

Valerie Taylor Trust – AGM Meeting 11th Sept 2021

Minutes of Meeting

Present: Valerie Taylor OBE, VTT Trustees, VTT members

Introduction by Helen Mortimer

A very warm welcome to all those present especially in light of the challenges experienced during the recent COVID pandemic which has affected a widespread of people from all communities.

Chairs Intro

The chair reiterated the appreciation of all those who had attended considering the current circumstances including those who had made the effort to attend the meeting from as far as Scotland.

Intro by Mokhtar Hussain

MH provided an introduction and welcome message in Bengali and emphasised the real desire to ensure greater engagement with and involvement with the British Bangladeshi community. MH shared his own experiences from having visited the CRP in Bangladesh over the many years of his involvement with VTT and very much encouraged those present to visit the CRP centres with their friends and families. This would help provide insight into the truly inspirational work being conducted by CRP in Bangladesh. A strong message of encouragement for all members and supporters to provide whatever contribution they can make and to stay engaged with the work of the CRP and the efforts of VTT in the UK.

Chair's Report

The Chair highlighted the recent challenges of the Pandemic to CRP – especially given the impact on funding support which had seen a significant decline, including reduced aid support from the British Government. The COVID restrictions have adversely impacted the ability of patients in Bangladesh to visit and utilise the services and support that they urgently required in many cases from the CRP.

The Chair highlighted the challenges in terms of staff retention within the CRP centres which was exacerbated by the rise in cost of living in Bangladesh which unfortunately has not been matched with similar staff wage increases. The CRP Project in Moulvibazaar where a new centre is being developed still needs around £0.5m to complete the first phase of construction. As a result, there is a big push required to generate additional donations for this project principally through enhanced reach to the core base of VTT supporters, as well as the younger as well as more established generations within the British Bangladeshi Community.

As regards VTT, there are important areas which require further investment. These include firstly the VTT website which is considered not to be fully fit for purpose especially not being fully compatible with the use of mobile phones. Whilst there is a Facebook page, there is currently no Instagram page or Twitter account. There is therefore a need to professionalise the organisation in some key areas which inevitably requires financial investment – and to some extent in hindsight the cost base of 0.9%

could have been further increased to make appropriate investments to improve the infrastructure needed for development and growth. VTT trustees are looking to work closely with Mr Farhan Masud, Head of Programmes for Channel S, which is a UK-based Bangladeshi TV channel, in the coming months to pursue further fundraising opportunities within the British Bangladeshi population.

The Chair expressed gratitude to all supporters for their continued contributions and interest in the work of the VTT, for Helen Mortimer and Valerie and Rokshana, CRP's publicity officer, in helping to put together the VTT Spring newsletter. He also thanked Brian Woodgate for his invaluable administrative support and for editing the VTT Autumn Newsletter.

The Chair then thanked Mr Sayadul Khaled for his careful work on the Accounts and invited him to present the Treasurer's report.

Treasurers Report

SK provided a summary of the financial review. Total income was £177,728 which consisted of donations and subscriptions of £93,462. Donations were sourced from a range of small and large donors and includes receipt of Gift Aid (of £7,581) which is the tax reclaimable from donors who have confirmed they are UK taxpayers.

Corporate donations included of £61,229 from Primark and a further £13,000 from Tesco – these are "Restricted" funds for specific CRP projects. A further donation of £2k from Scott Bader Company was Unrestricted.

Expenditure has continued to be very minimal representing 0.9% of total income for the year ending 31 March 2021.

The Treasurer passed on his deepest gratitude for the help and support received from Trustees, the Auditor (independent examiner of the accounts) and the external organisations, as well as friends of CRP in neighbouring European countries and around the World.

Trustees' election / appointments

The Chair announced the following resignations of Trustees from the Board of VTT.

- Peter Donnelly recently resigned due to additional pressures arising from his existing employed role with the Leonard Cheshire Charity. The chair thanked Peter for his incredible support over the years.
- Janet Ivin – has resigned as Trustee but plans to return to CRP and has remarkable 20 years history of volunteering with CRP. Janet has committed to continue her ongoing support for VTT.

The Chair announced the following nominations of Trustees for election to the Board of VTT who each provided a brief background to their resumes and interest in contributing to the work of VTT.

