MERCY CORPS

Our Work Begins At Home

From Bhutan to Portland | Planting the Seeds of A New Life
By Andy Parker

courched close to the loamy soil, the two women work as one, their golden hair shining brilliantly in the midday sun as their four hands move seamlessly across the tidy garden plot rows. Fifteen, 20, then 30 minutes whisk by and never once do they rise from their work, their motions as effulgent as the flight of the half-dozens butterflies riding the warm afternoon breezes across the garden. The women are plucking the little leaves of the mustards plant, one at a time; leaf by leaf, they quickly tying them into small bundles and tossing them toward a plastic tub, their fingers back picking greens before the bundles come to rest.

It’s a mesmerizing, well-practiced rhythm, one of the few remaining signature patterns in lives torn apart by the events that forced the women and their extended families to join the more than 100,000 people who were expelled from Bhutan.

During the summer of 2009 – their first year working in Portland, Koirala and Dhimal come from a country that’s still unable to find jobs.

Three women from Bhutan are growing vegetables in SE Portland, thanks to a partnership with Mercy Corps Northwest.

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A year later, Jardine is amazed at how these Bhutanese women have transformed a blackberry-encrusted lot into a lush, flower-filled garden. Instead of an impensable thicket of brambles, he now sees peonies, amaranth, sweet peas, persimmons, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, parsley, carrots and more. “It was a vision of what Mercy Corps was doing with urban farming, said Jardine, “so I called them up and said we could use let you, it’s phon...
Seven Star Brings Health Care to All

By Seven Rich

Fiona McLaughlin and Aisha Madrone had a dream—provide-able, high-quality, alternative healthcare to the Portland community—at a price ordinary people can afford. Like most dreams-come-true stories, they had a few twists and turns along the way.

Those years ago McLaughlin and Madrone launched Seven Star Acupuncture and Herbal Apothecary, a clinic focused on Chinese herbal medicine. Their services include private and group acupuncture treatments as well as licensed massage therapy, as well as administrative care and an onsite herbal dispensary.

“We wanted to provide acu-upuncture and herbal medicine to all,” McLaughlin said. “We wanted people to be able to afford it.”

The partners signed a lease on a 2,400-square-foot space on SE 12th Ave. Construction began, then stalled for lack of money.

“The renovation cost more than we expected,” McLaughlin said. Banks, sliding into deep freeze, didn’t lend. He was a new owner, and the bank wouldn’t lend.

Then a friend suggested Mercy Corps Northwest. Madrone and McLaughlin applied for an SBA loan, and received a $13,000 loan.

“This was pivotal to us,” explained Madrone. “That loan was one of the first to get through the door.” She said they had been rejected by many other banks.

“We applied for a loan and received it,” said McLaughlin. “The bank said they had never done anything like that before.”

Madrone applied for the money to help cover the administrative side, attending MCNW’s mandatory business and training classes ($150 fee, with scholarships available). There, she learned how to write a business plan.

“I thought a business plan was silly at first,” she admitted, “but if you nail it all out, you can see if your idea will work even better.”

Madrone praised the instructors for the steady and excellent training. Starting a business involves a lot of detailed planning, she said. They teach you how to think.

“Then, once you get to see other people go through the process,” she added, “you see how the system works.”

Today the clinic has six prac-titioners who treat hundreds of patients every month. As the busi-ness grows, they now run their own site that is open and acces-sible.

“We see everyone we can see, so we are not seeing them,” said Madrone. “We can’t afford to reject anyone.”

The clinic started up a sliding-fee scale when Madrone was invited to practice with Mercy Corps Northwest.

“Then, at the Small Business Development Center, they bent over backwards to help us get started,” she said.

As the clinic grew, Madrone’s services were in high demand. No time to wait, she said. She doubled her patient loads, then tripled them.

“Then you really have to take a hard look at what to do next,” she said. “You’re drowning.”

Eager Parents

So McLaughlin decided to open her school in a neighborhood where parents were eager for Spanish language resources. North Portland had just one preschool, none bilingual, when McLaughlin first came to town. Today the school has 23 students; next fall, it will reach its capacity of 40.

“Establishing a school is hard to do without state funding,” she said. “We’ve had a list of more than 160 students.”

Aprende con Amigos Takes Flight

Aprende con Amigos, a bilingual preschool, opened in Oregon City in 2001.

It’s the byword. Walks-in are welcome. Group and private treatment sessions are available. And a sliding scale allows anyone to buy classes from college students. The students are working—many of them workers, to receive some chiropractic care. Fees range from $25 to $75 per session.

When someone has a wine test, we ask them to pay on the high-end part of the scale,” Madrone said. “At other times of the year, maybe someone is laying off the harvest, they then pay on the lower end. We don’t ask for proof of income.”

Today the clinic has six prac-titioners who treat patients of all ages.

“We help them understand the experience,” she said. “We help them understand the body.”

As you look at the group, the goal remains: Creating communities facing challenges—that offered an ideal first floor loca-tion.

Last July, Aprende con Ami-gos opened with a summer camp program. Last fall, it had 23 students. Now, it reaches its new and old clinic.

“People appreciate the am-bient space and light that make our school a healthy place to grow and learn. It’s also just a block from the park,” said Spanish-speaking Nahia Chernus.

“I’m not sure about every-thing,” she said, “but I am em-phasized, as they watched in the rain and jammed their umbrellas, with children. Nahia Chernus.

“Spanish speaks only Spanish to her students. In the urge to make sure they understand that—there’s a language barrier here, a misunderstanding there—she decided to invite the whole world into English,” she said. “I want to make sure they understand that—there’s an English barrier here, a misunderstanding there—she decided to invite the whole world into English,” she said. “I want to make sure they understand the experience.”

Today the school has six students on the first floor. “They’re doing great,” she said.

Aprende con Amigos was founded by Fiona McLaughlin and Mercedes Madrone, co-founder of Seven Star Acupuncture.

Aprende con Amigos is the brainchild of Fiona McLaughlin and Aisha Madrone. Fiona McLaughlin is the founder and owner of Aprende con Amigos.

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Crime Rates Fall to 30-Year Low While Correctional Spending Soars

By Jennifer Williams

The Stearking Committee is made up of seven representatives from the ROAR alliance of me- mbers. They are responsible for making all organizing de- cisions and maintaining consti- tuency!

In subcommittee meets monthly, working on projects that impact the reentry community, education about prisoner reen- try and providing support to them.

The Advocacy Subcommittee made itself into a resource group by creating a web site to provide the participants with the necessary information and education. The Living Information for Entrepre- neurship is an important service for them. It focuses on the first year to harness the possibility of returning citizens.

The 28-week course is de- signed to help reduce recidivism. The program is designed to help them prepare themselves to start their lives afresh. They learn how to navigate the job market.

Mercy Corps Northwest ac- cepting the challenges is a leader in the public and private sectors. It invests in the future and is committed to supporting the participants and their communities.

Mercy Corps Northwest choose to focus on women be- causel the excessive and unnecessary focusing is a way to decrease the focus on their needs and the quality of life for our communities in the community.

PRISON STATISTICS

1 in 100
The number of people in prison behind bars, four times as many as in every other country combined.