

Frontline

The newsletter for Merlin supporters January 2012



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MEDICAL EXPERTS ON THE FRONTLINE

www.merlin.org.uk/frontline



Registered charity 1135111 & 1016607

Looking back on 2011

This is the difference you made

If you were to try to summarise Merlin's way of working in just a few words, they might be: "Respond to the short-term and work for the long-term". This is certainly true of the work we did around the world in 2011.

There were many high-profile emergencies that needed our help, like the unrest and fighting in Libya which forced many thousands of people from their homes, and the floods which caused huge devastation in Pakistan for the second year running.

Saving the lives of mothers and children

But we also responded day after day to the "silent emergencies" which rarely hit the headlines. The most obvious example is the high death rate among mothers and babies caused by a lack of maternity services in large parts of the developing world. Here Merlin, with your support, is playing a vital role by training midwives and community health workers so that mothers can receive the medical advice and support they need to deliver their babies safely.

Afghanistan is a case in point. This country has the worst maternal mortality rate in the world today, with more than one in ten mothers dying in childbirth. With your support, Merlin has been training hundreds of midwives at its midwifery school in Taloqan, and supporting the Ministry of Health's community midwife training programme.

When a natural disaster or earthquake strikes a particular country, we can act immediately because we are already there.

Crisis action: the Pakistan floods

Merlin's long-term work is vital, not just because it is needed to tackle huge, enduring problems like childhood diseases, but because it helps us respond to emergencies more quickly and more effectively. Very often, when a natural disaster or earthquake strikes a particular country, we can act immediately because we are already there.

For example, we have been working in Pakistan, building up local health services, since 2005. So when floods devastated parts of Pakistan in 2011 for the second year running, we were ready to get to work in the deluged district of Badin.

Using mobile health teams to reach inaccessible areas, we delivered health care to thousands of people who were in dire need, having lost their homes and livelihoods. And by treating sick and injured people and helping to prevent the spread of deadly, water-borne diseases, we undoubtedly saved many lives.



Dr Zubair attends to a child following the floods in Pakistan in 2010

Photo: Jacqueline Koch

Feeding the hungry: the east African food crisis



Photo: Valerie Powell/Merlin

Feeding a child in the therapeutic feeding unit at Gode Hospital, Ethiopia

Sadly, 2011 will be remembered for the worsening food crisis in east Africa – and here again Merlin was able to play an important life-saving role thanks to the support you gave us by responding so generously to our appeal.

Not only did we respond to the crisis, but we went into some of the most difficult, inaccessible and dangerous areas in order to do so. The El Buur district in Somalia, which combines an unstable political situation with extreme weather conditions, is one of them. Yet despite these challenges Merlin has succeeded in providing health services to 90,000 people through six health centres and 15 outreach villages. This includes treatment and food supplements for mothers and babies, who are most vulnerable to malnutrition.

Looking ahead

Merlin's story in 2011 has been a story of skill, persistence and courage. And we are determined to do much more over the next five years, when our priorities will be to give more people access to primary health care, to improve health services for mothers and children, and to combat disease and malnutrition. **But none of this will be possible without you and the generous support you give us.**



Children of the Central African Republic

→ Carl Robinson trains local health workers in Nalut hospital, Libya

↓ Richard Villar part of the first emergency team sent to Libya



Photo: Jenny Matthews/Merlin

Thank you for helping us to be where we are needed

When civil war broke out in Libya in February 2011, Merlin was one of the first agencies to help the people caught up in the fighting. And gradually, as the weeks passed and the war continued, we were able to expand our work in country, not only treating the casualties but taking health care to wherever it was needed most.

The Libyan crisis is a good example of how the support you give Merlin is making a difference right across the world.

You see, without your support, we would not have been ready to respond to the crisis as quickly as we did. We would not have been able to purchase the large quantities of drugs and equipment we needed, or recruit the health staff and paramedics, or get them to the places where they had to be. And we certainly wouldn't have been able to keep our work going for as long as we have.

