



Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

3030 BRIDGEWAY, SUITE 211
SAUSALITO, CA 94965
415-331-8585
FAX: 415.331.4027
E-MAIL: INFO@NYOF.ORG

DEAR FRIENDS *As they say in Kathmandu, “namaste.” Welcome to the annual chronicle of our recent work with impoverished children in Nepal. This past year has been another period of growth and fulfillment. We increased the number of indentured daughters we “rescued” from servitude and placed them in school. We continue to save the lives of malnourished children. We’ve expanded our two children’s homes. As you’ll see in the following pages, there’s nothing more wonderful than taking children who are desperately poor and providing them with education, health care, and love – what every child deserves – and seeing them thrive. Your donations enable us to do this work.*

As those of you who regularly receive these letters know, NYOF helps children who have no other opportunity for a bright future – homeless children living on the street, child beggars and servants, abandoned and disabled kids whose families cannot support them or send them to school, and children so malnourished that their lives are in danger. There are almost no government programs to help the youngsters we aid. Without NYOF’s help, they would be destined to lives of backbreaking labor and destitution.

Some of you have asked how we approach each child’s situation. Well, we resolve a child’s problem according to his or her need. For instance, a young child who has no family or an unsuitable home environment is placed in a boarding school. The most traumatized children, who especially need a warm, loving and secure family atmosphere, are admitted to one of our two homes for children – J House for boys and K House for girls. We assume complete parental responsibility for these children and sponsor their education through college or even graduate school. Many of the kids in our program are disabled, deaf or blind, and we undertake

their medical care, as well as special education to cope with their disabilities.

Some of our children live in remote areas of the country. Often, the only reason they don’t attend school is because their families cannot afford the required school uniform, school supplies, and small school fee. We fund these costs and improve the inadequate local government schools by subsidizing the salaries of teachers and providing teacher training.

About half the children in Nepal under the age of five are malnourished, some so severely that their lives are in danger. We have established the Nutritional Rehabilitation Home to meet these needs – a project unique in all of Nepal. Not only do we restore these children to health, but we educate their mothers about nutrition and child care.

Our newest program, and one in which many of you have expressed great interest, frees young girls from bonded labor in a remote area of Western Nepal. We compensate their impoverished families for the amount of the girls’ earnings, on condition that they be permitted to return home and go to school. NYOF pays all the costs of education.

NOVEMBER 2001



FORMER INDENTURED DAUGHTERS

2



UPDATES FROM J AND K HOUSE

4



EDUCATING RURAL CHILDREN

6



NUTRITIONAL REHABILITATION HOME

7



Olga with the girls from Dang

INDENTURED DAUGHTERS

As some of you may remember from last year's letter, in a remote area of western Nepal called the Dang District, young girls are sent by their parents to work as servants in far-away cities. They are usually employed by a family, but sometimes by a teahouse or restaurant to wash dishes. These children have never been away from home before, and because they speak a distinctive dialect (Tharu), they sometimes cannot communicate with the families that employ them.



The children who entered the program last year have formed themselves into a club to talk against the practice of bonded servitude in their communities. They obviously feel empowered by their new status.

A girl's father receives between \$30 and \$75 a year for his daughter's labor – a substantial amount in Nepal, where the annual average family income is \$170 to \$200. The child is paid nothing, works from dawn to late at night, and is not educated. In some cases, the families do not even know where the child is; some girls never return home. The opportunity for abuse of all kinds is obvious.

Our director in Nepal, Som Paneru, became aware of this practice almost two years ago. Outraged, he called a Nepali friend who is from Dang to get more information. The friend abhorred the custom as well, but said he did not know what could be done about it. Som and I decided he should make a field visit to Dang with his friend (who speaks the Tharu dialect) to see if there were some way to combat this practice. When they returned, we discussed the matter in depth, did some further investigation, and decided to start a pilot program with a small number of families to determine if

we could reduce the incidence of this inhumane custom. (This quick, flexible response is a hallmark of NYOF's work – no red tape, no extensive studies; if an idea seems like a good one, we can carry it out quickly.)

The "selling" of the girls takes place each year on a holiday in January called Maghe Sakrante, the festival at which annual labor contracts are renewed in this community. Som and his friend made their first visit in December 1999, just prior to the holiday, and discovered that the root of the problem was that the families could not do without the income their daughters' labor brought in. We concluded that if we were to succeed in alleviating the problem, it would be necessary to compensate the families in some way for the income the girl would have earned. So we tried an experiment: We asked 37 families to bring their daughters home for Maghe Sakrante. As an incentive, we assured the families that if their daughters were allowed to live at home and attend school (at NYOF's expense) instead of being sent off to work, we would compensate them for their daughters' lost wages.

