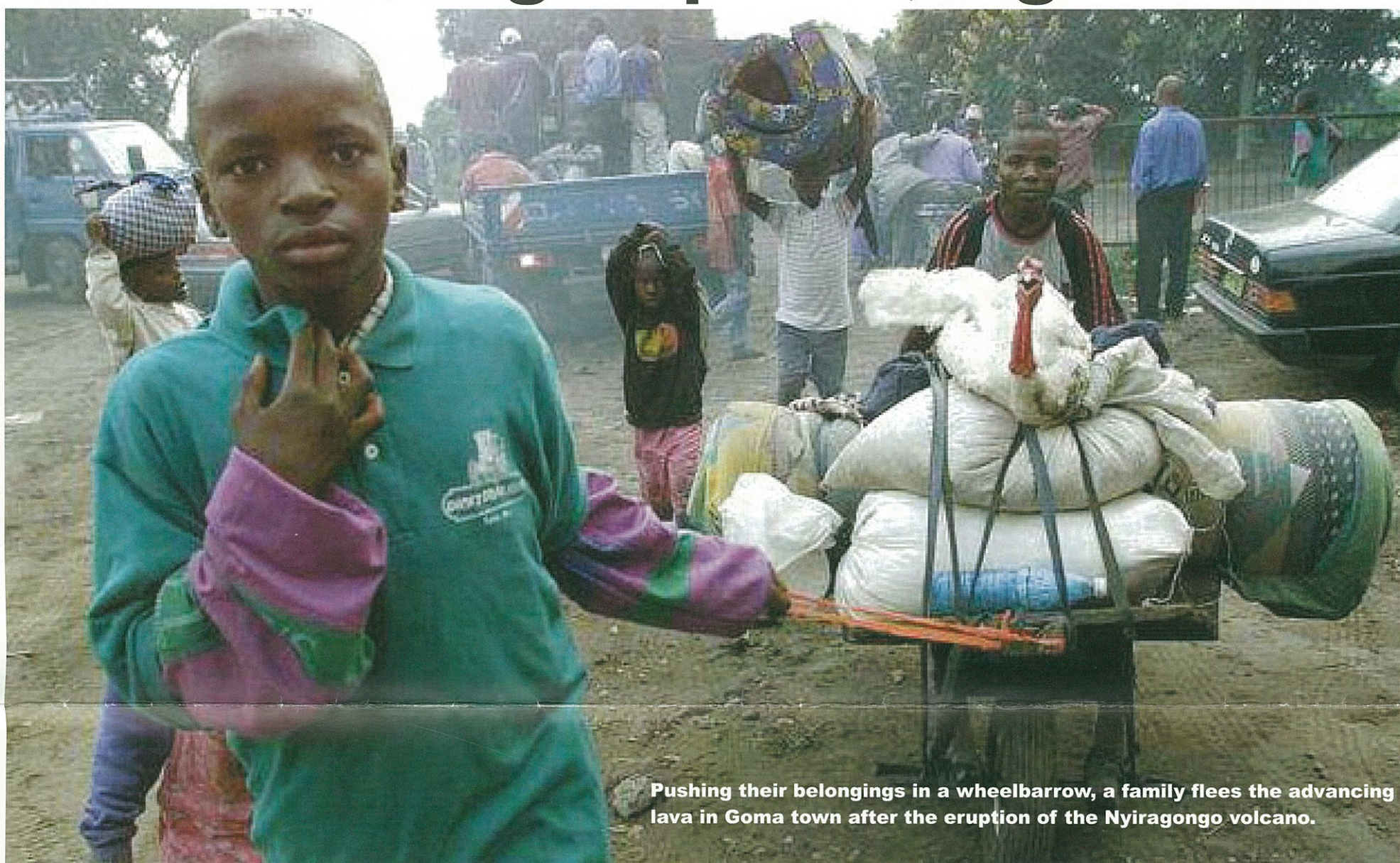


Merlin – ‘right’ place, right time



Pushing their belongings in a wheelbarrow, a family flees the advancing lava in Goma town after the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano.

Photo by GEORGE MULALA/REUTERS supplied by AlertNet (www.alertnet.org), the Reuters Foundation website for the disaster relief community.