Libya is just one example of how Merlin saved lives and helped prevent human suffering in the past, eventful year. You may have read about some others on page 2 and 3.

During 2011 the generosity of our supporters was once again truly inspiring.

But whatever the country, and the precise nature of the work we are doing, one thing never changes: the vital role that our supporters play. As a charity, we couldn't do any of it without you.

During 2011 the generosity of our supporters was once again truly inspiring. So far our Christmas appeal has raised an amazing £120,000. Thank you for helping us to be where we were needed in 2011 – and please continue to support us, whatever 2012 might bring.



Merlin was one of the first agencies to help in Libya when civil war broke out in February



Merlin has been working with the people of the Central African Republic

Bringing hope to a troubled land

Recently our Chief Executive, Carolyn Miller, visited Merlin projects in the Central African Republic, one of the poorest countries in the world. Here are her impressions of the tremendous difference Merlin – with your support – is making.

I have just returned from my trip to the Central African Republic (CAR) and wanted to take a moment to share my thoughts about it with you.

It was a very eventful week – I found myself painting a remote clinic in the south; dancing along to songs that were part of a sexual violence education session; and cheering on the Merlin football team. I heard many distressing stories about the violence inflicted on the population by the Lord's Resistance Army and we drove through many villages left abandoned as people fled in fear.

What struck me most, however, was the tremendous enthusiasm and dedication of the Merlin teams delivering vital health care in CAR. Despite the challenges of working with a moving, displaced population and refugees from neighbouring Democratic Republic of



Carolyn with the Merlin football team during her CAR visit

Congo, security threats and difficulties in communication, the team there worked tirelessly to provide nothing less than the best health and nutrition services to people in need.

I met with the Minister of Health last Friday, and he voiced my opinion exactly – if only there were more skilled health workers in the CAR, we could do a tremendous amount to meet the great need for health care in that troubled country.

There's something wrong with a world that looks like this

The reason why this map looks so strange is that the size of each country represents the number of children under five who die there every year.



According to figures from the UN Human Development Report for 2011, the infant mortality rate in the UK is roughly 6 in 1,000 children, but tragically the figure in parts of Africa and Asia is up to 40 times higher because of a lack of basic medical care.

199 out of every 1,000 children born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan die before reaching the age of five. In Somalia the figure is 180, in the Central African Republic it's 171. Sadly these are some of the worst child mortality rates in the world.

But Merlin is working in all of these countries, and a number of others with high infant death rates, to help improve health care and save children's lives.

What's more, our work – and your support – is making a big difference, as Carolyn Miller's report on page 5 shows. **But the challenge we face is enormous, which is why we continue to need your generous support to save young lives and help put the world right.**



A crying child in his mother's arms, Kenya

Photo: The Mirror/John Ferguson

with a

Photo: The Times/Richard Pohl



One year old Cicilia at Nimule Hospital, South Sudan



A one hour old baby with birth complications at Baitoro District Hospital, Pakistan

Photo: Sam Phelps

This map was created using the World Health Organisation's child mortality data. Child mortality rate refers to the number of children per 1,000 live births who die before age 5.

Data recorded before the independence of South Sudan.

The priceless gift of health

Lord Jay, Merlin chair, visited Merlin projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He writes inspiringly about what he saw there.

In Britain we are used to seeing children dressed up for parties. But in Lubutu, deep in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the sight of a young girl in a bright pink dress caught me by surprise. She was wearing shoes (barefoot was more usual) and she was also wearing the most enormous smile.

Merlin's medical staff were about to give her a gift far exceeding any party bag – an injection to protect her against measles (still a potentially fatal disease).

Her outfit and her obvious delight were just one example of the touching gratitude I have witnessed for the care and treatment provided by Merlin.

Our focus on health and our determined help for those in need have won us the respect of people around the world.

Lord Jay met many patients in Lubutu including this Mother and her baby



“Our focus on health and our determined help for those in need have won us the respect of people around the world”



Lord Jay during his visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo

Humbling experience

We teach the importance of sanitation, the benefits of breastfeeding and the need for people, especially pregnant women, to seek help from trained health care workers.

