

Citation for Kathy Mellor

One of Kathy Mellor's sponsors for the Human Rights and Nursing Award 2009 wrote 'Kathy is a true humanitarian, now known internationally'.

Kathy has and continues to work with sick new-born babies as a neonatal nurse practitioner. In addition, Kathy has worked tirelessly to support maternal and neonatal healthcare in other countries, focusing on regions where health care is severely compromised by lack of education and limited resources. Countries as diverse as Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, Mongolia, Russia, Nigeria, and Vietnam have benefited from the support Kathy and her team deliver.

In 1984 Kathy travelled to Colombia, South America, at the invitation of UNICEF to assess an early discharge programme for preterm babies, which had shown evidence of a reduction in neonatal mortality. As a result, Kathy helped to establish 'Kangaroo care' in the UK, which is now used throughout the world, and in particular benefits people in developing countries, being recommended by WHO.

In 2000 Kathy was invited to participate in a project in Nagorno-Karabakh, a small country whose infrastructure had suffered badly by prolonged war in the early 1990s. An aid programme to refurbish the only maternity hospital in the region included funding to improve care and facilities in the neonatal department, and Kathy successfully implemented a programme that had a significant effect on the outcomes of sick new-born babies. When the project ended, Kathy funded her own trips to the hospital, bringing not only supplies, but encouragement and support to enable doctors and nurses to continue developing their skills in this poverty stricken environment.

Kathy realised that there was much that could be achieved both in Nagorno-Karabakh and in neighbouring Armenia. In 2006 she founded BirthLink a charity whose aim is to provide support and education to all health care professionals involved in maternal and new-born care.

Through BirthLink Kathy was able to continue the work already started in the Maternity and Children's Hospital in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh, and many of the babies and mothers would not have survived without the contribution made by her total devotion and passionate desire to help others.

Kathy's work with BirthLink is selfless and inspirational, as others who travel with BirthLink across the world giving their time and support voluntarily, are quick to acknowledge. A Medal of Gratitude awarded by the President of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2008 is a testimony to how highly regarded she is by the people of that country.

The most common question from people whose lives have been touched by Kathy is 'why do you come here to help us?' Her reply is always 'because I can help to make a difference.' Kathy has a rare talent for enthusing the people she works with, and her deep desire to help the most vulnerable mothers and babies goes hand in hand with her respect, compassion and support for the caregivers, who in the long term will be the ones making the 'difference'.