The eruption on 17 January of Mount Nyiragongo, near Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, has created a massive health emergency for over 400,000 people. Merlin was working in Goma at the time the earthquake struck and has been responding ever since in co-operation with local people and international agencies.

Large numbers of people fled the town and headed towards the Rwandan border where Merlin set up the first temporary health clinic, within 48 hours of the eruption, to treat the fleeing people. Merlin set up the first mobile emergency clinic in the East of the town and nurses saw over 600 patients in its first day. Merlin's immediate response was to provide health care assistance

via these two mobile clinics concentrating on infectious diseases, infections, burns and other untreated common diseases.

Since opening the first clinic on Sunday morning the team have been giving support to eight Ministry of Health centres throughout Goma as well as one of the main hospitals.

Two hospitals in Goma were destroyed and the priority for Merlin is to ensure that the health centres can be the first call for medical aid and the shift in focus can move from emergency clinics to sustainable health care. Merlin has been providing healthcare assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1994, for refugees and displaced people that have suffered from conflict in the region.

To help deal with the crisis Merlin sent out an emergency team of seven consisting of both Medical and Logistical staff, as well as recruiting nurses from Goma to help administer health care in the area and drafting in members of Merlin teams in the surrounding countries. We now have over 110 national

and international staff on the ground.

The following is a personal account of events by Dismas Masirika Chirhakarhula one of Merlin's national staff who is a member of the team in Goma.

"When I was told of a possible eruption from Mount Nyiragongo my initial reaction was to have a look towards the volcano. The whole sky around it was very gray and dark. As the activity started to grow I was really afraid and said to my friend Selemani: "This is going to be terrible".

We first rang Bernard the Merlin country manager for the EDRC. He will tell you that my voice was broken when telling him what was going on and describing what I could see. I rang some friends to inform them then I dashed home where I spoke to my family and my neighbors begging them to be prudent.

Immediately I evacuated my family. I asked them to go further into the town while I stayed at home watching over things. When I realised I couldn't do anything, I went to join them but I could not find them. Finally I decided to cross the border to Gisenyi, Rwanda, where I found them among thousands of others who had fled Goma. My wife and I then decided to move on to Bukavu where we are both originally from.

I went back to Goma as I wanted to check on my property. My house had been destroyed. When I discovered this I went quiet, it was horrible. It took about three hours to work out the full extent of the damage. But that is God's will, what can we do against it?

It is difficult carrying on working because people are not in good spirits. I believe that I cannot concentrate on getting my own life back in order without working and without working hard. Merlin is an opportunity for me to do this. My friends and family are trying to stay happy. They think that God is still with me because of the work I am doing.

Merlin is still giving us much support. For me this is the first experience of losing everything and having to go on with life and rebuild. This is an opportunity for me to thank Merlin and especially all of Merlin's donors."