- Jahangir Alam – re-elected as Trustee; Jahangir graduated from CRP and worked in Bangladesh as an Occupational Therapist before he moved to London. Currently he works in the NHS and liaises with academics & students for their placement at CRP.
- Dr Sakel Hussain – is Director/ Consultant Neurorehabilitation Physician at East Kent University NHS Hospital and is also currently teaching at Canterbury University with specialist

courses being delivered on mental and physical disabilities. SH has had several years of exposure to the work of the VTT and has been well acquainted with VT.

- Zahirul Haque FCA – is a chartered accountant who currently works as senior audit manager in a financial institution based in London. ZH has attended VTT meetings over the last 12 months and has been educated about the work of VTT from fellow trustees. ZH has been inspired by the work of the charity and felt privileged to have been appointed as a trustee.

In the absence of further nominations, these three were declared to be elected.

Chief Guest speaker: Valerie Taylor

VT Thanked those present for attending the AGM and very much appreciated the physical presence of so many members. VT thanked all supporters for the generous financial support from UK based donors. which was very much appreciated by the patients, staff members, students, trustees and volunteers of CRP in Bangladesh.

VT was due to return to the UK in April 2020 although these plans were changed at the last hour and has continued to work from home in line with the Government of Bangladesh's instructions.

Due to the different COVID "lockdowns", there has been a detrimental effect on patients' attendance over these last 16 months. Educational institutions were hit hard and for very long periods. This included CRP's Primary, inclusive school (William & Marie Taylor School) as well as the Nursing College, the Bangladesh Health Professions Institute (BHPI), and the School of Prosthetics and Orthotics. Classes were given online when possible but so often it was the lack of the necessary equipment in students' homes that curtailed this kind of teaching. The most recent date for Educational Institutes to officially reopen in Bangladesh is Sunday 12 September.

There has been a change of Executive Director at CRP, from 1st January 2021. The previous Executive Director, General Shafiqul Islam had completed 10 years of service. VT expressed deep gratitude to General Shafiq for his hard work and efficiency during his tenure as director.

Dr Sohrab Hossein has taken over the reins of responsibility for the leadership of CRP from the beginning of this year. Sohrab originally trained as a physiotherapist at CRP's training institute, the BHPI (Bangladesh Health Professions Institute). Last autumn, 2020, Sohrab achieved his PhD and was successful in his application for the post of CRP's Executive Director. Sohrab will now be a great example as someone who opted to return home and work to build up the quality of therapy practitioners and teachers at CRP's training institute.

During these last few months, CRP has been the recipient of 3 remarkable donations. These involve three new donors, and each donor is a Bangladeshi.

1. In memory of Sami Azmol who was an Australian citizen, living in Sydney for the last 33 years and worked in a very responsible position as the Accountant and Finance Manager of the Ministry of Health of New South Wales. Returning from a run, he collapsed and died of a heart attack at the age of only 37. His grief-stricken parents wished to provide an appropriate building in his memory at CRP-Savar where the outpatient facilities required demolishing and need additional multi floor space to be provided for physio/ occupational/ and Speech and Language therapy due to the increased number of outpatients requiring treatments. VT reiterated the words of Sami's parents: "Something permanent, made at CRP, in the name of our son Sami Azmol. That will give us comfort that our son, Sami, will remain alive among the communities of CRP."

2. Creation of Regional Rehabilitation Centre supported by Mr Khairuzzaman, Mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation who donated a precious 5 acres which includes a raised area protected by a boundary wall, located beside the main road to Dhaka – and accessible throughout for wheelchair users by means of a raised concrete path running through fruit trees including mango trees for which Rajshahi is uniquely famous for as was demonstrated by the mayor's very thoughtful gift of 8 crates of mangoes to CRP Savar patients and staff.

CRP commenced its work 40+ years ago, focussing on the treatment and rehabilitation of those with Spinal Cord (SCI) injuries. CRP-Savar is a specialist amongst the 12 CRP centres dealing with the treatment of acute cases of Spinal Cord Injury. Some cases are treated conservatively, which includes 2-hourly turning in bed and care of the paralysed bladder and bowel. This is life-saving treatment – prevention of pressure sores and urinary infections, both of which can be killers.

Bangladesh can be divided into 3 regions with the central region having CRP-Savar as its main centre for acute cases, CRP-Chittagong as an obvious place for the regional centre in the South, and CRP-Rajshahi becomes an ideal place for a regional centre in the north of Bangladesh. Dr Patanjali of the WHO SEARO recently expressed his hope that the land transaction and the WHO funding for creating the buildings goes ahead as planned.