When Som returned during the festival in January, he discovered that 32 of the 37 families had brought their daughters home. Although we had at first planned to reimburse the families in cash for the amount they received from the labor contractors, we decided to nose around the village before making the offer. And it's a good thing we did. The mothers begged us not to give money to their husbands; alcoholism is rife in the community, and they were afraid much of the money would be spent on drink. In talking to the villagers, we discovered that piglets are much valued in this culture. So, instead of money, we gave each family a piglet, which they can raise on scraps and sell ultimately for about the sum they received for their child's labor. We also provided a kerosene lamp and three liters of kerosene a month – items of great value in this area without electricity.

Each girl was given a school uniform, a book bag, school supplies (including a copy book imprinted with the slogan "Send girls to school – eradicate the bonded laborer system"), the small school fee, and a colorful traditional costume.

Why the costume? Because the labor contractors would bring back for the Maghe Sakrante festival a few well dressed “city girls” to motivate the local girls to sign up.

This is where we left the story in last year’s letter. In January, I went with Som, his friend, and a filmmaker to Dang during Maghe Sakrante to see how the project was going. We spoke to many children – some who were working in the city and were back home for the holiday, others who were about to be sold, and still others who had entered our program last year.

It was at once a thrilling and depressing experience. I was amazed to see how young these children were – many seven, eight, nine years old. Some had red, rough calloused hands like those of a man accustomed to hard physical labor. A few fathers were reluctant to allow their daughters to remain at home, and we spent considerable time, always with a crowd of villagers around us, trying to convince them that both they and their daughters would be better off if they joined our program.

But we saw many things that lifted our spirits. The majority of the villagers were enthusiastic about the project, and 120 additional families asked to join. The families were truly happy to keep their daughters at home. We now have 154 girls in the program.

In one village, the youngish mayor had for years been selling the daughters of village families as a favor to his constituents. Over the last year, our local “motivators”



Girls from Dang rescued last year



Former indentured daughters dancing at a picnic to celebrate their freedom.

(mostly schoolteachers who are opposed to the practice) convinced him that this was an inhumane custom. When we entered his village, a home-made sign lettered with a crayon on cardboard read: “Labor contractors stay out – our daughters are not for sale.” In another village, we encountered a 14 year old named Sita who joined our program last year. Unlike most Nepali girls, she is a feisty sort, and when we asked if her father still beat her, she responded, “How can he – I know how to read and write!”

The cost to free a girl, send her to school for a year and make up for her lost wages is \$100. Last year, it was \$75, but we are giving a new and improved breed of piglet (Piglet 2.0), which costs a bit more but will get to market faster.

We have big plans to grow this very effective program. The problem is very large – from the Deukhuri Valley alone, the area where we are working, we estimate that about 2,000 girls are working as servants far from home. We are exploring additional options to using piglets, such as establishing cooperative vegetable farms and other viable income-generation opportunities, to help end this harsh practice in the Dang District.

NYOF KIDS HELPING OTHERS:

Durga came to the U.S. under NYOF’s auspices and is undergoing a complex series of surgeries because of burns she suffered as an infant. She held a bake sale at her high school, and she and her classmates raised enough money by selling bagels and brownies to free one little girl in Dang from indentured servitude. Buddhi, a brilliant boy from a remote village, arrived in Kathmandu years ago bare-foot and dazed by his first sight of vehicles and electricity. After finishing college under NYOF’s sponsorship, he has a job as an instructor at a college in Kathmandu and is helping his half dozen younger siblings through school. And Babu, who came to the U.S. a decade ago to study, is now a computer engineer in Washington, D.C. and writes a nice, fat check to NYOF every year from his earnings.

J HOUSE AND K HOUSE

Many NYOF supporters have followed the fortunes of the wonderful children at J House (for boys) and K House (for girls). We established these homes to provide love, security, and a family environment to the children with the most traumatic backgrounds, who needed the nurturing atmosphere the homes provide. They are small (25 kids each), and each is supervised by a couple that live in the house (the kids' "Aunty" and "Uncle").

These children have formed themselves into an amazingly loving and supportive family. They refer to each other as sisters and brothers, and that is how they act toward each other. The older kids take care of the younger ones in the most tender and natural way, and they share everything they own. A number of them are disabled – some severely – but their new-found “siblings” take great care to include them in all the house activities and outings.