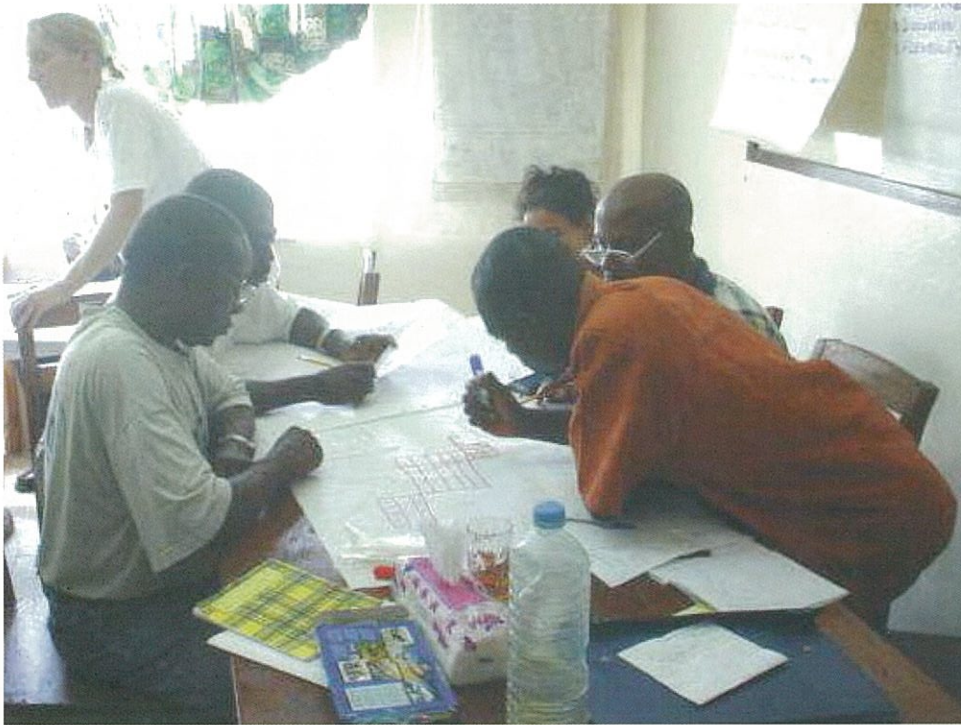
NEW CEO FOR MERLIN

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome Geoff Prescott as the new Chief Executive of Merlin. Geoff has a long history with Médecins Sans Frontières from 1990 to 2001, and we look forward to his leadership.



Get back to where you once belonged

Richard Corbett revisits Sierra Leone, where he spent time as a Merlin volunteer, to run a management training course.



A group engrossed with Project Cycle Management

"5,6,7,8 and left 1,2....." as the sweat dripped from my brow I started to wonder how I had been persuaded to join in the Merlin team's weekly keep fit session. I began to recall the previous time I had been with Merlin in Kenema (Sierra Leone) three years earlier. The room used as a temporary gym is now a living room. Previously it had been an office, and the last time I was in it, an improvised emergency first aid post, where gunshot victims were being treated on office tables. Now I was running on the spot and punching the air in time to a video, things had certainly changed. This was my journey back.

I worked in the field for Merlin from 1996-1998, not only in Sierra Leone but also in Afghanistan, Southern Sudan and Liberia. I returned to the UK to complete a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) at Cranfield School of Management and since graduating have been providing management training for charities.

My role on this visit was to introduce Project Cycle Management (PCM). A systematic method of planning that enables lessons to be learnt from previous projects to ensure best value for money is gained. This provided me with a personal bonus, as I would be able to visit two programmes in Sierra Leone and Liberia where I had previously worked and so catch up with many old friends.

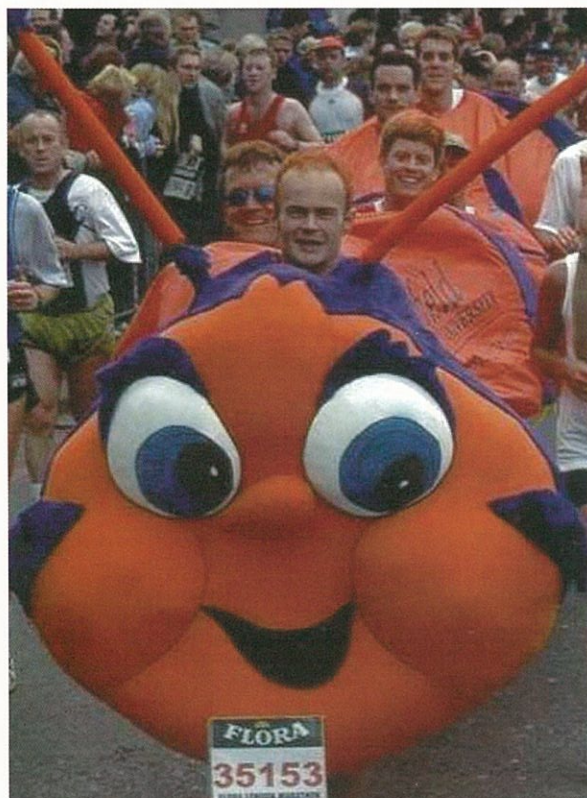
A key element of the training was to carry it out in Africa, allowing the maximum possible number of national staff to attend, aiding the sustainability and development of current and future programmes.

I have a special interest in ensuring that Merlin's funds are well spent as I have been continuing to support the organisation in recent years by fundraising. The Centipede Alumni Marathon team; the current record holders in the 'six man joined costume' are again going to run in aid of Merlin in this year's London marathon.

