

Smiles Update

Message from the Chair

It was good that Bruce McEwen our Operation Cleft Secretary was able to visit multiple surgical camps across Bangladesh last month. Bruce was joined for 2 days by Rosemary Guyatt of the Rotary Club of Woodend and both observed a surgical camp held at the river city of Barguna in the remote delta region of Bangladesh. These visits were totally self-funded by Bruce and Rosemary. Here are Bruce and Rosemary's stories of these very recent experiences.



Dr Lindsay Mackay, Chair.

From Bruce's travel journal...



My first surgical camp.

I could feel and see the stress, apprehension and maybe it was even fear in the eyes and on the faces of the young mums as they held their babies so tightly, waiting their turn to hand their baby over for surgery. This was obviously a new and traumatic experience for each of these young mums. It was also a very new experience for me to be there at my first live surgical camp and witness first hand this unfolding tension. For this was my first visit to Bangladesh to observe and monitor our amazing 13-year-old free cleft lip and palate program.

It's been 5 years since I first joined the Operation Cleft Australia board and over that time it's been too easy to just focus on the numbers, the operations complet

ed, dollars, reports, fundraising issues and budgets. But now through observing the surgeons and staff doing their unbelievably skilled work at seven camps over two weeks it's now become much more personal. It's about people with feelings just like me; about young babies and small children and their loving mums and dads.

These families are far too poor to afford surgery for their children, so after hearing about Operation Cleft they were eager to take up the opportunity to receive free life changing surgery and new hope for their child. As I watched the pre-op preparations, the anesthetic applied and the skilled surgeons beginning to do what appeared to me to be impossible surgery, it all became very real and personal for me too, each family with their own story of hope for a child born with a cleft lip and or palate, a child they obviously loved so deeply.

Post Operation - What a contrast!



To be there after the surgery and see the same mums' and dads' faces, following the handover of their child after surgery is an experience I'll not forget.

The contrast was indescribable. The pre-op stress and worry now replaced with joy and happiness. Mums now holding their babies so tightly, already their appearance so transformed that some mums are known to find it hard to believe that this was even their child! When in Sylhet in northern Bangladesh while one mum was holding her baby and looking intently at her little girl's restored face, surgeon Professor Siddiky took time out to explain to me the surgery process and the complexities involved for this little girl. I asked the Doctor if he could ask the Mum in her native Bangla tongue about what this operation means for her and her baby? The mum hearing the question in Bangla, hugged her little girl even more tightly and with tears flowing down her face, came back to me with, "This means everything for my baby, and for our family, my baby now has a future and a life". "I'm so happy and thankful".

Aussie appreciation expressed!

What impressed me most was that across the seven centers visited the same very strong and consistent message was expressed. Thanks to the Australians, Operation Cleft and Rotary supporters for the care and love, for the long term big hearted consistent and generous support for our people. This message was repeated from Hospital Directors, the Bangladeshi surgeons, local Rotary Clubs and the many mums, dads and families of the children after the completion of their child's surgery.

Bruce's story continues overleaf...

What I also found was that not all of our cleft lip and palate patients are young babies and children. I met one post-operative patient, a lovely young man who had just undergone a complex 4-hour palate surgery, he was 18 years old, and deeply appreciative of the efforts of all concerned.

Thank you for your part in making these surgical miracles possible.

As I visited clinics in Dhaka, Chittagong, Patiya, Cox Bazar, Sylhet, Barguna and

Rajshahi, the message was the same. Thanks for the service you provide to our children. You are very generous and making a very big difference for us. To you our Aussie supporters and donors I pass on to you the deep gratitude and thanks expressed by our very many friends we have now made over 13 years across Bangladesh.

Without your on-going faithful support this life changing surgery for the children of Bangladesh would not continue. Thanks also to our supporting partners

in Bangladesh, Far East Knitting and Dyeing Mills and their Associates who continue to partner with Operation Cleft Australia to ensure the work of giving hope and a new life to children in Bangladesh continues to grow and flourish.

Bruce McEwen
Secretary,

Operation Cleft Australia Foundation.

Rosemary's trip to Bangladesh.

March 2018

The Rotary Club of Woodend raises money every week through its egg auction to fund cleft lip/palate operations in Bangladesh. Local member, Rosemary Guyatt shares her personal experience of visiting the camps on her recent trip to Bangladesh.

'I can't honestly say that Bangladesh was on the top of my travel "bucket list" but a few things coincided this year and the next thing I know, I was invited to attend a Human Resources conference in Dhaka and at the same time I was also learning more about Operation Cleft and the surgical camps that are conducted around often remote, regional areas of Bangladesh. Being a highly populated and a very poor country, many children born with cleft palate/lip don't have the access to surgery that resolves this condition. In wealthier countries, this surgery would be undertaken at a young age and the cleft palate/lip is repaired to become barely visible. Operation Cleft in Bangladesh is made possible by the humanitarian project of the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central, supported by other Rotary Clubs around Victoria.'

The Woodend connection

The good people of Woodend have been contributing to Operation Cleft over the past 6 years. If you have ever attended a



Woodend club meeting, you would be aware that every Thursday night, there is an egg auction that involves a dozen local eggs (mostly free range), lots of small change and an auctioneer. At each auction, anything between \$60 - \$100 is raised to buy the dozen eggs which in turn contributes directly to Operation Cleft.

