



Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

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DEAR FRIENDS *I am back in Kathmandu again, so happy to see the children once more. My arrival in the fall is the highlight of the year for me – dozens of kids awaiting my arrival with garlands, smiles, hugs. I am always astonished to see how much the children have changed during my six-month absence. Most thrilling are the changes in the new kids who entered our program shortly before I left in March. The tiny little orphan boy from a primitive and remote area of Nepal who would hardly look at me when I left leaps into my arms with a big grin and gives me a tight hug. The two young brothers who lived in a lean-to in a village and were literally starving look healthy, well dressed and happy as they put a garland around my neck. And the two little orphan girls, who were incredulous that they would no longer have to work and could just be kids and go to school, are now part of the close K House family.*

NEW FAMILIES: J HOUSE AND K HOUSE

As most of you know, NYOF operates two homes for children in Kathmandu – J House for boys and K House for girls. They are small – each holds only 30 children – and have nothing of the flavor of an institution. We reserve places at the homes for the most vulnerable children, those who need the warm and loving attention and the family environment at the houses. At each house, there is a resident “auntie” and “uncle” who become surrogate parents. But it is the children themselves who bond into a close-knit family. They call each other “sister” and “brother,” and they mean it. They are supportive, loving, and helpful to one another in a way that any American family would be proud of. Several are disabled, but we never have to ask a child to help one of their sisters or brothers who have special needs. Nepali kids seem to fall naturally into a nurturing role. There is always someone to help a blind child to navigate, or a child with crutches or braces to climb the stairs.

It gives us great pleasure to see “cast-off”

children, who had been living on the street alone, sleeping in doorways rain or shine, or working as beggars or servants at a very young age, now living better, with greater opportunities for success, than the vast majority of Nepali children. The J and K houses are attractive and enriched with play areas, gardens, and even computers. The children attend good private schools and remain in the houses until they enter college. (Yes, most of these kids will attend college!) They know that NYOF will look after them until they can stand on their own, and this sense of security, which most of them are experiencing for the first time in their lives, transforms them into the loving, funny, lively kids they have become.

At J and K House, the kids have regular supervised study time as well as weekly chores, such as washing their own clothes and bed linens (by hand in Nepal), making their beds, and cleaning their rooms. But it is not all work for these kids by any means. We take them on outings regularly – picnics, hikes, even trekking

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Saroj, our youngest child, shaking it up at a J House party.



Looking for rhinos in the tall grass on an outing with the J and K House kids.

in the mountains. We want them to see that all of Nepal is not like crowded, dirty Kathmandu. It is important for them to witness not only the spectacular beauty of their country, but also what life is like in rural Nepal, since 80 percent of Nepalis live in villages. Many of the kids return from these trips counting their blessings after seeing children their age carrying heavy loads of fodder and wood on their backs, doing backbreaking labor from dawn to nightfall, and unable to go to school.

Last year, Som, our Director in Nepal, took 60 kids trekking for a week in the mountains. The 15 children who were too young to trek or disabled went with me to a wildlife park in the south of Nepal. We rode elephants and floated down the river in dugout canoes as crocodiles swam by, cartoon-style, with only their eyes above water.

Part of the river is safe for swimming, and it was there that the most memorable part of the trip occurred for me. Maya, one of the seriously disabled children at K House, uses crutches and has a heavy brace on her legs – a result of polio when she was very young. Nevertheless she was determined to go swimming. As we walked along the slippery, rocky approach to the river, Maya fell repeatedly as her crutches slid on the rocks leading to the beach. But each time, she just laughed, retrieved her crutches, brushed herself off, and insisted that we continue on.

To me she exemplifies the spirit of the J and K House children, a spirit that encourages me every day. They have endured more suffering at a young age than many of us experience in a lifetime, but they are finding ways to triumph over their difficulties. I am awed by their resiliency and good cheer. They have so much to give the world.



The intrepid Maya at the beach



A new little girl arrives at K House.



A warm reception from a K House sister.



Into the shower she goes.