My journey back to both Liberia and Sierra Leone proved to me that every minute my friends and I have spent pounding the pavements and raising money has been more than worth it. I walked away from a shattered town and a defunct programme. Yet the spirit of the Sierra Leonian staff meant they just got up and started again. Now Kenema feels secure and the Merlin programme has been rebuilt and developed.

Many things had changed on my journey back but one thing that remained unaltered was the spirit of the Merlin staff who continue to show great energy, enthusiasm and hope for the future.

If you would like to sponsor Richard's marathon team please visit their website at www.travellingtoad.com. where you can help raise money just by making a few clicks.



Richard gets a head start in the London Marathon

Story From a Russian Prison

"I took the blame for my friend, he died a month later"

The following is the story, in his own words, of Bashlykov one of the many prisoners who benefit from Merlin's program to combat the problem of Tuberculosis in Russia's prisons.

For the last seven years Merlin has been involved in the control of the massive outbreak of TB which has affected post-Soviet Russia and many other parts of the world.

Work has been done in Tomsk and Siberia with both civilians and prisoners.

My name is Bashlykov Alexey Vladimirovich, I was born on 18 December 1974 in Korolev in Moscow Oblast.

I had a happy childhood. My parents doted on me. My father spent a lot of time with me and taught me to work. He had a hard life when he was a child and I think he wished the best for me. I was an independent child and I studied well at school. In 1984 my younger brother was born. I had enough time to study, look after my brother and go shopping. My parents worked hard so I always helped. It was difficult time in the country and unfortunately my father started to drink and because of this we had rows. I managed not to leave home and played sport, this helped me not to be nervous.

After high school I studied at agricultural professional school and graduated with top marks. I was going to enter the Institute but according to Yeltsin's new edict I went into the Army and was taken to Chechnya where I was hospitalized and suffered psychological shock.

I wanted to go back to the war and I could not adjust to a new life for a long time. I struggled, but managed not to drink or smoke and in a year I forgot about the war and adapted to a peaceful life. I worked in a leading firm in Moscow in the department of advertising and delivery and earned good money. I met a girl and we lived together for a year until we split up because I found out that she used drugs.

In 1998 because of economic crisis I was fired. Then I tried different work but there I could not succeed. In September 1990 I was imprisoned when I took the blame for a friend. I did it because he had always been a real friend to me, he died a month later.

Now I wish that he was imprisoned and still alive. I am in prison when I could have had a promising future instead I became ill with TB and one year ago I was detected with HIV. I think I contracted it from the girl I lived with.

I thought about this life a lot but the most important thing is that I do not despair. When I am released I will find employment. I am in good tune for future life. I do not know or care how long I will live. The most important thing is that people should remember me.

"An Empty Bag Cannot Stand"

Dorcas, Merlin's cook in Freetown, Sierra Leone, understands the importance of a good feed.



Dorcas showing off her latest treat

I've found the above title to be true as a cook with Merlin. My 'office' (the kitchen) is one of the most important in Merlin. It is one which cannot easily be ignored.

Expatriates who come to work here can prove me right. They visit my office first thing in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening in order to "put something in the bag" which when empty cannot stand. Once the "bag is full", they are ready to carryout Merlin duties effectively.

Being a cook at Merlin has been a challenge. For one thing, the expatriates are of different nationalities and backgrounds and therefore have different tastes. Some are vegetarians, some don't mind African dishes, while others cannot eat at all. So there are times when it seems a little difficult, but I always make sure I satisfy their taste at the end of the day.

How happy I feel when they return after each meal to say: "Thank you

Dorcas" which means they appreciate everything.

So like any other cook in Merlin worldwide, our office has contributed in the furtherance of Merlin.

Thank you Dorcas!

It's a family affair

"For families to be thought of in this way is wonderful"

The Merlin office in Freetown, Sierra Leone was transformed from a place of work into the hottest party venue in town on the evening of December 18th 2001.

For the first time after ten long years of insecurity, curfew and civil war, Freetown felt safe enough for Merlin to host a celebration of the season.



