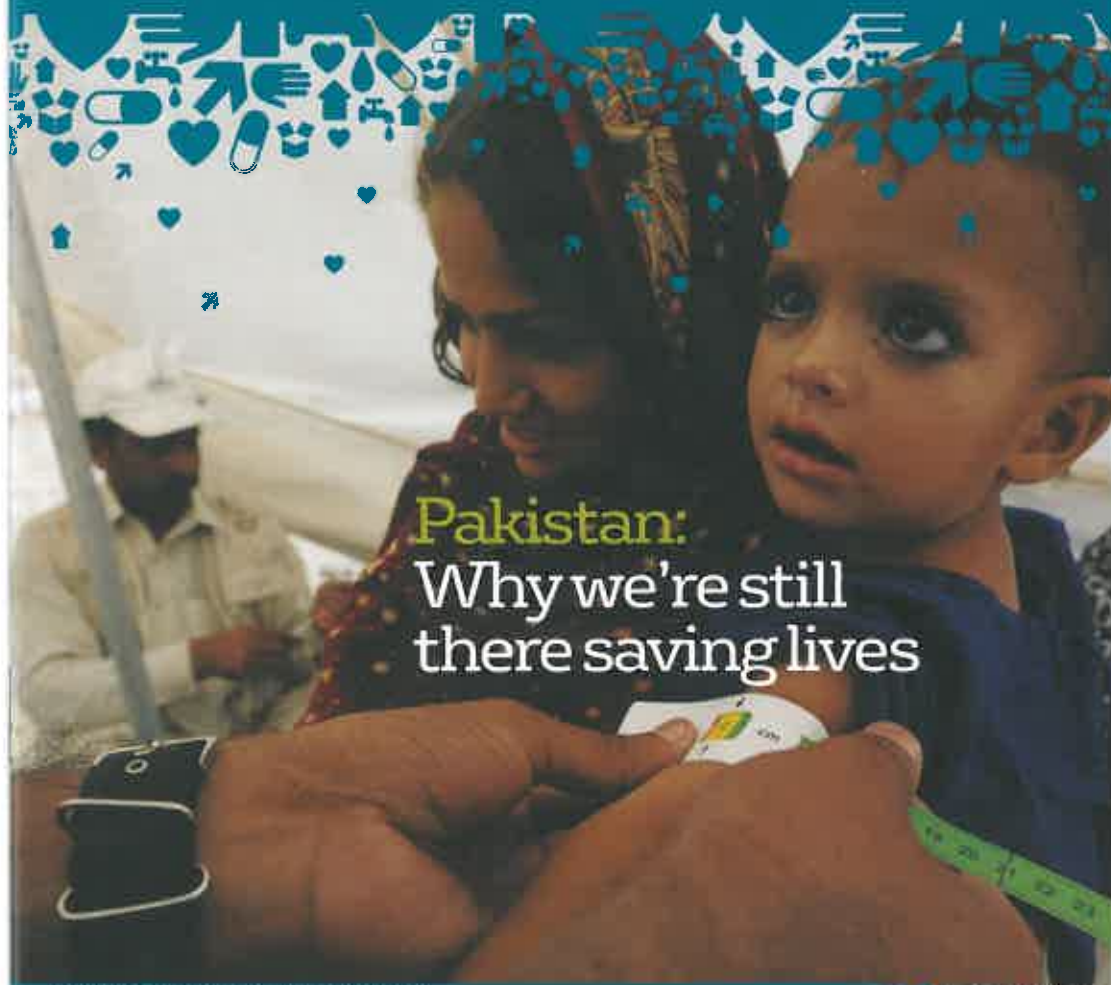


Frontline

The newsletter for Merlin supporters

May 2011



Pakistan: Why we're still there saving lives

MEDICAL EXPERTS ON THE FRONTLINE

www.merlin.org.uk/frontline

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Merlin health workers in DR Congo, 2006

It started in 1993 with three friends and one simple idea – to set up a medical relief charity here in the UK. And yet from small beginnings Merlin has grown astonishingly quickly into one of the world's leading emergency relief organisations. So what are the special ingredients that have driven Merlin forward and enabled us to change so many people's lives?

According to Dr Christopher Besse, one of Merlin's founders, there are three simple answers: enthusiasm, commitment and incredible energy.

The simple idea that helped change millions of lives

At the age of 30, Christopher left his comfortable job treating the rich and famous in an exclusive London clinic, as he says, "to do some proper work". It was in 1989, and it was the turmoil in Romania following the overthrow of Nicolae Ceauşescu that inspired his dramatic change of course. Watching on TV as children were shot in the streets, Christopher decided that he had to act.

across the channel with a map of central Europe, bound for Bucharest.

