

## In Action – Co-operation

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*Following the recent earthquake, Captain Kathy Crombie was sent to Nepal as part of the Salvation Army's international response team. We asked her to share her experience, reflecting on the value of co-operation.*

Helen Keller (1880-1968) once said "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." Team work and partnerships are fundamental to co-operation.

The violent earthquake of 7.8 in Nepal on the 25th of April this year (2015) presented a situation that required teamwork and co-operation on many levels. Over 9,000 people lost their lives and more than 23,000 were injured. In many places entire villages were flattened, leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless. On May 12<sup>th</sup> a major aftershock of 7.8 occurred, making the devastation even more widespread. The epicenter was in a different location, which meant more people lost their lives and more damage was done.

Numerous Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) rapidly responded to the disaster and came to offer support and relief. Regular cluster meetings amongst the NGOs were quickly set up to co-ordinate efforts in many areas, including food, shelter, education, water, sanitation and hygiene. The Salvation Army deployed an International Emergency Services (IES) team within three days. This small team quickly bonded to work in a way that called for close teamwork as well as the creation of networks within the community.

Effective communication and trusting partnerships were integral to the efforts, whether it was sourcing and distributing supplies or finding transportation to actually get to the affected areas to perform needs assessments. Liaising with the local community leaders was integral to receiving the supplies, arranging trucks or even helicopters in some places, loading the supplies, getting the supplies to the community and then distributing them. The biggest amount of food that we distributed at one time was for 3000 families – 116 tons of rice, lentils, oil, and salt!

As the monsoon rains increased, the conditions of roads deteriorated and we faced bridges washed away, landslides, muddy roads/tracks that were not easy to traverse without trucks becoming stuck in deep mud. Sometimes we faced all of these obstacles in one day! Our goal to take supplies to the communities especially in rural areas required much team work, especially when the convoy of trucks became stuck in the mud as they tried to ascend steep unpaved tracks. Human effort to push four-ton loaded trucks up the hills out of the quagmire of mud was a mammoth joint effort.

The IES team had several amazing opportunities to partner with other organizations. We worked with Filters For Families to supply water filters to communities and schools. A



partnership has also been made with other NGOs to construct temporary schools in remote areas. In another district on the outskirts of Kathmandu, a community development partnership has been forged with another Volunteer NGO (VIN) for a housing project. To see the construction of 500 simple sustainable houses and the joy of the recipients who no longer need to live under leaking tarpaulin and plastic was truly inspiring. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that “no member of a crew is praised for the rugged individuality of his rowing.” This certainly was the case every day for our small IES team throughout the earthquake relief operation in Nepal.

*Kathy Crombie was appointed from the Australian Eastern Territory to the International Social Justice Commission in New York in 2014 as the Senior Policy Research Analyst. Prior to being an officer, Kathy spent many years working in developing countries of Nepal and Bhutan. She also spent 11 years in academia, teaching research, health promotion and public health at a Sydney based university. Her degrees include a Master of Arts Theology, Master of Public Health and Doctor of Education. Kathy has a heart for people from other cultures. She has a passion about social justice, particularly in the areas of racism, health for all and equality between genders.*