Merlin Freetown staff, along with husbands, wives and family, celebrated the ending of the holy month of Ramadan and the commencement of the festive season with speeches, food, drink and a night of music and dancing.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of more than a hundred gift bags for the children of the 35 families of Merlin staff. Staff representative Kumba Boima said: "This is the best present ever; for families to be thought of in this way is wonderful!"



Operations Manager for West Africa, Paul Foreman, joined Sierra Leone staff and families for the festive celebrations.

Merlin have been providing medical care, health education, nutritional feeding and support to hospitals and clinics in Sierra Leone since 1996.

Preparing for Crises – report from Liberia

Liberia's recent history has been one of trouble, with wars and recurring health crises. With endemic killers such as: malaria, cholera and yellow fever, the need for emergency health care has been high. Merlin has been improving its capacity to respond to future events.

Health provision requires more than drugs and doctors. Dirty water and poor sanitation are real killers so Merlin's preparations included training the country team in the establishment of clean water supplies and good drainage for any emergency clinic that might be needed.

Civil engineer Robert Hodgson, a veteran of Merlin programmes in Chechnya in 1995 and 1997, was in Monrovia to facilitate the training.

Robert wasn't sure what to expect. "I had heard a lot about Liberia in the past, most of it not good. I was most warmly welcomed by the very experienced Merlin team. I was very lucky to see the vital work they are doing to

support government health providers in remote parts of the Liberian rain forest."

The Water and Sanitation training was targeted at the drivers and other logistical staff. "We decided to train the drivers because they are always on site but often forgotten", explained Lisa Kieh, Merlin's Country Manager. "Actually, they knew more about it than we realised."

Robert was pleased at the enthusiasm of the trainees. "Many of the staff had worked for other relief agencies in the past and the group had a lot of relevant experience", he says. "Mostly, they weren't aware of the others' experiences and the workshop helped them to share those. It certainly made my task easier and now Merlin's Liberia team is ready to take on even more in a crisis."

Merlin began work in Liberia in 1997 in response to the lack of basic health care in the country.



Water from the taps! Workshop participants celebrate completing an emergency water supply at the end of the Monrovia training.

Into Afghanistan



Christmas morning 2001 in Kulyab, southern Tajikistan, and we were making the three hour journey to the border crossing with Afghanistan to enter an area that has been destroyed by recent wars.

Nigel Young reports on his adventure to rejoin the rest of the Merlin team in Afghanistan consisting of: John Cobley, Sarah Moberley, Valerie Powell MBE, Danielle Stein, Theodoros Sofianopolis and Paul Critchley.

By leaving at seven we hoped to leave enough time to reach Taloqan, in the Takhar province of Afghanistan, before dark. I was eager to return to the rest of the Merlin Afghanistan team that I had left a few days earlier.

I was being accompanied by Paul, who had arrived to provide logistical support. We had intended to travel the day before but a misplaced exit stamp on a visa from my last crossing had made it invalid in the eyes of the Tajik border guards. A frantic day for the Merlin Tajikistan administrator, Firuza and my papers were in order again.

The last stretch to the Fakhar river crossing is reached by a road, destroyed by heavy trucks, that is peppered by five checkpoints. Passport details were given at each barrier. Tajik customs took the novel approach of demanding to know how much alcohol we would be taking out of the country. The first four checkpoints (militia, Tajik border guards, internal security and customs) were formalities. The real test would be the last hurdle, the representatives of the Russian Border Force.

The border guards here have often refused passage to those whose specific 'permissions' to cross has not been received from their General in Dushanbe.

I recognised the border guard on duty as someone who had shared his lunch with me the week before. I went first, placing my bags on the barge and waving goodbye to Suleiman, who had been unlucky enough to be the duty driver that morning. Paul's 'permissions' were on a separate order so to avoid complications we decided to cross separately, I took the spare parts and other supplies for the Afghan programme.

I shared the tractor powered barge with two trucks laden with food relief, more weight than the barge usually carries. This had fooled the braking system and we stopped only with the help of the Afghan riverbank. I gathered up the various rucksacks and cases and stepped ashore to meet some of the Merlin Afghanistan team who had travelled from Taloqan that morning to reach us.

