



# Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

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**DEAR FRIENDS** *This is the 15th year we have been sending news to you about our work with kids in Nepal. When I look back on the years that have gone by, it's hard to believe how far we have come - and how much more there is to do. The first five scholarships we gave to boys from an orphanage in 1985 have expanded to more than 1,300, and these include children in Kathmandu and in remote villages as well. What's more, we have expanded our reach beyond scholarships to new, innovative projects like our Nutritional Rehabilitation Home for severely malnourished children and the Indentured Daughters program.*

*Your support and advice throughout these years of growth and success have been the key to providing hope and opportunity to thousands of the most impoverished children in Nepal.*

## INDENTURED NO MORE

Most of you know about our efforts in the remote Dang district in western Nepal to liberate girls – some as young as seven, eight or nine – from bonded labor. These children, most of whose fathers had also been bonded all their lives to the local landlords, are sent off to work far away from home as servants for a family or to wash dishes in primitive eating places. They work from dawn to late at night doing household chores – taking care of children, helping in the kitchen, fetching water, and doing any other tasks their employers require of them. They get paid nothing, and their fathers receive an average of \$50 a year for their daughters' services.

In order to combat this practice, we came up with the idea of giving each family a piglet, which it can sell at the end of the year for about the same sum they received for their daughters' labor. There is only one condition: that they bring their children home and allow them to

go to school. We pay all school expenses.

Poverty is what drives this desperate trade. Although many families and most of their daughters are eager to join our program, at times a bit of persuasion is necessary. Our staff visits the families with bonded daughters every December, the month before the contracts for the girls' services are renewed each year, to urge them to bring their daughters home and enroll them in our program. Currently, there are 400 girls in this program, up from 32 in 2000.

The stories told by the parents of these girls would break your heart. One couple, who had seven daughters "on the way to a son" (who never did arrive), sent one child off to work at the age of seven for \$30 a year paid to the family, and another at the age of nine. The father asked our field worker, "If our daughters don't work, how will this family survive?" We talked to the father about the rights of children,

## FALL 2003



For the love of an innocent child...



... for the joy of giving back childhoods...



... and for the opportunity to restore health and hope - join us!

## NRH - BATTLING THE SCOURGE OF MALNUTRITION



The endless labor of indentured girls...v



... has ended! These girls are in school now.

the duties of parents, and the importance of an education to change society and improve the life of the child and the family. He conceded that we were right and that his daughters should be allowed to attend school. This being Asia, bargaining was in order. We struck a deal: in addition to providing the piglet, the kerosene lamp, and two liters of kerosene a month (there is no electricity in the area), we would pay the school expenses of the two girls who had been sent off to work if the family would send two other daughters still living at home to school.



NYOF's Nutritional Rehabilitation Home in Kathmandu restores severely malnourished children to health. They come to us pitifully thin and frail, often crying inconsolably, or so depleted that they are almost catatonic. This phase usually does not last long. They are immediately bathed and fed a high energy, easily digestible mixture of grains and greens. Over the space of an astonishingly short time, these kids perk up and become the children they were meant to be.

Almost every day, we see improvement – after a few days a tentative smile, then a glimmer of interest, and before long the child is putting on weight and running around and enjoying life. Here is just one example:



Another NRH miracle - baby Dinesh on arrival and six weeks later

While the children are restored to health, the mothers are trained in every aspect of childcare and nutrition. We have on staff a nutritionist, doctors, nurses, and cooks. The foods used at the NRH are readily available all over Nepal, so that the mother can follow the regimen after she returns to her village. It costs slightly

more than \$200 to restore a child to health and train the mother.

A young woman NYOF supported through medical school just graduated and is working as a full time volunteer at the NRH prior to starting her internship. This is but one example of how our programs support one another and how youngsters who have benefited from a NYOF education give back to others.

