

Day 9: Hope & Despair in Dhaka City

Today we began the day by visiting an Orphanage supported by the Orphan Trust which is located near Farm Gate - one of the most poor areas of Dhaka - called Bottomley House.

Bottomley House provides shelter, education and nurture to 140 girls who works otherwise be on the street. It is run by Sister Bijaya - a truly inspiring, and it must be added - humble, lady who has dedicated her life to offering these girls a loving and secure home.

Bottomley House has long been supported by The Orphan Trust who last year used donations to purchase 140 beds, medication (to last a year) and computer. All things desperately needed. It was amazing to see exactly where the money had gone and very humbling to see the big difference these things had made to the girls there (we are also purchasing and providing much needed shoes and educational equipment for the girls whilst we are here in Dhaka this time also).

Upon leaving Bottomley House we headed next to to a project called Jagorani. After a tour of the work areas (where the women sew on beautiful old Singer sewing machines - so beautiful!) we explored the amazing Aladdin's cave that is the onsite shop. I was in heaven! Each shelf groaned with beautiful hand made delights. Needless to say we left the shop with some truly unique purchases, happy in the knowledge that the profit was going straight back to the people who deserved it - the women who made them.

Dhaka is a city of extremes and contradictions. With hearts full of hope and positivity we walked from our project visits with a renewed sense of purpose straight into some of the worst poverty and suffering we have witnessed so far. Whole families were living on the streets, with only a piece of plastic held down with some bricks to offer protection and shelter (many families didn't even have this). It was devastating to witness.

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~~As we passed one family, Catriona and I stopped to acknowledge 2 little children who were sitting next to their mother. Almost instantly the mother ran towards us and began pulling at my arm,~~
begging me to help. She was desperate. Here was a mother who had nothing and who needed to provide for her babies. At one point she turned my body so that I could see directly into her eyes. She wanted to share her pain and desperation. It was one of the most powerful experiences I have had here and what she shared was absolutely devastating.

A little while later a little toddler began following us. He must have been 2 at the oldest. It was clear he lived on the streets and unclear if he had anybody looking after him (he was very skinny and very dirty). At one point a police officer roughly pushed him into a road of oncoming traffic. Nevertheless he continued to follow us. In Bangladesh there is no social services or such support services available. Here was a little boy who needed to be at home, who needed to be loved and cared for, to be cooked for and tucked into bed at night. Here he was having to fend for himself in this unforgiving city. Unfortunately he is not the exception and there are little children like him everywhere we look. Without funding to places like Bottomley House, the girls there would have been in this situation also.

Our experiences today affected me in many ways, both good and difficult. Upon returning to our apartment I stood in the shower and cried and cried. Sometimes this world just doesn't make any sense - how are mothers and little children allowed to have absolutely nothing? To be left starving in the streets? We are in a world where some of us have so much while others don't even have enough to cover their basic human needs. I have never felt more fortunate to have everything I do or more determined that through The Orphan Trust we can try and change the lives of the people who need our help the most. They deserve it. We have to try.

By Menna