On their return, the pair began talking about setting up a charity based in the UK. Christopher's first port of call was Médecins Sans Frontières, who turned down his idea of creating a British hub but offered him a job in Serbia where, as he remembers, he "travelled across minefields to find a scene from hell".

A friend, Nicholas Mellor, a management consultant, had the same idea and without further ado they raised £35,000, packed a van full of medicine and set off



Merlin health worker in Nepal, 2007

Mission to Sarajevo

Then, in 1992, while Christopher was working for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Sarajevo, he was approached by the billionaire financier and philanthropist George Soros. Christopher remembers: "One of his sidekicks came to me and said: 'We have a million pounds to provide aid to Sarajevo and there is a rumour that you are starting a charity'. The money was conditional on an immediate start.

"Nicholas moved into my house and a process that normally takes three months took three weeks. On 19th January 2003, we had the final documents from the Charity Commission to go ahead. We took the money, drove the trucks to Sarajevo and Merlin was created."

Building a team

Pulling in their friend and logistician Mark Dalton on their second mission to Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia, the trio was complete. Christopher explains: "Nick was the management, business side, I was the crazy guy in the field and Mark was this wonderful, gentle logistics guy.

"There was enormous enthusiasm, commitment and drive from all our volunteers. Merlin was built on this incredible energy. We didn't pay ourselves anything.

"We never looked at what we had in the bank. It was really only after a few years when we got a bit bigger that we realised we couldn't continue to drive Merlin on fumes alone."

Value for money

"The British people give more money per person than any other people in the world," says Christopher about charitable giving. "but they are quite particular about getting their money's worth, and that is something we have always tried to give."

Seventeen years later, Merlin has worked in more than 40 countries and responded to some of the most serious humanitarian emergencies of recent history, including the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Asian tsunami of 2004 and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, helping to change millions of lives.

Mother and child, Liberia
© The Times / Ben Clive

"There was enormous enthusiasm, commitment and drive from all our volunteers. Merlin was built on this incredible energy."

Every penny's worth a thousand heartbeats

We are very fortunate to have so many courageous and dedicated people working for Merlin. But we never forget that it is not just doctors and other health professionals who make Merlin what it is. It is also supporters like you.

You have made it possible for us to do so much in the past year, including all the life-saving work you will read about in this edition of *Frontline*. Whether it is training midwives to deliver babies safely in Kenya, setting up clinics to treat HIV

and AIDS in Sudan, or fighting the spread of deadly cholera in Haiti, your support has been crucial.

Last December one of our Patrons, the actor Hugh Bonneville, visited Liberia to see our work there for himself. He found himself deeply moved by the way Merlin was working to save lives, especially the lives of mothers and children. But he was also struck by the way Merlin makes the most of every penny we receive in donations.

He wrote:

"What I love about Merlin is that it just gets on with it. 96p in every pound is spent on the ground. Each one of those pennies is worth a thousand heartbeats. I heard them in Liberia."

We are deeply grateful to you for all your support. Please continue to support our work, so that we can keep many more precious hearts beating.

Hugh Bonneville, Merlin patron, 17-year-old mother and her one-year-old child. The child has scabies and suspected malaria. Banjor health clinic, on the outskirts of the capital, Monrovia
© The Times / Ben Gurr

"In a situation like this you are saving probably dozens of lives a day"

Haiti's forgotten disaster

A Merlin ambulance brings cholera patients to the cholera treatment centre just outside of Port-au-Prince
© The Times/Chris Harris



How Merlin is continuing to battle against cholera in Haiti

In any natural disaster, one of the biggest dangers is the high risk of epidemics once the initial emergency is over. This is certainly the case in Haiti, where people are continuing to die from cholera more than a year after the devastating earthquake ripped the country apart.



Baby Michelle at Merlin's cholera treatment centre - Haiti 2010
© The Times/Chris Harris

The exasperating thing about cholera is that the dividing line between survival and death is so fine. Its victims can perish within hours if not treated, and many do. But the overwhelming majority of those who can get treatment are easily cured.

That's why Merlin has set up its own cholera treatment centres in areas

where people are finding it hardest to get the treatment they need. Most are in rural areas where distances are great and transport lacking.

Martin Fletcher of *The Times* visited one of these centres last December, shortly after it was opened. He wrote about the patients he saw there: *"They were babies, young women and wizened old men. Cholera does not discriminate by age or sex, only between rich and poor."*

Saving lives every day

With the generous help of our supporters, Merlin has been flying medical supplies into Haiti to treat the patients who now fill our treatment centres. Treating cholera isn't easy, because of the danger of infection spreading. But undoubtedly, patients are surviving who would otherwise have died.