Merlin's midwife training is at the heart of our work. There are some brilliant midwives, like Colette from Nimule in South Sudan. She lost her own baby at birth but was spurred on to help prevent the same thing happening to other women. Merlin trained her up and, as the matron of Elia health centre, she sees at least twenty pregnant women each week.

It is a humbling experience to see the faith that people put in us. But with the encouragement of our many supporters, more little girls like the one in Lubutu and more young women like those in Nimule, will get the help they so badly need.



Little Mohammad's fight for life

Little Mohammad Amin lies in the therapeutic feeding unit supported by Merlin at Gode Hospital in eastern Ethiopia. Mohammad is so small that he looks like a new-born baby. But in fact he is three months old.

His mother, Rahmo, explains: “There is a big drought. In my village, Badeload in Gode, we are mostly farmers. Our family had 10 cattle. We now only have two.

“My husband tries to collect firewood to sell. Sometimes we have money to buy food. Sometimes we don't. We try to adapt but we have nothing.”

The fight against hunger

Baby Mohammad is one of five children. Three of his siblings have already died from diarrhoea and vomiting. They were very thin and obviously suffering from malnutrition.

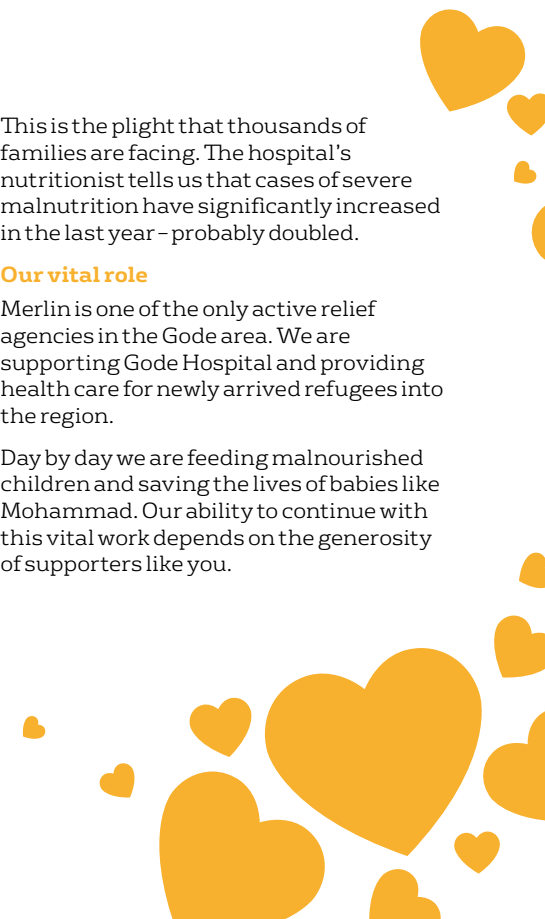
Rahmo is struggling to breastfeed Mohammad, but he is severely malnourished. The hospital staff with Merlin's support are trying to keep him alive. He probably needs to stay in the unit for one more month until he reaches his ideal weight.

This is the plight that thousands of families are facing. The hospital's nutritionist tells us that cases of severe malnutrition have significantly increased in the last year – probably doubled.

Our vital role

Merlin is one of the only active relief agencies in the Gode area. We are supporting Gode Hospital and providing health care for newly arrived refugees into the region.

Day by day we are feeding malnourished children and saving the lives of babies like Mohammad. Our ability to continue with this vital work depends on the generosity of supporters like you.



Merlin's fundraising heroes

Merlin's life-saving work is only possible because of all the supporters who either give money or help to raise money – sometimes in extraordinary ways. Here are three of the best!

Around the world... by bike!

In January 2010, Merlin supporter Dr Steve Fabes started out from London on an epic solo journey around the world. He set out to travel the length of six continents, crossing the greatest land masses on earth... all by bicycle!

Two years later, Steve's journey goes on! It will take four and a half years, during which he will travel through approximately 50 countries and cover some 80,000km (50,000 miles).