Voilà – a clean and happy child

J + K House Kids Welcoming Their New Sisters and Brothers

This year, we have brought several new kids to live at J House and K House. Pragya, a five-year-old girl, is active and amazingly cheerful considering her former life. Abandoned by her parents, she had been living outdoors on the grounds of a temple with her grandfather and a 78-year-old man. Tika and Bishnu, two little girls from far western Nepal (an area heavily impacted by the Maoist insurgency), came to us just before I left Nepal in March. Both are orphans from low caste families, and they were living with distant relatives who were unable to support them.

It is when a new child comes to the houses that the kids really shine. They remember how frightened they were when they first arrived and they are tender, reassuring and very helpful with the new children, showing them where they will sleep, lending them clothes, helping them to shower and shampoo, and making them feel at home.

FROM HUNGER TO HOPE: THE NUTRITIONAL REHABILITATION HOME

For those of you addicted to almost-instant gratification, this is the project for you. On a grassy lane near Kathmandu's children's hospital, little miracles occur every day, practically overnight.

We have all seen horrible images of severely malnourished children with huge bellies, glassy eyes, and sticks for arms and legs. The problem seems overwhelming. How can we truly help such children? NYOF has found a simple, effective way that transforms these tragic children into bouncing, active little people within the space of a month or two. And our approach helps to keep the problem from recurring.

Our Nutritional Rehabilitation Home (NRH) is a residential facility unique in Nepal. Malnourished children and their mothers (or another caretaker if the mother is not available) stay at the NRH for about four to eight weeks. Our staff of doctors, nurses specialized in child nutrition, a nutritionist, cooks, and other support personnel help the child regain normal weight and health. Meanwhile, the mother is trained in how and what to feed her child, how to prepare meals to retain their nutritional value, and other important matters relating to the health of the child such as hygiene, symptoms



Nurse demonstrating preparation of vegetables to retain their nutritional value in the NRH kitchen.



Brothers Ganesh and Mohan at admission to NRH.



Kumar and his parents on arrival at NRH.

of serious illness, and preparation of "jevanjel" rehydration fluid. (We also teach family planning.) The problem is often lack of knowledge rather than the unavailability of appropriate food. Each child is carefully monitored and weighed every day, and the mother is kept informed at all times about the child's progress.

Everything used to feed a child is available in the villages of Nepal so that mother and child can continue the program after the child is discharged. Field workers visit the children at home following discharge to report on their health and to offer help if needed.

In the five-and-a-half years of the NRH's existence, we have restored the health or saved the lives of more than 600 children and educated their mothers in child care. The cost is an astonishingly low \$200 for



....and 43 short days later.



37 days later, a happy and healthy mother and child.

each mother/child pair. Think about it: For the price of a couple of doctor visits in the U.S., we can provide this fully staffed, residential program that prevents lifelong disability, empowers poor women, and reduces future malnutrition.

Early this year, we rented a house located within walking distance of the children's hospital, on a quiet lane, set in a beautiful, level walled compound. There is room for the children to play and for an organic vegetable garden, so that our staff can show the mothers how to provide nutritious meals from seed to final cooking. Best of all, we have increased the number of children we can serve.

The NRH has proved so successful that both the United Nations and the Nepali Ministry of Health have urged us to expand it. Within the next year, we hope to open the first of several satellite NRHs

in an area where malnourishment is endemic. Many mothers cannot make the long journey to Kathmandu to seek help for their malnourished children, so we will go to them.

I visit the NRH as often as possible while I am in Kathmandu, not because it needs my attention but because I am addicted to watching the almost daily improvement in these children. The child who was admitted last week pitifully frail, crying, and unable to keep food down – the embodiment of a Gerber baby in reverse – is now less upset, more alert, and eating regularly. Next week, he or she will venture a sort of smile, and the mother will look calmer and healthier (sometimes the mothers are in very bad condition themselves). The week after that the child will clearly be stronger and have gained some weight. And so it goes, week-by-week, and sometimes day-by-day.

After an average of one month, it is hard to recognize the bouncy, plump little thing that was admitted in such a wretched condition a short time ago. Honestly, it has even happened that the mothers themselves don't recognize their own children in the "before" picture.

According to the U.N., half the children under five years of age in Nepal are malnourished, one of the leading causes of death in this age group.