Tilmann Haacker, a German doctor who is working with Merlin, says that, for him, it is very rewarding work: *"Here you are treating a potentially fatal condition,"* he explains. *"In a situation like this you are saving probably dozens of lives a day."*



Michael is the first to be born in the new, Merlin-built maternity centre in Omoyaki, DR Congo

A girl called Michael

Merlin recently celebrated the opening of a new maternity centre in the town of Omoyaki, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The town's existing health centre had fallen into an awful state, exposing mothers and babies to the risk of infection. But the new facility will help to raise the quality of healthcare and ensure that more

mothers can deliver their babies safely. The centre got off to a good start even before the official opening had taken place. Just before the opening ceremony, the centre delivered its first baby. The delighted parents named the baby after Merlin's project coordinator Michael Anett - even though the child was actually a girl!



Princess Merlin with a Merlin health worker in the Philippines

What's in a baby name?

The answer is that some can tell you more than others!

First came baby Pandawlin, born in Myanmar in 2008 shortly after Cyclone Nargis devastated her country. She was named after the boat she was delivered on - Pandaw - and the medical team that brought her into the world - Merlin.

Then came Princess Merlin, born in the Philippines in 2009 after Typhoon Ketsana

had torn through the country. She was one of a number of babies we delivered there in very hazardous conditions.

And most recently came baby Merline - born six months after the earthquake in Haiti. She was named after the team that delivered her, on a small rock next to a river, after her mother gave up on the three-hour walk to the nearest hospital.

Here are some of the lives you've helped to change



Woody was treated by a Merlin plastic surgeon after being injured during the Haiti earthquake.

Woody's a carefree child again

Two-year-old Woodolf "Woody" St Eloi was at home when the Haiti earthquake struck his house in Port-au-Prince. A wall collapsed on his right arm, which had to be amputated at the local hospital. After the operation, Woody was referred to Merlin's field hospital for the kind of specialist surgical care that his local hospital was unable to provide,

including skin grafts, so that his amputation wound could heal properly.

Woody has recovered remarkably and he's a very active toddler again. His wound has completely healed now. And thanks to Merlin's help - and your support - Woody can live the carefree life that every three-year-old deserves.



Merlin's trained Safe Motherhood Promoters are encouraging the women of Turkana to give birth in a proper health facility

Life-saving care for mothers and babies

In Turkana - a vast, arid region in the north west of Kenya - less than one woman in ten gives birth with the assistance of a trained health worker. This results in the deaths of many mothers and babies. But gradually, with your support, we are changing that. We are training local women like Selina (left) to be local health workers, and encouraging women to receive antenatal care.

Merlin's Country Director for Kenya, Louise Patterson, says: "Because of their nomadic lifestyle, the Turkana people find it hard to access adequate healthcare. We are incredibly grateful to our supporters for helping us prevent the needless deaths of mothers and babies in this part of Kenya."

Why we won't turn our backs on Pakistan

The terrible floods in Pakistan last summer affected about 20 million people, many of whom lost their homes and livelihoods overnight. Fortunately, Merlin was able to jump into action immediately to bring vital medical aid to the people worst affected. But even now our work isn't finished, and Merlin continues its work in Pakistan to rebuild shattered health services.

When a large part of Pakistan was devastated by flooding last July, Merlin was already working in the country, so we were able to mobilise very quickly to reach the worst-affected areas.

29-year-old Dr Sadaf was one of the doctors deployed to work in the flood-stricken Nowshera region. She emailed us to say: "Merlin's team was the first to reach many people in Nowshera. We drove through water, abandoning the car to get there. Working from the



Dr Sadaf Naz, a Merlin medical officer working in Nowshera Province, Jalozai camp
© Jacqueline M. Koch

beginning of this crisis, we were all tired. But we don't stop: people need us. I could not turn my back and I will not."

This was courage and tenacity in the face of disaster – and it made a huge practical difference to the people of Pakistan. In the first ten weeks after the floods, our static and mobile clinics treated over 300,000 people – nearly 3,600 a day – with a particular focus on vulnerable women and children. Undoubtedly we saved many lives.

But now the work has to go on. In the wake of the floods has come another deadly danger – disease. Lives are continuing to be lost, simply because in so many areas medical care is not available.

Treating malaria

Our continuing battle against malaria is particularly important. Malaria is spread by mosquitoes that have been breeding in the stagnant pools. Living in open compounds and tents has made the people who were left homeless by the floods especially vulnerable.

Because malaria can damage the brain and other organs if it is not treated immediately, our mobile clinics are equipped with a kit that can provide blood-test results within five minutes. They are also equipped with anti-malaria medicines and supplies of indoor insecticide spray, which is one of the most effective tools in reducing the risk of malaria.



A child on a drip recovering from malaria at the Borna hospital
© Trevor Snapp

"People need us. I could not turn my back and I will not"

A new clinic for Daira Wadhu

Merlin medical teams have also stayed on in Pakistan to help rebuild the country's shattered health services. Floods damaged or destroyed an estimated 558 health facilities.