3. Offer of 8 acres of land in Netrokona District by Mr Milki and his family. Mr Milki's sons Nasir and his elder brother Sal who were both present at the AGM and were asked to introduce themselves. Mr Nasir Milki recently came to visit Sojol, a paraplegic staff member who has been a friend since childhood and Nasir was kind enough to bring some CRP calendars to the UK on behalf of the CRP.

The area of land offered to CRP is in a very rural location and as so many of CRP's SCI patients are from a farming and/or labouring background, it seemed very fitting that CRP should consider this gift as a perfect place to present choices of farming activities to SCI patients. The only difference from able-bodied farming trainees is that these people will use a wheelchair for their mobility. VT gave a flavour of the Agricultural projects which include a range of products including pisciculture, aquaponics, poultry rearing, animal husbandry, vegetable growing, fruit trees, beehives, beekeeping, making compost and biodegradable flower pots. These projects were further promoted by Shaikh Siraj via his farming/gardening projects on Bangladeshi TV.

VT highlighted the importance of increasing employment opportunities in agricultural areas for SCI cases in wheelchairs. The offer of the Milki family of their land in Netrokona will enable these different activities to be permanent and the site can act as a demonstration farm at which others can receive training and share knowledge.

Other news:

1. After years of waiting, Dr Rafiq, a wheelchair user, who recently completed his PhD studies at the Agricultural University in Mymensingh has been appointed to the senior position of Director at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute at Joydebpur. VT referred supporters to Dr Rafiq's story in the book written by Liz Timms called "Journeys", a collection of stories of those with a spinal cord injury. Dr Rafiq will make an excellent adviser when the plans are shared with Dr Rafiq for the agricultural activities to be commenced on the Milki family's property.

2. The Government of Bangladesh has continued its financial support for the needs of CRP in part due to the very proactive approach of Mr Mizan, Head of Finance and Accounts at CRP. This has led again to an increase of 40 lac. taka resulting in a total of 5 crore taka, roughly £430,000 donation from the government itself.

3. There are some very committed individuals involved with CRP, including Mr Shafi Ullah, the Head of the Social Welfare Department who recently completed 29 years of service with the Department.
4. COVID has a direct impact on CRP's services but also on staff. Monira, Canteen assistant at CRP-Manikganj sadly passed away, leaving behind one daughter. CRP's staff are looking to see if there is any work that appeals to Monira's daughter at CRP. In addition to Covid-19, Dengue fever has been claiming the lives of young children.
5. There are constant examples of inspiration and wonderful generosity. Dr K M Maqsudur Rahman made a surprise notification recently of a : "Donation of 1st Instalment Tk 30 lac. for construction of 4th floor of CRP-Barisal Centre and signing of MOU.. to complete processing by next month Oct. 2021 & [so that] work can start next Nov."
6. Kadoorie Charitable Foundation has maintained its 3-year support for the running costs of the Day Centre for those with mental conditions at CRP-Gonokhbari. CRP will apply and request for continued funding from the Kadoorie Foundation to help finance the creation of a replica Day Centre at CRP-Mirpur.

Farhan Masud

FM introduced himself as Head of Programmes for Channel S and has been a long advocate of the work of the CRP – having first met VT back in 2012-13. FM was very much inspired by the work and energy being put in by VT and CRP team. FM highlighted the diversity of colour, gender and age within the audience, and acknowledged the commitment and talent to make a success of VTT.

FM expressed his desire and excitement about the potential prospect of working with VTT to help raise funding for the organisation by targeting the British Bangladeshi community where his own experience has shown there to be a significant level of compassion and generosity towards contributing to good causes. This has been demonstrated by the £65m which Channel S has itself helped raise since its inception in 2007.

The basic strategy advocated to help promote VTT would be to target all UK cities using the national broadcasting reach and community links which Channel S has developed in recent years. FM believes that the specific work of the CRP will be a natural pull factor for donors and FM has pledged to provide personal commitment to ensure that there is a platform for success.

Helen Mortimer

All those present at the AGM were requested to join at the end of the session for tea, cakes and snacks which were kindly put together by the CRP volunteers. All supporters were also requested to look at the CRP books and hand-made beautiful cards made by Carol Bennett one of the CRP volunteers.