This year, we rented new houses for both the boys and the girls. We needed more room, especially a larger compound where these energetic kids had space to play. The houses are about a 10-minute walk from one another, in an unpolluted, quiet area. Each has room for a vegetable garden, and the boys have a full basketball court so they can play their favorite game to their heart's content. There is even an extra room for a library/computer/study area. Best of all, the houses can each accommodate 30 children, and we are in the process of admitting more kids to both houses.

Several of the new kids are very young, and they bring a delightful liveliness and playfulness to the atmosphere at the houses. One visitor described the houses as “squealing with laughter.” The young ones bring out in the older kids the natural instinct for nurturing that seems to be an inborn characteristic of Nepali children. Let me tell you about some of the new kids.

Sangeeta, new at K House, is only five years old, very tiny and shy. She has no parents. Her father abandoned her mother when she became pregnant. The mother subsequently fell into a deep depression, and died a year ago. Sangeeta was more or less shunted from one relative's home to another after her mother's death. She lived with her grandparents for a while, but they are old and themselves impoverished, and they could not afford to support Sangeeta. At K House, she has started to overcome some of her shyness and has

become fast friends with the supervisor's four-year-old daughter, Nafissa, as well as with little Babu (see below). She is attending a good nursery school.

Babu is the only boy who has ever lived at K house. Also five, he is the younger brother of three little sisters who came to live at K House about four years ago. I have written about these three irresistible little girls in prior letters – Soba, Sobita and Saraswati. They were living on the street with their parents, both alcoholics. All three children were seriously malnourished, ill, covered with vermin and lice, and dressed quite literally in rags. At K House, they have evolved into joyful little girls – full of life and personality and good cheer.

The mother gave birth to a little boy after the girls came to live at K House, but the parents were simply incapable of taking care of a child. Babu was sometimes left outside all night, crying, in the cold winter. At the age of five, he looked to be about three years old, and we feared for his survival. To our amazement, on a visit to K House (we encourage the families of J/K house children to visit), they asked if Babu could stay with us. Of course, we agreed enthusiastically. You can imagine the response of Babu's three sisters, whose adorable baby brother is now



J House boy with a class at school in village where the kids went for a social work trip.



Teaching village kids to brush their teeth.

the prince of the house. Babu's health has improved greatly, he has gained a lot of weight, and he is a happy child with a bright future. As soon as his health is completely restored, we will transfer him to J House.

Among the children admitted to J House are two brothers – Ram (five) and Rabi (eight). They belong to an indigenous tribal group from the Ghorka District. Their mother abandoned them shortly after Ram was born, and their father is in jail in Kathmandu for murder. After the father was jailed, the boys lived with their grandparents, who are desperately poor themselves. When we met the boys, they were barefoot, dressed in dirty, torn clothes, frightened and sad. We whisked them off to J House immediately, and they are adjusting well, healthy and happy.

Kedar is another new J House boy. He is 11 years old, and like all the other children at the house, he has a sad history. Both his parents were drug addicts, and he was abandoned on the streets of Kathmandu at the age of four months. Somehow, his grandmother found him, and he was living with her when we heard about his situation. Som and I went to meet his grandmother, a kindly, careworn woman who obviously loved Kedar and feared for his future as she grew older. She was greatly relieved that he could join J House. Kedar is a “people” kid with an infectious grin, and he seemed to bond immediately with the kids at J House. After his first week at school, a dozen new friends phoned him at J House!

We have not only admitted kids to the houses, but two have graduated – the first



K House girls doing their favorite thing—dancing.

to depart from K House. Sita and Madhu passed their college entrance exams and are entering nursing school. This was quite an achievement, since only 31% of all students taking the exam passed. Madhu's success was especially gratifying. We found her several years ago living outdoors under a tarp on the grounds at the brick factory where she was a child worker, and brought her to K House. Although we were not sure whether she would be admitted to school at her age, we had her (and several other kids) privately tutored at the house for a year. Madhu entered school at fifth grade and had only six years of schooling (instead of the usual 10) before she took the college entrance exam. So it was a truly triumphant moment for her.

We strive to raise these kids with a sense of social responsibility so that they will pass on to others some of the benefits they received from NYOF. To encourage this, we take them on a “social work” trip in the countryside. Last year, they went on a three-day camping trip to a village, where they interacted with the local community, especially the children, and tried to understand their problems – often quite foreign to a child in Kathmandu city, even one who was formerly impoverished. In preparation, our J and K House kids wrote and rehearsed plays about the evils of child marriage, alcoholism and domestic abuse, and the need to educate girls. (Many of the villagers are illiterate, so this is one way to get the message across.) Several times a week, in the month or so before the trip, they rehearsed. While these performances might not merit an Academy Award nomination, they were done with a good deal of heart, and a good bit of ham. The

kids also drew posters urging care for the environment and other worthy causes, and collected spare clothes to distribute, as well as toothbrushes and toothpaste.