Almost all the children come to NRH with a caregiver – usually the mother, but sometimes the father, a grandfather, or an uncle. This is important, because it is the training the caregivers receive that will prevent another bout of malnutrition and give them the tools to teach others in their community about good nutritional practices. But sometimes the only one available to care for a malnourished child is a not-much-older sibling.

This was the case with a little boy named Dhane, about five, and his sister, Binu, who is about nine or ten years old. To all intents and purposes, she is Dhane's mother. Dhane, who was severely malnourished, is a tiny little boy, almost comically solemn, and at least so far unable to speak. His sister, Binu, is a cheerful little thing, very shy, but almost painfully conscientious in caring for her little brother; she comforts him, carries him everywhere, feeds and dresses him, washes his clothes, and does all the things a mother would do for her child. Their own mother is retarded and deaf. She has no place to live in her village or any way to provide food for her children. Our field staff visited the mother and reported back that the children would not survive if they were returned to their home.

A tough call: we could not separate the two because they would have been devastated without each other. Binu had to go to school, and there were few school hostels that would accommodate both boys and girls. After several months, we found an excellent school with a hostel where they could both live. We hope that with the care he receives at the hostel, his sister at his side, and other children to stimulate



Binu and her little brother Dhane

him, Dhane will learn to talk and become a happy and secure child. Here is what a member of our staff wrote recently about their progress: "They are happy and funny kids indeed. Dhane is learning to speak more words... When we visit they welcome us in a different way – coming quietly closer, caressing and smiling. They have now learned to trust people without doubt."

## J AND K HOUSE: WHERE CHILDREN BLOSSOM

The kids at our two children's homes (J House for boys and K House for girls) continue to thrive. Two boys left J House, one for college, and the other for a computer training program.

And one boy left the girls' house – the only one of his gender to ever live there. Several years ago, we rescued three little girls living with their alcoholic parents on the streets of Kathmandu. The mother later gave birth to a boy, Deepak, whose condition quickly deteriorated. He was severely malnourished, cried incessantly, and was ill most of his young life. He became so debilitated about three years ago that his mother feared for his life and asked us to care for him.

He was tiny and very frail, and we decided that instead of placing him in J House, our boys' house, he would live

with the girls for a few months – not only to be close to his sisters, but because of the 20-odd little mothers who would shower him with affection and care. He has blossomed, and, while still very small for his age, he is in good health and full of mischief. Three years later, he was still there. The girls treated him like the little prince of K House, and he knew a good thing when he saw one. Whenever we suggested that he was, after all, a boy, and should move to the boys' house, he would start bawling. I imagined him at 17, a squeaky-voiced teenager starting to shave – and still living with the girls. Well, a few months ago, we eased him into a new life with his brothers at J House. And it was not as traumatic a transition as we had feared. The kids at the two houses treat each other as sisters and brothers and see each other frequently, so he grew accustomed to being around the boys. And at J House there are also children we can count on to be tender and loving and kind to a "new" kid.

If Deepak was the prince of K House, then Prema is the princess. She is only five years old, and as is true of all the children at the houses, she has a tragic story. Her father, a schoolteacher in a remote village, died of tuberculosis when she was only one year old. Three months later, her mother fell out of a tree and was severely injured. In spite of several surgeries, she is permanently disabled and cannot work. All the family's funds were spent on medical care, and Prema's mother could not support her. They moved in with her mother's relatives, who did not welcome them, since they could barely feed their own children. In fact, when our social worker went out to visit the family to make an assessment, they were disappointed that he did not take Prema to Kathmandu right away. She was clearly an unwanted child.

Prema has been at K House now for several months. Although she was frightened when she first arrived, the other little girls were very happy to have a young child in their midst again after Deepak's



**For no particular reason except that the world is in such a mess and we all need cheering up, here are a few pictures of some of the children recently restored to health at NRH. Honestly, we do not hold a baby beauty contest before admission!**

departure, and they welcomed her with kisses and hugs and some of their own toys. She has started nursery school and leaves every morning on our school bus with the other J and K House kids. Here is a picture of her with one of the K House girls when she arrived at the house, looking a little forlorn, and another about a week later:



Prema comforted by a K House sister on arrival...