From Piglets to Prosperity: Freeing Indentured Daughters

Many of you are acquainted with this program, featured on "The Oprah Show" earlier this year. We were so grateful to receive many donations to "buy a piglet and free a girl." These donations have gone to work.

As you recall, in some remote areas of Western Nepal, little girls are traded by their fathers to labor contractors to work as servants for a private family or to wash dishes at a restaurant. The girls live far from home under oppressive conditions. The opportunities for abuse of all kinds are obvious. The father receives about \$50 a year for his daughter's labor, but the girl is not paid. Some of these girls never return home.

NYOF devised a way to bring them home to their families, send them to school, and compensate their families for their lost wages. The families – usually quite large – don't want to sell their daughters but are truly desperate for the income. We learned that piglets, prized in the local culture, could be raised on scraps and then sold for about the same amount the daughters would have earned. So, for each family joining our program, we provided a piglet, enabling the girls to stay home. Then we put the girls in the village school, paying all education expenses, including a school uniform, supplies, and the small school fee. The cost for all this? Only \$100 for each girl a year.

Though this project has really taken off (increasing tenfold to 329 the number of girls rescued in two years), we have only just begun. We estimate that 1,500-2,000 young girls have been indentured from the valley where we are working.

Piglets have been a great start, but we intend to tackle this problem on a wider scale by starting other income generation strategies as well, leading to sustainable income for these families. We have excellent relations with these communities, which is an essential foundation for new programs. We hope to launch micro-lending, which will help the villagers start small businesses of their own.

Our "secret weapon" here is the girls themselves. Those who have joined our program and are going to school with NYOF's support have formed themselves into a club to convince the parents of their friends not to send their daughters away. Over time, they themselves will sustain our outreach efforts for this program. Once traded by desperately poor parents, they are becoming assertive, empowered, and educated!



These girls no longer work as bonded servants far from home. Instead, they are back living



with their families and attending school, thanks to NYOF's Indentured Daughters Program.

MAKING CHANGES, CHANGING LIVES

The most heart-wrenching aspect of our work is deciding which children to accept into our program. In Nepal, the average income is \$200 a year, and there is no safety net – no AFDC, no social security, no food stamps. The pressure to help more and more children is very great.

I have often been asked if I find it depressing to be surrounded by thousands of kids who live in such desperate poverty: after all, NYOF can help only a fraction of them. My answer is yes and no. Yes, it is sad that NYOF cannot extend a helping hand to the millions of Nepali children who live in great deprivation. But it is hard to be discouraged when we witness our help making such a big difference in the lives of so many children who blossom before our eyes – so quickly and dramatically.

The backgrounds of some of these children are horrific. Each day a stream of anxious mothers, poorly dressed, often malnourished, appear at our office with their young children, seeking help.

It's hard to know how families like these find out about NYOF since we do not advertise, but somehow, almost every day, two or three young mothers are waiting in the garden ready to tell their melancholy tales. Many have been abandoned by their husbands and have no way of supporting their children. Since no help can be expected from the government, they do not know where to turn. We do not send anyone away without talking to them first and offering help if the need is genuine, if only to provide some emergency money for food and shelter.

To give you a taste of what it is like to learn about the lives of these children and how we go about deciding the best way to help them, let me tell you about a typical afternoon at the NYOF office. Just before I left Nepal in March, I was working with Som (our Director) and Ishwor (our Children's Counselor and Scholarship Coordinator) at the NYOF office, when our office assistant announced that there were two mothers and their children outside to see us.

The first mother was accompanied by her seven-year-old daughter and five-year-old son as well as a social worker who told us that the mother was a drug addict and prostitute, that her husband was also addicted, and that the whole family lived in a small concrete room where the mother conducted her business within sight of the children. The kids were silent, depressed, and unresponsive, with no sign

of the usual spark of young children. And the mother was indifferent. After talking it over privately, we decided that if the parents agreed, the best solution was to remove the kids from the home because there was a real danger that the mother would initiate the girl into prostitution when she reached puberty. We could place them either in boarding school or at J and K House, where we had a couple of vacancies.

