

SPECIAL FEATURE

Providing water wheels to struggling families in India

By Julie Bissett

A charity founded by dental marketer **Shaz Memon** is seeking practice teams to partner with him and help turn around the lives of struggling families living in some of the world's poorest societies.

Wells on Wheels (WOW) was started by Shaz when he was inspired by the birth of his daughter to help women and children in rural India who shoulder the daily burden of transporting heavy buckets of water to their communities.

Whilst the accessibility to wells in rural India has vastly improved in the past two decades, typically water is carried by balancing metal pails on heads – a practice that brings with it multiple health concerns as well as barriers to education.

The physical loading can lead to musculoskeletal disorders, such as neck or back pain, and even risks lifelong disability. Additionally, the time spent moving water from source to communities has impact on school hours for the young girls.

Children, too, are tasked with walking in heat of up to 40C to fetch water – sometimes they are as young as seven years old.

WOW has been providing communities with innovative water wheels since its inception in June 2019. An estimated 2,000 young girls have been attending school as a result of not having to carry pails of water. Providing rolling barrels to areas throughout India means they can now pull water from wells back to their communities in just one journey instead of four to five, freeing up time for young girls and boys to attend the village school and giving them an opportunity to have a brighter future. WOW wants to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

WOW has received attention from *The Times of India*, Reuters, the BBC and Indian TV and news channels. But, more importantly to Shaz, WOW has had tremendous support from the dental community.

The charity receives 99% of funding from within the profession and Shaz is now seeking



further support from dentists and their teams to help the charity continue to change smiles in more ways than one through the WOW Partner Programme for dentists.

Dentists can integrate into their practices the charity's drive to deliver the rolling drums to communities by signing up to the programme, which demonstrates to patients a commitment to their corporate social responsibility.

Shaz explains: 'My daughter was blessed to be born in the UK where we don't give a second thought to where we source our water. WOW is my attempt to address the imbalance and to improve the lives of women and children who are not so fortunate.'

'Water usage in a typical dental practice is high and it is perhaps appropriate that the profession supports a charity that helps those without easy access to this vital resource. By addressing these inequalities in their support for WOW, dentists and their teams can go some way to demonstrating a commitment to sustainable development for poorer communities, including poverty eradication and gender equality.'

'We have started our work in the Indian state of Maharashtra, and have plans to garner enough support to move to other regions of India. I hear Rajasthan has a great need for our input.'

Becoming a partner means practices can:

1. Add a batch of water wheels to a personal 'Wheel Vault'. Minimum purchase 14 wheels at £28 (total £392)
2. Donate wheels on behalf of patients, who are automatically issued certificates
3. Demonstrate it is a business with a conscience by integrating the principles of 'giving back' into its DNA whilst inspiring others.

Shaz adds: 'Our lean operation allows us to operate with minimal operating costs, of which the costs have been 100% funded by myself and not paid via the charity.'

For more on how to join the partner programme, visit <https://www.wellsonwheels.co.uk/wow-partner-programme-for-dentists/>. ■