

The Weekender 18/05/07

Heal the World

We buy lotto tickets and dream of getting lucky, but we already won when we were born in a developed country. Alicia Gutierrez meets two local charities who are sharing the luck with those who really need it.

Project India

Five-year-old Maggie was watching television when she saw an advertisement that would change her family's life forever. It was a World Vision ad for sponsorship and Maggie, who had never known true poverty, couldn't comprehend what she saw.

Maggie's mum, Cheryl Ryan, recalls the moment last June which was to change her life's direction. "Our daughter



Maggie asked my husband and I, 'Why doesn't George (the child on TV) have any clean water or food?' I offered her sponsorship of a boy or girl from her choice of countries and she replied,

'Why do I have to choose one and why can't we help more than one? Two weeks later I was still asking myself that question and I decided it was time to do something about it'

While looking for a humanitarian project to become involved with, Cheryl read the biography of a young Tibetan woman who had fled to India titled *A Child of Tibet*. She contacted the book's author who told her of the desperate need for a hospital in Dharamsala. "She put me in touch with two retired German doctors who had only two months earlier decided to build a hospital in Dharamsala. We decided on a team effort to achieve the one goal." Buderim residents Cheryl and her husband Michael set up Maggie's Dreamcatcher Dharamsala Hospital Project Inc. with the purpose of funding the building of the hospital and supplying volunteer staff to operate it.

Dharamsala lies in northern India at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains and is one of the poorest regions in the world. "There are a lot of Tibetan refugees there and a high amount of poverty," Cheryl says. "Obviously there's a high need for medical attention as



well, with the nearest Western-style hospital a six to 10-hour car ride away; that would be like travelling to Sydney."

Cheryl's love of India first blossomed during a trip there. "I spent about a month travelling in India and loved the culture, the people, the colours and

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the smells. But India is one of those places where there is great suffering amidst the beauty. The tragedy for me was walking out of a restaurant one evening and being confronted by a woman holding a dead baby."

In Australia we are rarely, if ever, confronted with harsh realities of this scale. "Our kids go off to private schools and they have

everything on their plate, opportunity and whatever they want."

Cheryl and her family are unwavering in their commitment to raising \$500,000 for the hospital. To help with the fundraising efforts, Cheryl has written and illustrated a children's book titled *Who Is George?* The book can be bought at local businesses and online at www.whoisgeorge.com.au or www.maggiesdreamcatcher.org.au. Donations can also be made to Maggie's Dreamcatcher Dharamsala Hospital Project at the Buderim Base of Queensland

