



No Child Left Behind

BY
EDWARD
GUNAWAN

NEITHER TREACHEROUS TERRAIN NOR TERRORIST THREATS WILL PREVENT WEST HOLLYWOOD'S DR. MIKE CARRAGHER FROM BUILDING A CLINIC IN IMPOVERISHED INDIA.

DR. MIKE CARRAGHER makes saving the world look easy. A board-certified Osteopathic physician who heads The Body Well wellness clinic in West Hollywood, Carragher (or Dr. Mike, as his patients call him) has just completed three humanitarian medical relief missions to the remote Himalayan mountains of India with Amrit Davaa World Health—a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide sustainable humanitarian aid, health and wellness education and healthcare for children and families in need.

Volunteering as a physician to provide free medical care to the 140 children of the Manjushree Vidyapith Orphanage—many with malnutrition, disease and physical handicaps—Carragher takes the dangerous and arduous endeavor, replete with two-day treacherous mountain trek and terrorist bomb attacks, in stride and with good humor to spare.

The remote city of Tawang—where the orphanage is located—sits in a tumultuous, politically contested region of former Tibet. Getting there is a challenge all by itself.

“The flight to Delhi, India, takes 24 hours,” Carragher explains, “We fly for three more hours to the city of Guwahati in northeastern India.” But that is barely half the journey. Carragher continues with a laugh, “Then we drive for two days up the mountain road.”

The treacherous trek has not deterred him yet, nor has the constant threat of terrorist bomb attacks.

During his second trip, while on a stop over at Guwahati, Carragher decided to change his travel plans at the last minute and narrowly escaped a bomb explosion.

“I was already by the strip mall where I wanted to buy batteries for my digital camera. I didn't want to leave my bags in the car, so I instructed the cab driver to drive me to the hotel first. Forty-five seconds later, as we were driving away, an explosion went off in the mall where the camera shop was,” Carragher recalls. As it turned out, the bombing was part of a synchronized terrorist attack in the Assam region, which left 80 people dead and more than 200 injured that day.

It's the kids that make the risk worthwhile. “There are 70 kids in each room. Two to three in a bed, with no heat. And this was above 10,000 feet in the mountains, where it gets freezing cold in the winter,” Carragher says. The doctors taught them how to clean up their trash so that it does not run off onto their crops and even things as simple as properly brushing and flossing their teeth.

In addition to providing vaccinations, treating the orphans for dysentery, providing protein powder to combat malnutrition and growth retardation, the group also installed clean water filters and solar showers for the

children to have hot showers during winter.

Carragher reveals, “What's compelling is just how spirited they are with as little as they have. It's that spirit that keeps me going.”

After graduating from Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona and completing his osteopathic residency, he opened the Body Well in 2007 with the vision of providing a wellness center that emphasizes holistic and preventative treatments. Gathering a group of like-minded practitioners that range from a nutritionist and psychotherapists to a Chinese medicine doctor and acupuncturist, Carragher also built a physical therapy department that provides functional-based rehabilitation, massage and pilates.

It was around the same time that he opened the Body Well that he reconnected with his former chief resident at the Downey Regional Medical Center, Natalie Nevins, who had then just co-founded Amrit Davaa with Hollywood director-producer Debra Bergman.

Carragher volunteered his service promptly. And two humanitarian trips later, the physician is now helping Amrit Davaa raise \$210,000 to build a 7,000-square-foot eco-friendly infirmary and clinic to serve the children at the orphanage and the 20,000 people in the region with the assistance of Architects Without Borders.

“The plan is for the clinic to be sustainable, staffed by locals from the region. The problem is not that there are no local doctors. But they don't have the necessary supplies and equipment, something as simple as a stethoscope. We are simply helping them by building the clinic and providing the supplies,” Carragher says.

Despite the challenges, Carragher plans to return to Manjushree twice a year until the completion of the project.

“Being there really serves as a good reminder why I went to medicine in the first place,” he offers. “And it really taught me to appreciate what I have and how much I can do to make a difference.”

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