



How one local organization is making a real difference

By Alex Barclay

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MOST small businesses have a tough first year. But the unique Bermuda-based alliance of business and charity, *ISIS*, has roughed it out and is on target.

ISIS -- the Egyptian goddess of motherhood -- is an acronym both for the business, International Solutions & Investment Strategies, and the foundation, Initiating Sustainable Integrated Solutions, which provides overseas aid.

The company was formed and is now run by businesswoman Audette Exel and finance lawyer Sharon Beesley. As licensed finance and insurance intermediaries, *ISIS* works with the local insurance market to structure finance-related insurance products, and also undertakes consulting work.

"Our particular focus is finance-related insurance, and developing products for multi-national clients," said Ms. Exel, who previously worked on the island as managing director of Bermuda Commercial Bank.

"We picked that niche because the insurance markets are moving towards non-traditional insurance products -- right now the traditional markets are having a tough time. Also, because we had a lot of background in international structured finance."

While Ms. Exel is determined to make her new business a success, her bottom line has changed. The primary interest of *ISIS Limited* is not to increase its shareholders' equity but rather to fund *The ISIS Foundation*.

The ISIS Foundation is run by colleague Dr. Charles Swart, a former King Edward Memorial Hospital emergency room doctor.

According to the team, the charity was the original concept, while the idea of starting a business to pay for the charity came later.

ISIS Limited covers the administrative expenses of the Foundation, and 100 per cent of the donations -- now totalling just under \$500,000 -- go toward project costs for their chosen causes.

And while Ms. Exel and Ms. Beesley keep the business-side ticking in the local and international financial markets, Dr. Swart has been working on location in Humla, Nepal and Luwero, Uganda. After a brief stop in Bermuda, Dr. Swart headed off last night to Uganda. For the past month he has been working in Nepal, where he has joined forces with other relief workers in the area. "Some of these people have been here for 20 or 30 years now so they are really experienced," he said. Humla is home to some 40,000 people, living in villages ranging from just 200 to 3,000 in population, scattered about the mountainous region. *ISIS'* plan for the region is to institute a primary health-care system as well as rebuilding the Government school, which is in a state of ruins. According to Dr. Swart, *ISIS* does not intend to be a long-term solution to the people of Humla or Luwero.

But rather the organization focuses on making the villages self-sufficient, by training locals to be the health-care workers.

Funding for the Ugandan project -- to bring a primary health-care system to about 300,000 people living in the area -- has been secured. And *ISIS* has started building a community based health-care hall, just off the premises of the local hospital. But the immediate need is to supply four-wheel drive vehicles which will serve as mobile clinics. "Within 50 kilometers they can go to hospital," said Dr. Swart. "After 50 kilometers they go to the grave."



Just this week Partner Re, a leading Bermuda reinsurer, has confirmed funding for the first vehicle. Dr. Swart needs at least two more. The other immediate need for *ISIS* is to provide continuous communication -- a satellite telephone.

"Our purpose now (for Luwero) is to initiate the outreach part of the programme and get it up and running," he said.

For now Dr. Swart has committed to spend the next three years in the two remote regions. "It is hard travelling, but it is unreal to be in those countries. And, unless time is spent on the project there is no chance that it will succeed." He is hoping that in the future he will be able to have an "on the ground" manager for each project reporting back to him. "But for this initial stage I can see myself living out of a suitcase and a backpack. It really is nice coming back to Bermuda for a break."

He continued: "We are using our experience and our qualifications to develop something for the people of Nepal and Uganda, bigger than ourselves. This is a unique concept of joining business and charity."

Ms. Exel said *ISIS* could not have picked a better location than Bermuda, noting the generosity of local donors. So far they have received funding from four organizations and two individuals.

"We cannot thank Bermuda enough for its support. People have come out of the woodwork from all walks of life to help us," added Dr. Swart, "donors as well as volunteers." And he said so far all support has been on an anonymous basis.

Additional help has come from the Carter Center -- a think tank started by Jimmy Carter after his presidency.