With each operation costing approx. AUD\$300, the Operation Cleft Australia Foundation has raised enough money for some 11,600 operations over the last 13 years, all conducted by top Bangladeshi plastic surgeons. The before and after surgery photos of young children requiring cleft surgery are inspiring. These children's' (and their families') lives are transformed through this surgery. Their wide smiles are amazing and provide hope of a much brighter future with the prospect of better health, education, social inclusion and employment.



Every smile says a story...

November 2017

Another member of Rotary Club of Box Hill Central, Mark Balla visited Bangladesh in October last year to visit operation camps and also to meet and greet the families and the recipient children.

Commenting on his experience Mark added that *'Meeting the children who were waiting for surgery and those who had already undergone surgery in previous months was an experience I will never forget. The parents of those awaiting surgery arrived with looks of hope in their eyes, clearly concerned about the uncertainty of what was to come but excited about how the lives of their children were about to change forever.'*

Meeting those who had previously undergone surgery was a truly emotional experience. I spoke with one little girl and her uncle. They had travelled from a remote village to meet the Operation Cleft team. She had gone to some effort to dress up for us and when I told her how pretty she looked with her hair in a bow, she truly beamed from ear to ear. It was all I could do not to cry as her uncle told me how she had become so confident and happy since her surgery.'



For \$25 per month for a year, you can provide a free cleft lip /palate operation to an underprivileged child in Bangladesh. AUD \$300 is all that it costs to transform a life and give a chance for a better future!

Rotary Club of Bendigo Golf Night

March, 2018

The Rotary Club of Bendigo ran their 10th golf event in support of Operation Cleft Australia in March with over 85 golfers enjoying a night with a difference. With 22 teams playing with glow in the dark golf balls there was laughter heard right across the course, and raising \$10,000 for Operation Cleft in the process!

The golf night co-ordinator Rotarian Glenn Reilly said "it cost each team 'one operation' to play so for a really fun night of night golf they get to also change a life. This year's winning team was led by Rotarian Ian Coates and his team who have been long time supporters of our event. The number of teams that play repeatedly over the years is testament to the night golf concept and the Operation Cleft project." Over the 10 year history of the event the Rotary Club of Bendigo has contributed over \$90,000 to Operation Cleft which has changed over 350 lives.



Whitehorse Leader featuring Operation Cleft Australia!

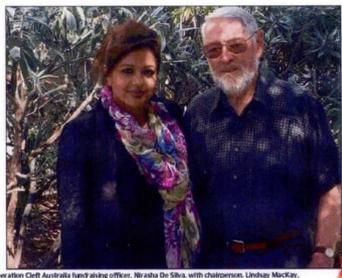
Our local newspaper Whitehorse Leader ran an article and an interview on OCA's 11,000+ operations milestone on their 12 March edition. Our Chair, Lindsay Mackay, and Fundraising Officer, Nirasha Silva were present at the interview conducted by Reporter, Samantha Dick.



Kids get a new lease on life

Club provides free surgeries to children with cleft palates

Samantha Dick
 MORE than 11,000 Bangladeshi children have received life-changing surgery thanks to an international project launched by the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central.
 Launched in 2005, Operation Cleft Australia provides free surgeries in Bangladesh to children born with a congenital birth condition that causes a cleft lip or cleft palate.
 Group chairman and Deakin University Professor Lindsay Mackay said he was thrilled by the group's milestone event.
 "Every individual operation makes a real difference," he said.
 "The before and after photographs just blow your mind." More than 8000 children are born with a cleft lip or cleft palate in Bangladesh each year.
 Mr Mackay explained that the cleft repair surgery not only helps to alleviate feeding difficulties and infections, but also improves the social lives of children suffering the condition.
 "It's a genetic condition that happens all over the world... but in Bangladesh the mother and child are ostracised from the community," he said.
 "There is a superstition that the mother must've done something in full moon which led to the condition."
 "We see a massive improvement in kids' social development after the operation, giving them the chance to fulfil their potential." An operation costs \$300 and is performed by surgeons in selected hospitals in Bangladesh.
 Mr Mackay said low-income families in Bangladesh could spend an entire annual income on just one operation.
 "They have to choose to either live for a year feeling the kids, or repair the cleft," he said.
 "Thanks to the Rotary Club of Box Hill Central and the generosity of sponsors, Operation Cleft Australia is on its way to reaching its goal of 1000 cleft operations each year."
 To donate, visit operationscleft.org.au



Operation Cleft Australia fundraising officers, Nirasha De Silva, with Chairperson, Lindsay Mackay.

District 9810 District Conference 2018 in Bendigo

Operation Cleft Australia participated at the District 9810 District Conference in Bendigo which was held from 2-4 March 2018 at the Ulumbarra Theatre (the former Bendigo Gaol).



OCA had a booth at the Expo which provided an opportunity to promote the project to delegates from Clubs throughout the District.

OCA Kiosk at Forest Hill Chase Shopping Centre

Four days in late April and early May, OCA had the opportunity to have our charity's presence at our local shopping centre. It was a brand new experience for all of us creating awareness in the local community. Our heartiest thanks go to all the volunteers who helped man the kiosk; Bernie Millane, Tony & Robyn Stokes, Kevin Dobson, Lindsay Mackay and Don Sweeney.



Global Fiesta - City of Whitehorse

Operation Cleft Australia participated at the Global Fiesta organised by City of Whitehorse at Box Hill Gardens on the 18th March.

The colourful event was organised to celebrate the diverse Box Hill city.



Family Wedding, Anniversary or a Birthday coming up? Many of our supporters take donations to OCA in lieu of presents, so together they can transform the lives of underprivileged kids in Bangladesh. Please let us know if you are planning to raise funds while celebrating your life event!

