

# ANGEL OF NAGPUR



Leah Pattison, 33, treating an elderly leprosy sufferer in Nagpur, assisted by her friend and colleague, Usha Patil

In 1995 Leah Pattison, who is from Frosterley in Weardale, went to India on a working holiday after graduating in Fine Arts. She taught English to girls undergoing treatment in a leper colony. She was horrified at the suffering, due to lack of medicines, financial support and help from their own people. Leah returned home and sold all her personal belongings to raise funds to provide some medication. She then returned to Nagpur where she and an Indian friend, Usha Patil, qualified as leprosy paramedics. In spite of contracting leprosy herself (which took almost a year of treatment before she was declared free of the disease) Leah continues to work among the lepers. "I never planned to dedicate my life to this," Leah says, "but I found I couldn't walk away from these women."

Leah Pattison has received national publicity and in 2002 she was presented with the prestigious Frink Award at the Woman of the Year Lunch and Assembly. In March of this year Leah was invited by Her Majesty the Queen to attend Lunch at Buckingham Palace - it was the Queen's salute to Women of High Achievement.

A Charity has been set up named START with the aim of providing a Centre with adequate medication and to recruit additional

workers to care for the patients. START offers hope to those it reaches out to. Its work includes the obvious medical assistance, counselling and practical help to allow sufferers to escape from the poverty they find themselves in. It is concerned with educating others that leprosy can be cured if it is caught early enough. There is also a programme within the charity's budget for the financing of a small number of reconstructive surgery operations.

Leah and Usha alone, look after the needs of in excess of 150 patients, only a fraction of the true number of women sufferers in the city of Nagpur, where they are based. There are enormous strains on them and obvious limits as to what the two of them can do to support these women who exist in dire conditions. The demands on the charity's services are ever growing. For as long as leprosy exists, together with the ignorance that surrounds this terrible disease, there will always be a need for START.

On Saturday, 2nd October a Concert is to be held in The Gala Theatre, Durham, in aid of the START Charity.

## WITH A SONG IN MY HEART

with Marilyn Hill-Smith (*soprano*)  
and Alison Hudson (*mezzo-soprano*)  
accompanied by Simon Kenworthy.

*Musical Director of the Spa Orchestra in Scarborough*

The music will be light classical with songs by  
Novello, Gershwin and others

Tickets £10 are available from the Gala Theatre Box Office  
0191 332 4041.

Any further enquiries - please contact Freda Billson  
01388 604406.

The START charity's trustees are all unpaid and include members of Leah's family - all financial contributions go directly to support