

“Classrooms in the Clouds”



*This is a brief note of the talk given prior to the regular Forum agenda on 13th November 2018. We welcomed **Anthony McCarthy**, local fire fighter with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, to hear about his volunteer work in Nepal.*

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service first came into contact with the charity “Classrooms in the Clouds” when Mark Cashin, then Deputy Chief Fire Officer, went to an evening talk on “Work across the World” with a view to how the Service could get involved in a charity. The lady speaking was a trustee of Classrooms in the Clouds. In 2015, £20T was raised by that charity to build schools in Nepal and the Service offered to help out with the refurbishment. Anthony has now been out twice with fire cadets to these very remote schools in Nepal.

Nepal is the poorest country in Asia and ranks as the 12th poorest country in the world. There has been a decrease in poverty in urban areas but not in rural areas – at present in urban areas the figure is 10% and in rural areas 25%. 4/5 of the population live in rural areas and depend on subsistence farming for their livelihoods.

In these areas most households have little or no access to health care, education, clean drinking water or sanitation facilities. Therefore many families are forced to send their children out to work rather than school.

This is an example of a typical classroom in a rural school. The classrooms are very basic with a distinct lack of teaching materials. Many children leave school early especially girls when they reach puberty as they simply won't or can't go to school during their periods due to the lack of adequate facilities.



These children need better schools with decent facilities and better trained teachers that will encourage children to attend school on a regular basis.

This is where “Classrooms in the Clouds” comes in. Its founder is Dewa Sherpa. He himself can read and write unlike all the other Sherpas who cannot. Because of this the Sherpas become porters and guides as a means of earning a livelihood. Dewa was determined that his own 3 children would have a better life through education and so he sent them to schools in Kathmandu. Realising that this was not ideal he set about raising money through a charity fund to build schools in the remote rural areas.



Here is one of the schools nearing completion - the building had already been constructed when Anthony and the Fire Service cadets arrived but it was all hands on deck with paint brushes and shovels to get the school ready for the official handover. And then there was a great celebration! The schools used to cost £70T to build but this has risen to £120T as buildings now have to be earthquake proof as a result of the devastating earthquake of 2015. And then there was a great celebration!

Kharikhola early years classrooms



In 2017, £90T was raised to build this Early Years Centre. This was built by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service apprentices.

Anthony is going back in 2019 to help build a new Early Years Centre – which will now cost £200T.

By building these schools, the children of Nepal in these very remote, poor areas will have the chance of a better future



Q and A session:

How is the money raised? By Cheshire schools, sponsored walks, Just Giving page

Do the Nepalese children have to walk long distances to get to school? Some as much as 5 miles and often over difficult terrain

How much does the Nepalese Government put into education? Anthony not sure of figures but certainly is improving although somewhat haphazard.

Is it hard to get teaching staff? The answer is yes particularly because women are expected to stay at home and run the house stead. Again the situation is improving. Classrooms in the Clouds are actively encouraging more women teachers

Does improved education mean that youngsters move away? Not necessarily. Some do but being educated can often help to improve farming techniques.

How much did the cadets build? The building is done in advance – the painting is done by the cadets.

What are fire fighting facilities like? As far as Anthony aware just 1 fire station in Kathmandu

What about sustainable development – will Nepalese be skilled enough to build own school? Possibly but they're not always built properly and safely at present.

Who maintains the schools? – The local people.

Do the pupils learn another language? Yes - English

Is there an exam system? Yes but very few go on to higher education. There is evidence to show that girls staying in school longer now as a result of improved toilet facilities.

HS asked about having local link with schools in Nepal. "Connecting Schools" is a programme in this country, so it might be worth setting up a link following the building of another school.

Further information on the charity: www.classroomsintheclouds.org