Steve is a doctor at Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital in London. His particular area of

interest is neglected tropical diseases. He is tracing a route through regions affected by these diseases so that he can witness their effect on local people.

For this ultimate challenge event, Steve aims to raise £50,000 for Merlin – the equivalent of £1 per mile. His journey is being sponsored by Incognito, one of Merlin's partners who are providing their anti-mosquito spray to protect Steve from malaria. Steve has journeyed through Africa malaria free thanks to their support.

Steve aims to travel anywhere between 80 and 150km (50 – 95 miles) a day, depending on terrain and road conditions. At night, he is mostly camping out, but sometimes he is offered a bed for the night by people who know about his trip.

A few weeks ago, while in Africa, Steve blogged: "I visited Merlin projects and it made me proud to have chosen Merlin as my charity of choice. Training and supporting local health workers is central to everything Merlin does. This way they help to create lasting change."

You can sponsor Steve's amazing journey by going to www.justgiving.com/cyclingthe6



Dr Steve Fabes visits the Merlin Lodwar office on his epic trip

incognito®
anti-mosquito



Donald sets out from Land's End

Donald's birthday adventure

Donald Macleod is a keen supporter of Merlin because his daughter Janette is a member of our staff – and as a retired consultant surgeon he understands the importance of everyone having access to health care. So when his 70th birthday approached, he had a wonderful idea. Why not celebrate by cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats – a distance of 984 miles – to raise money for Merlin?

He admits: "This was the furthest I had ever cycled. On my first morning I was awestruck by my fellow cyclists who had super lightweight bikes! They all looked so much more clued up than me."

The trip, which took 11½ days, was tough for Donald, especially when he had a flat tyre crossing a remote Scottish moor. But at the end of it he had raised over £2,000 from family, friends and former colleagues, thanks largely to his son-in-law setting up a JustGiving page for him on the internet. Now he says: "I plan to rest and recuperate and get ahead with the garden! I may be tempted to try a different challenge next year."

Kate's fantastic cookies

10-year-old Kate Guest from Devon read about Merlin's work on our website and decided to help – by baking lots of cookies and selling them in the local community shop. She calls them Kate's Kookies and, as she says herself: "Everyone likes them!" The customers snapped them up and before long she had raised £55. She told us: "Spend it well and save loads of people's lives."



Kate Guest and her cookie sale



Kate's letter to Merlin

Dear Merlin,
19 September 2011
Pease could you put this money towards your amazing project to help others in Africa. I've seen your website and I was most intrigued about your work .
I am 10 years old and I baked loads of cookies for the money. It is a business called Kate's Kookies. EVERYONE likes them. I sold them at the village community shop.
I have £55.00 for your charity, spend it well and save lodes of people's lives.

Yours sincerely

Kate M Guest

Could you be a fundraising hero?

You don't have to cycle round the world like Dr Steve Fables. There are many imaginative and enjoyable ways that you, your family and friends can help to raise funds for Merlin's life-saving work around the world. Everything from walking a marathon to holding a 'bring and buy' sale, a quiz night, a coffee morning or a garden party.

If you think you'd like to help Merlin in this way, and have a lot of fun at the same time, we'd like you to see the guide, **Fundraising for Merlin**. It is packed with practical advice such as:

- ➔ An A to Z of fundraising ideas
- ➔ How to get sponsorship
- ➔ How to get publicity for your events
- ➔ How to raise funds at school
- ➔ The legal and safety issues involved in fundraising.

You can download a copy of this booklet from www.merlin.org.uk/community



Your support will be vital – and will be much appreciated, no matter how you choose to give it.



Alternatively phone Sarah Johnson on **020 7014 1707** or email your name and address to challengingyou@merlin.org.uk to receive the guide; or for more information about taking part in a community or challenge event with Merlin.

One thing's for sure. Merlin's work will continue to be needed right through 2012 – to save lives when disasters strike and to improve health care in some of the world's poorest countries. Your support will be vital – and will be much appreciated, no matter how you choose to give it. But there's no better way to raise money than by putting the fun into fundraising.

Thank you!