



# NEPALESE YOUTH OPPORTUNITY FOUNDATION

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**DEAR FRIENDS** *I am excited to be back in colorful, exotic, chaotic, polluted, but always fascinating Kathmandu and to see the progress of our children and the commitment of our staff here. Our programs are thriving! As always, we face challenges and are presented with opportunities to do enormously satisfying work for the children of Nepal. In spite of the Maoist insurgency, our programs have not been seriously affected. At the end of this letter, I will share a story that encapsulates all the hope and heartache of working here. But first, I would like to give you an update on all the good things we have accomplished this year.*



## FALL 2004



Nothing like ice cream on a hot day for the K House girls



NRH boy – healthy now, but suspicious of my digital camera

## HAPPY ENDINGS AT THE NRH

**O**ur Nutritional Rehabilitation Home in Kathmandu recently reached a milestone – admitting the 1000th child just a few months ago. That's 1000 kids restored to blooming good health and 1000 mothers trained in the principles of child nutrition in the six years of the NRH's existence. Last July, 100 children who had regained their health at the NRH were invited to attend a celebration of International Children's Day with their mothers. These now sturdy and lively kids were astounded to see pictures of themselves when they were admitted to NRH as frail and pitiful little creatures. We are grateful to the dZi Foundation for its help in funding the Kathmandu NRH.

The two branches of the NRH in eastern and western Nepal are now open and full to capacity. If anything, these children are in even worse condition than those admitted to the Kathmandu facility. That's the bad news. The good news is that these two new branches of the NRH make the same dramatic improvements in the health of the children as we have seen for years at the Kathmandu facility, and in about the same six week time period. These photos are but one example of the miracles that happen at NRH every day. The pictures below are of one-year-old Ashwarya at the time she was admitted to the NRH, and less than one month later.



**There is an urgent need to expand these nutritional homes to other parts of the country so that the vast majority of mothers who cannot travel long distances with their starving children can also get help. It costs \$100,000 to build such a facility and operate it for five years. One of NYOF's donors has made a generous contribution of half of this amount toward an additional NRH in rural Nepal. It is a challenge grant, which must be matched by a like amount from NYOF donors. If you would like your donation to be used for this purpose, please mark your check or send a note with your donation indicating your preference. Another NRH in a rural area would save the lives of many vulnerable children and at the astonishingly low cost of a little over \$250.**



Street play in Dang: cruel father and about-to-be-bonded daughter

## RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH MELODRAMA

We continue to advocate energetically with the community in Dang for the young girls who have been bonded away by their parents to work as servants or who are about to be. Although rescuing these girls from bondage by compensating their families with a piglet or a goat is an important part of our strategy, equally important is raising awareness that bonding their daughters away to work in far-off cities in the homes of strangers is not a good idea. We believe that more girls could be saved from bondage by these awareness campaigns than we could rescue with our limited resources.

The most effective way to accomplish this is to enlist the help of the girls who are the victims or prospective victims of the practice. Last January, during the festival at which the girls are “sold” by their parents to labor contractors, the hundreds of children who had been returned home under the NYOF program and are now attending school, distributed thousands of leaflets and posted hundreds of notices on tree trunks and walls, warning of the dangers to girls who are contracted away. And hundreds of them marched in a demon-

stration carrying banners and chanting slogans against the bonding practice.

Another effective way to combat the custom is by presenting street plays that convey the suffering of the children and their mothers. There is no television in the area and not much other entertainment, so it’s the only game in town. Since most of the community is illiterate, this is a good way to get the message across. We have seen the impact of these presentations – mothers in the audience weeping as they relived the trauma of the bonding of their own daughters.

Last summer, we invited 11 girls who had



Girl returned from her labors reading anti-bonding leaflet to mothers in Dang

been indentured and are now in school under NYOF’s program, to come to Kathmandu and create plays to be performed in their communities. With the help of a facilitator, they sat for days discussing the pain they felt at leaving their families and the suffering they endured while working as servants far from home. Then they composed a play which distilled their emotions and experiences. They were provided with training in acting, and by the time they returned to their home villages, they were confident performers and felt passionate about their role in helping to bring an end to this practice. They are presenting these plays in the villages of the Dang district, where the bonding of children is common.

Recently, a Nepali television crew visited Dang to film a program about the bonding of young girls, and the girls trained in Kathmandu performed their play as a part of the program. It was broadcast throughout the country, so all of Nepal saw these young girls acting out the pain and abuse that results from this inhumane custom.

One sweet and delicate child, Asmita, who had been working as a servant for years before she was rescued by NYOF, was the star of the play. She was invited to Kathmandu to talk about her experiences to a group of journalists and representa-



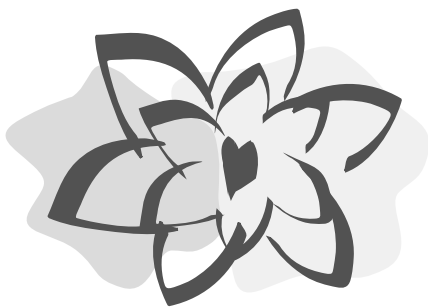
Asmita, star of street play troupe, talking before audience of journalists about her experiences as an indentured daughter



The drama troupe, wearing local costume of Dang women

tives of charitable organizations. At the beginning of her talk, she was overtaken by stage fright. But as she went on, her voice became firmer and her manner more determined as she told of the abuse she suffered when she was working as a house servant from the time she was a young child. Other girls had even worse experiences, she said. Now that she was trained to bring information to the villages about this custom, she wanted to devote herself to presenting these dramas all over Nepal so that parents would become aware of the harm they were inflicting on their children and would not send their daughters away.

