

20 years of service

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disease to the narrow life possible within the leprosy centre. They had no hope of an outside education, no opportunity to mix with healthy children from the nearby town and no expectation of a cure. Later, when there was effective treatment available for leprosy, children could be admitted to the school as boarders without being condemned to life-long residency in the leprosy home."

As the stigma of leprosy in India is slowly declining and the government's educational facilities have improved, TLM India recently decided to close all its remaining schools.

"TLM will continue to meet the educational needs of individual children disadvantaged



Ruth with the medical staff at Purulia hospital

by leprosy in ways more appropriate to the 21st century. Some children will stay at home and attend a local school with financial help from TLM. Those with worse physical disabilities will be enrolled in boarding schools run by other non-government organisations with more expertise in education, and some will need individual tuition in the wards while receiving short-term inpatient care."

The closure of all TLM India's schools is a milestone; they have served their purpose in providing a useful and enjoyable education to many children who would have otherwise gone without.

By becoming a missionary doctor, Ruth has undoubtedly foregone a glittering career in medicine in the UK. Yet typically she doesn't take this worldly approach.

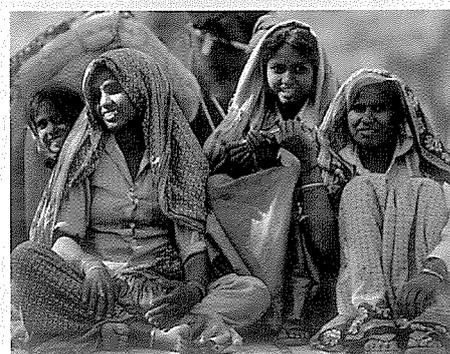
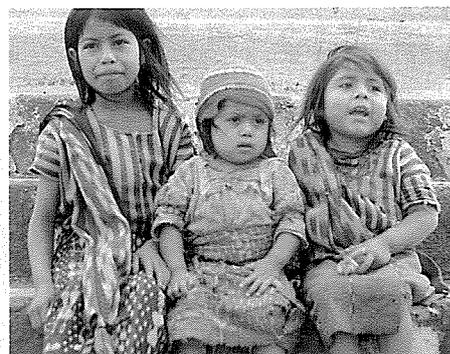
"I don't regret pursuing a medical career abroad because my life has been so full of interest and opportunities to be useful."

She was recently honoured for her outstanding dedication and contribution to alleviating suffering. In October 2002 in New Delhi, she received a CBE for her work "towards the eradication of leprosy in India and Nepal" from Sir Rob Young, the British Ambassador.

Ruth's service with TLM, which has been epitomised by cheerful optimism and flexibility – her latest posting in Bangladesh follows two spells in India and one in Nepal – has brought untold blessings to many individuals.

As we parted company, I pondered the sheer power of the media and the many lives that have been enhanced as a result of a young person seeing a film about leprosy, taking a leap of faith and realising a vision. ■

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SIMON WATKINSON is editor at *The Leprosy Mission* and based in Peterborough



Further information

● A course of MDT to cure a patient of leprosy costs just £15 to administer. Since MDT was introduced in 1982, over 11 million people have been cured of the disease. Most of these were treated before they developed deformities and were thus spared the stigma. However, an unacceptable 3 to 4 million people now suffer from, or are threatened with, permanent disability due to leprosy.

● Of the 763,317 new leprosy cases detected in 2001, about 90,000 had already been disabled by the disease and 82,000 were children.

● TLM is an international Christian medical charity working in 28 countries and currently caring for over 298,000 people affected by leprosy. In 2002, TLM

undertook or supported leprosy control covering a population of over 27 million people world-wide and its programmes detected 65,272 new leprosy cases.

For more information about TLM click on www.leprosymission.org.uk or write to: The Leprosy Mission, Goldhay Way, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough PE2 5GZ; tel: 01733 370505; fax: 01733 404880

