

Heart of Asia

Compassion in Action

Issue no 1. January 2006

Heart of Asia

*Bringing Healthcare
To the Nomadic
Peoples of Tibet*

Heart of Asia's goal is to work with the local population to create a long-term, sustainable healthcare network which respects local culture and traditions and suits the environmentally challenging conditions in the remote mountain areas of Dru gu near to Chamdo, and Dzongsar near to Derge, in Kahm, Eastern Tibet.

Working in partnership with respected local health practitioners and development workers, Heart of Asia aims to empower local men and women with basic hygiene, nutrition, maternity and child healthcare skills to create a network of barefoot health workers in these communities.



See <http://www.heartofasia.org>

Tibet : Land of the Snows



Tibet is well known as a "land of snows," having the youngest and therefore some of the highest mountains on earth. It has a landscape of awe-inspiring beauty with an average altitude of 14,000 feet and an extreme and savage climate. It takes a tough and resilient people to flourish in these conditions.

These people are nomads, semi-nomads and farmers who for centuries have lived in harmony with their environment and the seasons. Their livelihood depends heavily upon the vagaries of nature and a barter economy. Recent decades have seen major social changes which have greatly affected their lives but have not improved their monetary situation or contributed to improved healthcare. The Chinese government is focusing its healthcare resources in urban areas where it is only available to those who can afford to pay for it. More than eighty percent of Tibetans live in remote and often very inaccessible rural and nomadic areas.

There is little healthcare within these communities and no modern medicine at all.

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Healthcare for mothers and children

In Dru gu just two doctors practising Tibetan herbal medicine have the impossible task of serving a nomadic population of 7,000 people that is scattered over 7 valleys. It may take as long as two days on a mule or yak crossing difficult terrain for a patient to reach the doctors, that is if they are well enough to travel. Women in difficult childbirth do not have this option. And many die. *"The level of maternal and infant mortality in Tibet is so high that it can be classed as one of the least developed regions on earth."* (Tibet Information Network). There is also a high rate of miscarriage, a lack of pre-and ante-natal care, a very low rate of breast-feeding and pressure on women to return to work prematurely.



**2004/2005:
The Work So Far.....**

Following two fact-finding trips to Dzongsar/Meshu area in Kham by Diane Barker (photographer) and Oga Thingo (Tibetan field worker for German charity Misericordia) in 2001 and 2002, Youdon Lhamo undertook a research and training visit in 2004. Youdon is a UK trained nurse, midwife and health visitor, born in Kham and therefore able to speak the local dialect. She identified areas of need and produced a detailed report (see *Birth and Loss in Dzongsar Area* www.heartofasia.org). Whilst there, Youdon initiated a pilot training course in consultation with our local partner, Dr. Lodre Phuntsok , a highly respected practitioner of Tibetan herbal medicine. Dr Lodre has already established a clinic for herbal medicine in Dzongsar and is in the process of extending this to include allopathic medicine.

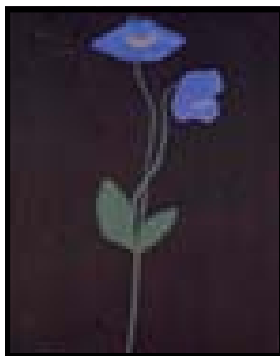
Youdon worked with ten trainees from local communities, selected by Dr Lodre. Her training course covered basic hygiene, pre and post natal care and infant health and nutrition. Heart of Asia is very grateful to Youdon (and her husband David Burgess) for generously donating not only her time but also her travel, expenses and expertise.



In August and September 2005, Frances Howland, respected and well qualified healthcare consultant based in Kathmandu, brought her extensive experience of working in Tibet with the Swiss Red Cross community based health

promotion, to a course with the same ten trainees in Dr. Lodre's clinic. Frances's ten day course covered hygiene and the prevention of infectious disease, reproduction and pregnancy, family planning, pre and post natal care, safe delivery practice, breast feeding and nutrition. Frances was able to provide Heart of Asia trainees with illustrated manuals and posters and other training aids including a VCD (developed by NGO *One Heart*) of various emergency scenarios enacted by Tibetans, and a model baby with umbilical cord and placenta. (see *Health Care Consultant's Report for Heart of Asia* www.heartofasia.org).

We are immensely grateful to our donors, particularly the Golden Sufi Center (www.goldensufi.org) and painter Jo Self.



Himalayan Poppy. The painting donated to Heart of Asia by Jo Self. See www.redfern-gallery.co.uk Jo's exhibition Paintings from the Private Garden of His Holiness XIVth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, Dharamsala, Northern India, runs at the Redfern Gallery until 26th January.

**2006
The Future.....**

The telephone has arrived in Dzongsar and works – intermittently! Youdon will soon be in regular contact with our partners in Tibet.

Youdon is planning a return trip in August/September to evaluate the training so far, to visit the communities covered and to see the trainees put their newfound skills into

practice. At the same time, she will provide a very basic travelling clinic. Each trainee will be provided with a birthing pack. The visit will again be fact-finding – to discover local sources for equipment, to investigate setting up a basic infant vaccination programme, and to establish locally viable methods of maintaining hygienic conditions. Diane Barker will accompany Youdon, documenting the trip and creating a training video to be used locally.

Firm foundations

Heart of Asia is growing slowly and organically trying to ensure that we work in harmony with the local people, building trust and co-operation, so that our community based healthcare development has a long-term future.

Chronology of Events

2001 July/August

Fact finding trip to Dzongsar/Meshu area (Diane Barker and Oga Thingo)

2002 Sept/Oct

Fact finding trip to Dzongsar/Meshu area (Diane and Oga).

2003 Sept/Oct

Heart of Asia founded

2004 June/July

Research trip to Dzongsar/Meshu area by Youdon Lhamo and David Burgess. Report produced see www.heartofasia.org. First training course undertaken informally.

2005 September
First formal 10 day training programme given by Frances Howland at Dr. Lodre's clinic.