When they arrived, they made a survey of the village size and population, and discussed their findings with the trip leader. In the evening, they performed their little plays at village gatherings and talked to the locals. The next day, they went to the small school armed with toothbrushes and toothpaste, gave toothbrushing lessons, taught a little English, etc. All of them returned home with a bit more knowledge and empathy for the problems of the people they encountered – people living in very different circumstances than the city-bred, now secure youngsters they have become.



Poster for social work trip encouraging care for the environment. Theme: Keep water clean.



Poster for social work trip. Theme: Educate girls as well as boys.



EDUCATING RURAL CHILDREN

In some rural areas of Nepal, the large majority of students (especially girls) drop out of school before fifth grade. These children are not learning the skills they need to cope in a rapidly-changing world.

Why don't most rural children stay in school? One reason is that the government schools in remote areas are pretty dismal – some classrooms have no teacher at all, the teachers generally have no training, and there is almost a complete absence of teaching materials. Secondly, many families cannot afford the school uniform, supplies, and small school fees, which total \$50 per child on average. That might seem like pennies, but in the context of a \$200 average annual income for an entire family, the cost is prohibitive.

For four years, we have been working in several rural communities to alleviate these problems. We pay the school expenses for 250 children who would not have been able to attend school without NYOF's help. About half of these are girls. (Sometimes we won't give a scholarship to a boy unless his sister is also allowed to attend school.) All the children we support also have the opportunity for a college education at our expense if they pass the college entrance exams with average marks. That's quite a motivation to study well. Last year, 11 students from our village program passed the exam and are attending college. This is the first generation in these remote villages to receive an education.

While providing scholarships tackles one side of the problem, we also have worked to strengthen the schools themselves. We

initiated a program to increase the number of teachers in the government schools by hiring teachers in the schools with the greatest shortages. NYOF pays three-fourths of the salaries and the locals pay the rest. The main reason for the villagers' contribution is to give them a stake in the performance of the teachers. We now employ 73 teachers under this program.

What's more, we are helping the available teachers to become more effective, which they greatly want. We have held several one-week teacher-training sessions, the most recent for 100 teachers. Experienced trainers come to the district center to instruct on teaching techniques. The teachers pass on what they have learned to their colleagues.

One interesting aspect of this program is the broader effect it has had on the students, the teachers, and the community. The dropout rate has fallen sharply, and attendance is up by more than the 250 students we support. The parents of many children who have not received scholarships are enrolling their children in school because of their desire to "keep up with the neighbors" and the hope that ultimately their kids, too, will be eligible for scholarships. The NYOF teachers are young, enthusiastic, and attentive to their duties, and they have more or less shamed some of the teachers appointed by the government to be more conscientious both in attendance and performance. And

the communities themselves are beginning to invest in the education of their children. In some cases, local governing bodies and parliamentary representatives, who have never before done so, are spending discretionary funds granted by the national government to employ teachers in the schools.

MORE GOOD WORKS

Because NYOF is small and nimble, we can respond directly and without delay to emergency needs of desperately poor children. During the last few months, we have paid for several surgeries for children whose families cannot afford it, including a complex operation for a 14-year-old boy who was so badly disfigured by an inappropriate surgical procedure that he fell into a deep depression and dropped out of school. There is only one doctor in Nepal who is qualified to correct his condition, but the family could not afford his services. We paid for the surgery, and the boy is back in school.

As another example, we have helped a number of destitute mothers by providing them with vocational training so that they could support themselves and their children. The list goes on and on. None of this costs much in U.S. terms, but these investments make a big difference in peoples' lives. NYOF has become known as the place to go when all else fails and a child's life is in peril.

We have a new web site, so please visit us at www.nyof.org. I plan this year to send short e-mail dispatches directly from Nepal every couple of months about the kids and our programs to those who wish to receive them. Please enter your e-mail address on the response envelope if you would like news of the children – straight from Kathmandu!



A child restored to health at NRH

NUTRITIONAL REHABILITATION HOME (NRH)

Our facility for severely malnourished children, now almost three years old, provides an innovative approach to the serious problem of malnutrition in Nepalese children. Here, we restore to health pitifully frail and sick kids in a residential setting, where they regain their normal weight and health. Equally important, their mothers are trained in proper nutritional and health care practices.