... and two weeks later - safe at last!



K house girls ready for school



Som Paneru, our Nepal Executive Director, heads the NYOF staff of 40 in Nepal. Som is himself the product of a NYOF college scholarship. He has worked for NYOF for eight years and has shepherded its growth from a small foundation providing limited services to a limited number of children to a much larger organization that is one of the most respected and innovative non-governmental organizations working with children in Nepal. He recently completed his Masters degree in International Child Welfare in Britain, after receiving a prestigious scholarship from the British Embassy in Kathmandu. I often say that he does all the work and I get all the credit. Here is what he has to say about his work with NYOF:

*"One of the most satisfying aspects of my job is that I have been privileged to meet and help many outstanding children. The greatest happiness comes from my personal relationships with these kids and from watching them grow into confident and accomplished youngsters eager to give back to society.*

*"Here is a recent example: Several years ago, we met Rabendra, a little boy who had just been through a terrible ordeal. His father murdered his mother in his presence, and because he was the only eyewitness, he was forced to testify at the trial. His father was convicted and sent to jail in Kathmandu. We placed Rabendra in boarding school and kept close touch with him, offering counseling when it was needed. Father and son reconciled over the years, and the father was released from jail a couple of years ago. He died suddenly late last year.*

*"The family had a small house in a run-down area of Kathmandu, and Rabendra, as the only child, was entitled to its possession. When we offered to make legal arrangements to give him title to the property, he refused to accept it. He wanted, instead, to donate it to NYOF so that we could sell it and use the money to give other poor kids like himself the benefit of an education. Of course, we told him that he was too young to make such a serious decision, and he reluctantly agreed to accept the property in his name. He has rented it out and uses the proceeds to pay the cost of schooling for the poor kids in the neighborhood. (Rabendra recently graduated from high school, scored very well on his college entrance examinations, and is in his first year of college.)"*

**W**e try to emphasize the education of girls because they are discriminated against in Nepali society. Only 38 out of 100 women are literate, and the dropout rate for girls between first and fifth grades is 80%. Nepal is one of the few countries in the world where a woman's life expectancy is lower than a man's. Most of the students supported by NYOF are girls.



“So what if our desks are a pile of bricks – we’re getting an education!”

## SCHOLARSHIPS: A SPRINGBOARD OUT OF POVERTY

In a country like Nepal, a child without an education is destined to lead a life of backbreaking physical labor and abject poverty. NYOF emphasizes the importance of education, and everyone in our program attends school except for the malnourished babies at NRH. At present, we support the education of more than 1,300 children, about half in villages and the remainder in the Kathmandu area. These kids range in age from five to their late 20s, and from nursery school to medical school. Every child in our program will have a chance to attend college in Nepal if he or she receives average marks on the college entrance examinations.

Without the help of organizations like NYOF, many poor kids would have no real chance for education. The statistics are appalling: the Nepali government spends only \$21 dollars a year for each primary school child, the lowest in Southeast Asia. Thirty percent of children do not go to school at all. Only slightly more than one-half of the teachers have had any training. Ninety percent of the government schools are dilapidated. NYOF has a variety of programs to help

destitute children receive that all-important education, their only ticket out of poverty:

- Children who have a decent family home but whose parents cannot afford to send them to school live with their families while we pay for the cost of their education.
- Youngsters without family or who must go to special schools because of their disabilities attend boarding schools.
- Older students, mostly in the Kathmandu area, attend college or graduate school, with NYOF paying their modest living expenses and school costs. In all, about 125 intelligent but impoverished youngsters attend college or graduate school under NYOF’s auspices. They are studying to be teachers, engineers, computer technicians, rural development specialists, doctors, and more.

We are proud to say that of the 18 students in NYOF’s program who took the college entrance examinations this year, all but two passed – and this in a year when the national passing rate was only 32%.

