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Colchester Rotary Club volunteers help National Immunisation Day in India

In late January three members of Colchester Rotary Club, Robert Macaulay, Lydia Clough, and John Powell with his wife Shelagh joined 90 Rotary volunteers from across the UK and Ireland and teamed up with 50,000 local Rotary members and health agencies staff to immunise millions of tiny vulnerable children in the hardest hit areas of India. Rotary volunteers are self-funded and entirely unpaid.

Robert was based in Kolkata, Lydia in Amritsar, and Shelagh and John in Delhi reaching and protecting millions of children via house-to-house visits and specially erected vaccination booths. The volunteers also joined in rallies through the streets to raise the communities' awareness of the National Immunisation Day the next day.

The immunisation drive is part of Rotary's End Polio Now campaign. Thanks to Rotary's efforts, the number of endemic countries has dropped from 125 to 2: Afghanistan and Pakistan. Rotary made the promise in 1985 to eradicate polio from the world. At that time there were 125 endemic countries and over 350,000 new cases of polio declared annually worldwide. In 2017 the number of cases was the lowest yet at just 22.

A leading Indian Rotarian said, "Visiting Rotarians have a curiosity value which attracts children who do not meet many foreigners. Your coming all the way from the UK and showing such interest in what we have been doing has been out new life in the campaign for our members who are getting a little weary after 25 years of the fight against polio".

Over 170 million children, aged up to five years old, were given the life-saving polio vaccination on one day, 28th January 2018, thanks to Rotary's End Polio Now campaign.

The End Polio Now campaign is a joint project between Rotary International, WHO, Unicef .the USA Centre for Disease Control, National Governments in affected countries and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Since 1985 Rotarians around the world have contributed over £1.25 billion.

Once immunised with the 2 polio vaccine drops, the child's little finger is dyed purple. This helps to track those who have been protected and is known as the 'purple pinkie' and hence the many varied Rotary Purple4Polio awareness and fund-raising events taking place [see below]. Following the immunisation day, house-to-house visits were carried out to check that no child had been missed and further inoculations were administered if necessary.

India has been declared polio free for 3 years but there is always the threat of re-infection from migrant workers and people seeking refuge from war-torn countries who may be carrying the virus and it is critical to maintain ongoing high levels of vaccination take up.

Whilst this focus was on the major Rotary worldwide project all the volunteers were at pains to stress that Rotary work is equally important and valuable on a local basis and the 4 Rotary Clubs in Colchester are very active in helping our less fortunate citizens.

The Rotary Club of Colchester has donated 10,000 crocuses to local schools and the Castle Park. The launch of Colchester's Rotary Purple Pinkie day will take place behind the Castle at 10.30am on Friday 23 February. During the week, several local primary schools have raised fund by holding "Purple Pinkie Days"