The facility is simple. Located in a busy area of Kathmandu, on the top floor of a building which houses a children's clinic, the home consists of 15 beds in one large room, a kitchen, and an office. The main room is plain but light and cheerful, and very clean. The beds are built extra-wide so that the mothers can sleep comfortably with their children, affording the children the warmth and emotional support they need. Most of the children are referred to NRH by hospitals, but some come from the street or are brought by our field worker from the villages (where he visits kids who have been discharged from NRH).

Each day, the mothers are trained by a nutritionist and the nurses in the preparation of nutritious, easily digestible meals, using cooking methods that retain the nutritional value of the food they feed their children. We also educate mothers in other principles of child care and hygiene. They are taught to recognize the symptoms of serious illness and to make "jeevanjel," the rehydration mixture which has saved the lives of millions of

children in developing countries around the world. The mothers prepare the food the children eat under the supervision of the nurse and the nutritionist, and feed their children several small meals a day. Only locally available foods are used, so that when the mother and child return to their village, the mother can continue the good nutritional practices she learned at the home.

Following discharge, a field worker visits the mothers and children in their villages on a regular rotation to provide information and follow-up support. Few children need to come back for a refresher.

This year, 150 children regained their health at the NRH, at the incredibly low cost of \$200 each. Without the help of NRH, some of these children would not survive, and many more would face a lifetime of physical and mental disability due to severe malnourishment in their early years.

But the statistics do not begin to tell the story. This is a place where those of us who thrive on instant gratification can

get our fill of daily miracles. The kids come in horribly emaciated, either crying constantly or unresponsive, lacking the animation you expect to see in children. Day by day, their mood, appearance and alertness improve. By the end of one to two months on the average, it is hard to recognize these plump and happy children as the pathetic little beings they were on admission. Our staff at the home keeps pictures of each child at the time of admission and discharge. The photos tell the story of these dramatic improvements – simply routine business at NRH. Here are a couple of pictures to illustrate what I mean:



13 year old Sushma at admission and six weeks later.



Rajendra at admission and two months later.

Because the home is providing an important service with such success, we want to move into larger quarters, expand the number of beds, and provide room for the children to play and the mothers to relax. Ultimately, we hope to establish similar facilities in other areas of Nepal, since the need is so great. The U.N. estimates that half the children under five years of age in Nepal are malnourished, and lack of proper nutrition is one of the leading causes of death of young children.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

As you probably have gleaned from reading this far, NYOF is an organization not only with heart, but also with a serious sense of responsibility for the children under its care. When we take on children who have no other means of support, we need to be there for them until they can stand on their own feet – just as any good parent would.

We cannot tell our kids that they have to return to the street or quit school because it has been a bad year on the stock market and donations are down. For this reason, NYOF has always run in the black, moving wisely and well as we've expanded programs and taken on new commitments.

This acute sense of responsibility is reflected in the insert with this letter – something new for NYOF. Our Board of Directors and some of our donors have made commitments in their estate plans that build real financial stability into the organization, taking steps to ensure that NYOF will continue to meet its responsibilities.

One excellent way to achieve financial stability over the long term is to assure a stream of income in the future through “planned giving.” This secure source of income will assure that we can continue the projects I have described. Making a gift costs nothing now, and can bring benefits to the donor in both the short and long term.

When you support NYOF – now or in the future – you receive more

“bang for the buck” than from any other organization I know. What better thing can you do with \$50 than send a village child to school for a year or, with \$100, free a little girl from indentured servitude and pay her school costs? If you raise that gift another \$100, you can save the life of a severely malnourished baby. Two hundred dollars to save a life! It is unusual in today's world to be able to make such a tangible and lasting difference in the lives of impoverished children as you can with a donation to NYOF. Your support will help us continue to give these kids what they need – love, security, education, purpose and self-confidence – in short, an opportunity to change their lives.

We enclose a response envelope, which will help you to make a contribution in various ways: by check, by credit card, or by donating stock or other property.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your loyal support, which continues to give new life and hope to hundreds of Nepali children.

Warm regards,

NEWS OF NYOF

This year has seen a new and exciting development at NYOF. We have just hired our first Executive Director, an able young man named Jason Chen, who has had long experience in the foundation world and worked in Nepal for two years, carrying out various projects there. He possesses that special combination of qualities that characterizes NYOF – the dedication and ability to help the children of Nepal, combined with a personal, loving touch that is the hallmark of our work. He is well educated (Harvard Law School and Wharton), but decided early in life that he would devote himself to helping people. He has come to the right place!

P.S. If you want to see the J and K House kids, NRH, and the children of Dang alive and in color, we have available a video filmed by a documentary filmmaker named Julie Bridgham when she was in Nepal earlier this year. Please check the box on the response envelope if you would like a free copy.

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