The remote village of Daira Wadhu is just one of the communities where Merlin is working to provide healthcare for the people. In the village we have established a clinic, staffed it, equipped it and organised health outreach services for the local population.

Abid Hussain, one of the doctors working at the clinic, says that this is the first time that the villagers have had any kind of medical facility close by.

Besides providing basic healthcare, the Merlin team is also helping local people address underlying health problems that have never been tackled before – like lack of access to clean water, lack of sanitation and lack of knowledge about hygiene.

Merlin's community health promoters go from village to village to educate people on hygiene. The clinic also runs health and nutrition programmes for mothers and children. As Dr Hussain says: "The mother's health is crucial for the family's wellbeing."



The Times puts our life-saving work in the spotlight

Everyone at Merlin was thrilled towards the end of last year when we were told we had been selected as one of the beneficiaries of *The Times* Christmas Charity Appeal 2010.

In addition, *Downton Abbey* actor Hugh Bonneville – one of our Patrons – visited Merlin in Liberia as part of the appeal and wrote about his trip in a piece that appeared in *The Times*.

To date the appeal has raised £500,000 for all three charities, of which £220,000 has been raised for Merlin – providing essential funds for our life-saving work around the world, and a huge boost to the morale of our staff and volunteers. With your help the final total should be even more.

The Times Christmas Appeal is one of the most high-profile charity fundraising events of the year. It offers readers the chance to support three good causes, while also providing the charities with a unique profile-raising opportunity. *The Times* sent a number of its correspondents overseas to see Merlin in action in Haiti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Pakistan. The result was a series of revealing articles which were published between November and January (see opposite.)

Merlin has rehabilitated Kindu hospital (DRC) and set up a Therapeutic Feeding Centre to address the many cases of malnutrition
© The Times / Paul Rogers
DRC

Real lives in the news



Democratic Republic of Congo

Times correspondent Rosemary Bennett reported back from Elila in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Merlin has recently set up a health centre for the local population. She wrote about one of the patients she had met, Maisara Masudi, a young man who had come into the clinic severely dehydrated after several days of diarrhoea.

Maisara literally collapsed as he came through the door. But within minutes he was in a bed and hooked up to a rudimentary drip.

Rosemary asked what would have happened if this clinic – funded and managed by Merlin – had not been here. “He would have just died of a simple stomach upset,” the head of the clinic told her. “Stomach upsets, malaria and respiratory infections are the biggest killers,” he added – “all curable as long as they can get here.”



Southern Sudan

In southern Sudan, *The Times* correspondent Tom Whipple reported from the community of Nimule, where Merlin is working to combat HIV and AIDS.

One of the people there was Sarah Asenzo, who had lost her baby to AIDS. For six months she was ill and stayed in the hospital. Twice she was asked to take a blood test for HIV. But the disease carries a terrible stigma in her community, so she agreed only very reluctantly.

Being diagnosed as HIV-positive made life almost impossible for Sarah. “If I drank from a cup my family threw it out,” Sarah said.

“If I ate from a plate they got rid of it.” Worse still, her brother chased her out of the house. “Whenever it rained I had to run for shelter. I tried to commit suicide,” she said.

Now Sarah has found hope once again, with help from her church and from Merlin’s HIV counsellors. Merlin’s health centre in Nimule is one of the few places in southern Sudan where it is possible to get anti-retroviral drugs for HIV, and now at last Sarah is receiving treatment.

She has also become part of a small, brave group who have volunteered to speak about their condition in the hope that by doing so they will counter the prejudices and misinformation about HIV and AIDS.

Your legacy

Your legacy of life for the next generation

There can't be any gift more precious than the gift of life. Yet millions of people around the world face a daily struggle to survive, because they don't have access to healthcare. Parents see their children die in infancy from diseases that could easily be treated. Mothers die far too frequently in childbirth. And diseases like HIV/AIDS and cholera kill thousands of people every day.

If this is something you would like to help change, please consider leaving a gift to Merlin in your will. Your gift - of whatever amount - could help save many lives in the future. It could help to build clinics, and train midwives and health workers, so that whole communities can have access to healthcare. It could mean that generations of children can grow up strong and healthy.

It is easy to leave a gift to Merlin in your will, or to change your existing will to add a gift to Merlin. How much you choose to give is entirely up to you - but you can be sure that every pound will make a lasting difference.

Thank you.

Registered charity numbers: 1135111 & 1016607



"In a situation like this you are saving probably dozens of lives a day"



Please send me a copy of the Merlin Legacy Guide

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Please complete this form and return it in the Freepost envelope provided to Merlin, Freepost BLZE EGYR JAGH, 12th Floor, 207 Old Street, London EC1V 9NR. (No stamp required.)