but the Nepalese Lions continued on, undeterred by the risks to their own safety.

Ten days after the initial tremors, local Lions reached Danuar Basti in the Sidhupalchowk district. Until then, no other relief agencies had reached this remote area.

The Lions saw major destruction when they arrived, with many people wearing the white garments traditionally worn by those mourning the loss of family members. People were huddled under improvised shelters and in dire need of assistance. Lions provided relief kits with tents and blankets, and victims received medical attention at a nearby health camp.

Amidst the ruins, life went on. For some, life was just beginning. Phool Maya Tamang gave birth to a healthy baby girl in the Lions camp. Understanding this precious gift of life, the Lions helped Phool and her baby move to a sturdy shelter where they could safely await a more permanent home.

Shambhu Bahadur Bhandari, 76, had watched helicopters fly over his village, but none came to help. The local Lions club was the first to offer any assistance to his village. He approached the Lions with tears in his eyes, a bag of food in one hand and blanket and tent in the other. He hugged the Lions and expressed his gratitude that his two young grandchildren could eat while he continued searching for food and shelter.

Lions also established health camps, donated medicine to area hospitals and helped with sanitation efforts. They are working closely with the government on plans for reconstruction, which currently include building 1,000 houses and 50 schools, all of which are now required to be resistant to an earthquake.

In total, LCIF mobilized more than US\$5 million for both immediate relief needs and long-term reconstruction efforts. The Lions of Nepal, alongside LCIF, are committed to rebuilding the country and will continue working until the job is done.

Your Club's contributions would of course have assisted with the LCIF funding.

### **Melvin Jones Fellowships (MJFs)**

Please contact me if you have any questions relating to MJFs or difficulties in applying for a MJF.

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