



Thursday, May 8, 2014

Whangamata

Coastal News

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Dental team help abroad

A team travelling to remote Leh in the Himalayas later this year to treat children suffering from dental problems is appealing to Whangamata residents for help with funding the expedition.

Justine Connolly and Kelly Mullins are part of a nine-member team that former Whangamata dentist Dr Trevor Barnes is leading to Leh, a Buddhist enclave within India, on the borders of Nepal and China.

The team of dentists, dental therapists and nurses is leaving New Zealand in August and will attempt to have an impact on what Dr Barnes describes as a "tidal wave" of dental disease swamping the region.

Dr Barnes, who until recently worked at Whangamata's Ocean Dental with dental therapist Justine as his assistant, says an epidemic of dental disease is sweeping through the high mountain villages of the Western Himalayas.

It's the result of an increasing number of tourists and trekkers bringing soft drinks, sweets and junk food into the population, he says.

"Additionally, the ready availability and cheapness of sugar has supplanted the more traditional methods of preserving winter food. There is virtually no access to dental care and many children spend the entire winter in pain. Others have had pain for as long as they can remember. Some abscesses



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HIMALAYAS-BOUND: Looking forward to the August dental expedition are Justine Connolly, Kelly Mullins and Trevor Barnes.

and infections are so long-standing and severe as to be life threatening.

"We will be based in Leh and will also travel up the highest navigable track in the world to the Nubra Valley, where access to dental treatment is zero."

Dr Barnes says the children are

immensely grateful for any help that can be provided.

"In our 2012 expedition, we treated more than 2000 children. Any contribution Whangamata residents can make, however large or small, will ensure that this year's expedition will be equally as successful."

Justine, who is spearheading fundraising locally, says the team needs financial support to make the expedition as successful as possible.

"Just \$30 will buy enough anaesthetic, materials and instruments to allow us to treat two children. We're also hoping for money to buy things like filling materials, gloves, masks and scrub uniforms and to pay transportation costs.

"There are virtually no administrative costs and the money will enable dental care to directly reach the children most in need."

She is excited at the prospect of going on the expedition, even though it will involve several weeks of hard work in difficult conditions.

The team, made up largely of Kiwis, will be away for five weeks.

As a means of thanking team members for their voluntary efforts, local people plan to treat them to a five-day trek from Leh up to an altitude of 6000 metres.

They will be accompanied by Sherpas.

"Right now I'm training by walking in the forest every day with my tramping boots on," Justine says.

"I'm really looking forward to it."

■ Donations can be deposited at Westpac under the account name "Dental Aid". The account number 03-1577-0439063-000. Alternatively, email Justine, mrsjustineconnolly@gmail.com