The formalities are more relaxed on this side of the border. A quick passport inspection later and we were on our way south. Four hours and a forded river later we arrived at the Merlin base in Taloqan, in time to share Christmas with the rest of the team.

The Merlin Afghanistan team moved into the northern regions of Kunduz, Takhar, Samangan and Baghlan, in November, to provide life-saving health care to tens of thousands of refugees.

One team is up in a village in the mountains running a mobile clinic. The village was abandoned 14 months ago when the front line between Taliban and Northern Alliance forces moved west and residents found themselves in the line of fire.

The second team is in a refugee camp in Kunduz where they are operating a large feeding centre with a clinic attached.

The third team is up in the North taking part in a huge vaccination campaign against measles. Most of the medical agencies in the North are taking part, with the aim of covering 95% of the child population.

Panto season reaches Afghanistan

Russian Border Forces in Tajikistan jumped on the festive pantomime band-wagon when they provided welcome (????) entertainment to the aid agencies who were undergoing the usual long wait at the border crossing. The ex-pats were treated to a unique performance of songs from the musical 'Jesus Christ Superstar'.

Field Funny

Make a Celebration Donation

Are you celebrating a landmark occasion with a big party but don't want your friends and family wasting valuable money on presents that you don't need and won't use?

Then why not suggest that they put the money to better use by buying you a Merlin 'Celebration Donation' voucher. By donating on your behalf they will not be wasting their money but will be helping to provide life saving health care to millions of people around the world.

The vouchers are available in £5, £10, £20, £50 and £100. To buy a voucher simply follow the link on our website www.merlin.org.uk, email development@merlin.org.uk or phone 020 7378 4888.



Here Kitty, Kitty

The traditional Christmas turkey almost got a lucky break when the Sierra Leone team were considering their options in dealing with their rampant pet cat.

Much to the turkeys' disappointment the team opted for simply removing the cat's 'valuables' leaving the chef to revert back to the original menu.

Field Funny

All Creatures Great and Small A competition for the kids (or wannabe kids)

Here at Merlin HQ we were puzzling over a question brought up one lunch time. **'If we were to have a mascot what creature or animal would it be?'**

Having pondered and puzzled with little success we need your help. So what we are doing is asking you, your children, your grandchildren, your niece or nephew, your neighbours children etc. to decide for us.

All you/they have to do is draw what you think it should be and send it in to: Mascot Competition, 5-13 Trinity Street, Borough, London, SE1 1DB.



And just to show how nice and appreciative we are every child will receive a special thank you letter from us.

The winning entry will be turned into the Merlin Mascot and feature on our website amongst many other places.



Adrian Turner (left) nominated Merlin to his employees AFD Software to be one of the benefactors of the companies charity scheme. Peter Mills of AFD Software is seen here receiving the cheque on behalf of Merlin in December.

Memo to self:

Things I can do to help Merlin

- Set up a monthly standing order with Merlin
- Tell 5 friends about Merlin and encourage them to give their support
- Send a Merlin 'Celebration Donation' voucher.
- Organise a local community event such as a bring and buy sale
- Organise school fundraising e.g. mufti days, 1/2 hour football-a-thon etc.
- Do a sponsored walk, run, cycle etc.
- Apply for a field job to work as a nurse/logistician/accountant
- Volunteer to help out in the office doing admin stuff for Merlin
- Hold a company/department fund-raising event
- Make a regular tax effective donation through my payroll
- Sponsor a Merlin runner in the 2002 London Marathon
- Make a donation by phone, by post or through the website.

CAPTION COMPETITION

Put words into the mouths of Merlin staff Jane Moore and Bryan Emery or their mystery guest at the NHS recruitment fair.

If you make us laugh you will see your quote on the website.
Send your entries to: development@merlin.org.uk



5 Things you can do with Response after you've read it

1. Take it to your local doctor's / dentist's surgery and turn it into a waiting room journal.
2. Post it on to someone you know with a note telling them to read it and then do the same.
3. Take it into work and give it to the person responsible for the company's charity donations.
4. Give it to your child / grandchild /niece or nephew to take to school.
5. Send it to your local newspaper.

DO NOT DEPRIVE IT OF IT'S FULL POTENTIAL

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