## NEWS ABOUT NYOF

NYOF welcomes two young and energetic members to our Board. Lori Perlstadt (below, right) is a Senior Vice President of a corporation that places independent business consultants. She is full of ideas for improving NYOF’s operations and has proved to be a great asset during her short tenure on the Board. Like all the other members of the NYOF Board, she has been to Nepal and is devoted to the country and its people.

Ian Coats MacColl, a recent bridegroom, is an industrial designer and product developer. He traveled to Nepal for the second time six years ago, fell in love with our kids on a visit to J and K House, and has been volunteering his considerable design skills to NYOF projects ever since – like the newsletter you are reading.

NYOF also has a new Director of U.S. Operations. Nora Heaphy (below, left) runs the Sausalito office of NYOF. She is not only a seasoned non-profit manager, but she has had experience in developing countries as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. She is knowledgeable, cheerful, efficient, and always ready to help NYOF donors with their questions.

We have on the drawing board a number of new and creative programs to help the children of Nepal. I will write about them in my next newsletter.



**You can sponsor a child’s education through our sponsorship program, which enables our donors to develop a relationship with the children NYOF helps. Sponsors receive letters from the child, progress reports, and pictures. It means a lot to the children that someone in a faraway land is interested in their welfare and progress, and many sponsors and children develop a close relationship. One of our greatest needs is sponsorships for the children at J and K House. A sponsor contributes \$1,000 toward the cost of supporting a child at the house, but if you can provide additional funds to help us to cover the full cost of the child’s expenses, we would greatly appreciate it. Please contact us for more information about the children available for sponsorship.**



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

For all these successes, we have you, our donors, to thank. None of these good works would be possible without your loyal support and generosity. Your contributions are making a difference by transforming the lives of children who come into the world with the odds heavily stacked against them. Like you, we have watched the pictures on television of hollow-eyed, cadaverous children from developing countries who have no prospect for a decent future, and felt helpless to do anything about it. We are blessed with the good fortune to have found a way to cut through the barriers of poverty, caste, and hopelessness and give kids in Nepal the opportunity to change their lives.

Because dollars go so far in Nepal, your donations make a tangible, real and lasting difference. For \$50 a year we pay the annual school costs of a child in a remote village; it costs a little more than \$200 to restore a malnourished baby to health at NRH and train the mother in childcare; and only \$280 to pay the expenses of a blind or deaf child in a special boarding school.

Please give as generously as you can. You can donate on-line ([www.nyof.org](http://www.nyof.org)), by credit card or check (using the enclosed envelope), or include NYOF in your estate plan.

We look back on 2003 with a feeling of gratitude to all of you and to the wonderful kids with whom we work, and look forward to the new year with hope and anticipation.

Warm regards,

P.S. Enclosed is a small gift – a bookmark with a poem written last year by a former Indentured Daughter for a school assignment. Her prayers were answered when NYOF came to the rescue!

Please visit our web site [www.nyof.org](http://www.nyof.org)

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**We are proud to welcome Marilyn Callander to our Legacy Circle. These donors have included NYOF in their estate plans. Marilyn lived in Nepal when she was a Fulbright professor there several years ago. She has returned many times, is passionately devoted to the country and its people, and sponsors the education of several children through NYOF. Here is what Marilyn says about her reason for making a bequest to NYOF:**

***“By naming NYOF a beneficiary of my will, I am making sure that its wonderful work in Nepal will continue into the future. I have personally witnessed the transformation NYOF makes in the lives of children in Nepal by its support of kids who live in the most desolate circumstances and who would have no hope for a decent life without this support. The commitment, intelligence and creativity of NYOF’s staff and their devotion to the children of Nepal gives me confidence that my bequest will be used in the most effective and efficient way to make lasting, positive changes in the lives of the children in a country I love.”***

***Planned giving can benefit you and your estate while also helping NYOF. Call us (with no obligation whatsoever) if you’d like to explore the possibility of making a bequest to NYOF. You can also find information on our web site ([www.nyof.org](http://www.nyof.org)).***