Next, another mother, also followed by two children, came through the door. She looked terrible: Her hair was matted as though she had not combed it in days, there were holes in her sweater, and she was not clean. She was blind. But the moment she opened her mouth to speak, her face lit up with intelligence and amiability.

This was her story: She was married off at the age of 18 to a 60-year-old man because her family felt that this was the best match she could make. They had three children – a 16-year-old boy working as a servant for a village family, and the 12-year-old girl and five-year-old boy who were cuddling and giggling together in one of our office chairs.

The husband was now badly disabled and unable to work, and the mother could barely feed her children. She made her living by gathering fodder in the forest for sale. Accompanied by the little girl, they went to the forest each day, carrying a basket held by a tumpline around their foreheads – a large basket for the mother and a smaller one for the child. For hours, the little girl placed leaves and twigs into the two baskets, and then they trudged back to the village together with their heavy loads and sold the fodder to the villagers. The mother was not earning enough to feed her children and came to Kathmandu seeking help.

As she spoke, she caressed the little boy who had crawled into her lap with one hand and held the hand of her daughter with the other. It was obvious that this was a close and loving family, and that it would be painful to separate them. Besides, they would have a hard time surviving without the help the girl gives to her mother. So this time, we had to craft



A special solution for a special family



An impoverished and loving mother and son

a different solution. NYOF would pay the school expenses of all three children in the village school (a very small cost), and would also provide the family with 1,000 rupees a month (about \$15) for “kaja” (snacks) for the children. This tiny supplement, together with the mother's earnings, would allow the family to survive, with both older children helping their mother before and after school.

As I left the office a short time later, the blind woman's children were running around the garden, laughing and playing with a hackey-sack made of rubber bands (they cost one penny in Nepal), while the children of the first woman looked on silently.

Postscript: The drug-addicted mother died of an overdose shortly after I left Nepal. The little boy is now at J House and the girl at K House, adjusting well and cheering up. The village family is managing satisfactorily, and all three children are in school.



Olga at the NRH with a child nicknamed the "little wizard" for his intense and knowing eyes.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Those of us who work at NYOF derive a great sense of satisfaction and joy from our contacts with these children. And they are not at all shy about expressing their appreciation. Here is what a student NYOF supports in college wrote about what NYOF's help means to him: "When I go home all person of my family ask about you. They are very happy that you got me a golden chance to improve my life. When I will reaching my last period of my life, you will be in my heart at that time."

You, our donors, are responsible for the "golden chance" afforded this boy and the hundreds of others who have benefited from NYOF's help. You are the critical factor in everything that NYOF has accomplished to improve the lives of these children. I just wish you could witness personally how much has been achieved because of your generosity. We want to continue to provide opportunities for these wonderful kids so that they can grow up to be confident adults, ready to pass on to others the benefits they received from NYOF. We can do this only with your help.

Please give as generously as you can. Our work results in unequalled change in the lives of these kids for each dollar invested because dollars go very far in Nepal.

We have made it easy for you to donate. You can send a check, pay by credit card, or donate securities, using the enclosed envelope, or give online (www.nyof.org). Or you can sponsor a child at J or K House or in boarding school and receive letters and pictures and news about the child's progress. We have undertaken the care of many new children recently who would enjoy a relationship with a sponsor from a far-away country. Please consider also becoming a member of our Legacy Circle by including NYOF in your estate plan. The enclosed brochure will give you more information about this program, which will help to ensure that the work of NYOF continues far into the future.

Thank you for giving these children the opportunity they need to change their lives.

Warm regards,

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Tot Heffelfinger, a founding Director of NYOF and his wife Joanne, not only donate generously to NYOF annually, but provide support in other ways as well - by their advice and encouragement, and by acting as parents for NYOF kids brought to the U.S. for medical care. But their help goes even further. They have designated NYOF a beneficiary of their estate plans by a bequest, and by naming NYOF as the recipient of the undistributed funds remaining in Tot's IRA.

"By keeping distributions from my IRA during my lifetime to the minimum required" says Tot, "it is likely that a significant part of the IRA will go to help kids in Nepal rather than to the IRS."

**Please visit our web site
www.nyof.org
for more pictures and the
latest on our programs.**