

2011 Manakamana Scholarships Field Report

Namaste friends of Manakamana Scholarships,

This past March Geeta and Pam were finally able to get to west Nepal to visit two schools where we have been supporting ANM (Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife) and CMA (Certified Medical Assistant) students for many years. We flew to Nepalgunj, the hub for the western region, and then drove 6 hours west to Mahendranagar, the westernmost town in Nepal. There we visited the Institute of Community Health and talked with three current scholarship recipients, who are all from nearby villages, so they can live at home and ride their bikes to the campus, a pleasant green compound at the edge of town. The classrooms are bright and freshly painted.



ICH, Mahendranagar

Janaki Jagire was just finishing her ANM degree, doing her 3-month OJT (on the job training), half at a village health post and half at the Mahendranagar government hospital. She said that tuberculosis and pneumonia are the most common serious illnesses she saw at the health post, and that childbirth and immunizations are the main work there.



Janaki Jagire

Meena Lekhak Bhatta had to overcome unusual adversity to get her ANM degree: her husband, a police officer, was killed during the Maoist insurgency, leaving her with a young son. She returned to her parents' home because her in-laws refused to help her and opposed her desire to study. Meena is quietly self-confident, and looks forward to being able to support herself and her son.



Meena Lekhak Bhatta

Janaki Paneru started her CMA degree in September 2010. She is from a remote village in Dadeldhura in the far western hills, but is now living in Mahendranagar with her husband and her in-laws, as is the custom in Nepal. Her in-laws didn't want her to study, because they believe it is shameful for a daughter-in-law to work outside the home, but Janaki's husband supported her desire to study, and she will finish her degree in November.



Janaki Paneru

The next day we visited the Center for Integrated Community Development in Dhangadhi, a CMA/ANM school where the Manakamana Fund has supported 22 students since 2005. CICD was founded 12 years ago by a group of local citizens who felt that it was important to have local healthcare practitioners—because Dhangadhi is right on the border with India, most people used to go across the border for healthcare and most healthcare workers were trained in India. The school has its own land and one building, and a new building is under construction. We were welcomed with flowers and tikas and speeches.



CICD, Dhangadhi

We were impressed by the number of female teachers and administrators and by the spirit and dedication of everyone at the school. Charts in the office show the pass rates for the last four years (last year 31 out of 40 ANM students passed, 20 of them in 1st division and 11 in 2nd division) and the caste breakdown of the students (8 Brahmin, 23 Chhetri, 8 Janajati and 1 Dalit).



Devika Shaha, Devika Bhandari (Senior Nurse), Raksha Rai (ANM Coordinator), Sarita Chaudhary (Geeta in back)

Devika Shaha is from a small, remote village in Accham, a district in the far western hills that was particularly hard hit by the Maoist conflict. Her family is so poor that she was unable to complete the application process and entrance exam the first year, but she applied again and was accepted on her second try. She will complete her ANM degree in February 2012.

Sarita Chaudhary is Tharu, a caste that has had very few females achieving higher education until recently. She cried as she told us her story: married at 18, she had a child who died because, “I didn’t know anything or have anyone to ask about his illness.” She now has a 4-year-old son, and her goal is to help women in her community to understand basic healthcare, and to realize that they can access health posts and hospitals when they need to.

As always, thank you for your continuing generosity, which changes the lives of 40+ young Nepali women every year. We had more applicants than ever this year, and the new recipients are in the process of getting admission to schools and opening bank accounts so that they can receive funds from us 4 times per year.