In January, as usual, NYOF will have a presence in Dang during the festival at which these bonding arrangements are made, to save more girls from being contracted away.



## ENTERPRISING WOMEN

Another prong of NYOF's efforts is to empower the mothers of the indentured girls to start their own local businesses. After a girl is rescued, NYOF pays the cost of her education at the local school. The aim of the micro lending project is to enable the mothers of the girls to use the profits from these enterprises to pay for the education expenses of their daughters without NYOF's aid. With the help of NYOF and an international bank, a non-profit organization in Dang has enrolled the mothers of the girls in our program in a micro lending project. They will borrow small amounts of money to initiate local businesses such as raising pigs or goats, farming vegetables, creating local crafts, etc.

The theory underlying micro lending is fascinating. Instead of requiring monetary collateral for a loan to start a business, the program relies on peer pressure. The women form themselves into groups of

five (they make the choice of members) and are given some rudimentary training in arithmetic, basic literacy, and simple bookkeeping, so that they can evaluate whether they are making a profit. Then two women in the group propose a project. The group votes on whether it is feasible, gives the go-ahead, and sets a payment schedule. Not until these first two group members make a specified number of scheduled payments do the next two women in the group receive a loan for their proposed enterprise. And not until they make the payments required does the president of the group receive a loan. After all the members of the group have started enterprises and are paying back the loans according to the schedule, another round of loans is granted. The first loan is usually around \$75. The interest rate is set by agreement of the group, although there is a minimum interest payment required. In addition to learning business skills, these women learn to work together and help one another out of poverty.



Mothers learning how to run a business in preparation for receiving loans

## J AND K HOUSES: FINDING A SECURE HAVEN

Our children's homes, one of NYOF's first projects when it was founded 14 years ago, are still the heart and soul of our program. The children at the houses have been abandoned, abused or working as child laborers and desperately need the warmth and security of a good home and family. And this is what they find at J and K House.

We are close to the children, see them often, and are very involved in their lives. The relationship of the kids to one another is the best testament to the success of the houses. They view one another as sisters and brothers and treat each other as such. These close relationships continue after they have left the houses to attend college, and beyond.

Each year, as children leave the houses to go to college, new ones are admitted. This year, two new boys came to live

at J House and one new little girl at K House. Sajani's family were poor migrants who lived in a primitive thatched hut by the side of the road. Her father died suddenly three years ago. The plight of a widow is a desperate one and a child in Nepal is considered an orphan if he or she has no father. Most of these widows are illiterate and untrained and simply have no way of making a living or supporting their children. No help is forthcoming from the government, and they are often reduced to begging.

Sajani's mother is partially sighted and could not support Sajani and her younger sister, except by begging and occasional work as a casual servant in a household. Her two daughters followed their mother around all day and had no fixed place to live.

A social worker visited Sajani's village

and offered her younger sister a scholarship at a boarding school in Kathmandu. She asked NYOF to admit Sajani to K House. Sajani is quiet, shy, charming, with a radiant smile. Like the other children at the houses, she attends private school, and seems to be doing well. She has found a secure haven where she can grow up whole and healthy.



Sajani at K House



### NEPAL IN A NUTSHELL

I'd like to end this update with a bitter-sweet story of love and sacrifice. It is about a young woman named Tara Rana Magar. She is 19 years old, married, has a 17 month old daughter, and lives in Kathmandu. Last winter, as she was walking to her job as a household maid, she saw a crowd gathered on the bank of a river and stopped to investigate. What she saw broke her heart – a tiny, newborn baby who had been abandoned in the riverbed on a bitterly cold day. He was wrapped only in a thin cotton cloth and was already beginning to turn blue from the cold. She rushed down to the riverbank, took the baby in her arms, wrapped him in her shawl, and brought him home. Tara and her husband, who is a sweeper, earn barely enough to feed their little family. Yet, she and her

husband agreed that they would raise the child as their own and that he would be their "child for life," as they put it. They named him Nishanta.

It was soon evident that Nishanta had acute health problems – he was often sick and he had trouble breathing. A doctor advised that the baby had a serious heart condition and needed immediate surgery. The cost was more than Tara and her husband would earn in a lifetime.

Enter NYOF. Last year, we committed to supplementing the cost of heart surgeries for those who could not afford them. NYOF pays about 40% of the cost, a Nepali charity pays another 40%, and the new heart hospital provides a 20% discount. In the last year or so, we helped to pay for 35 life-saving procedures for impoverished heart patients, mostly children, who would have died otherwise. All but one procedure was successful, the others restoring the health and vitality of 34 of the patients. Nishanta had the critical and delicate operation he needed. Tara and her husband were with him at the hospital 24 hours a day, sleeping on the floor by his bed for two weeks following the surgery. Alas, he did not survive – the damage to his little heart from his rough start in life was too severe.

If there was a Nobel Prize for compassion and sacrifice, Tara and her husband would be good candidates. NYOF will help them to improve their lives in some appropriate way – such caring actions deserve to be rewarded.



*Yale Jones is a San Francisco attorney and a member of the Board of Directors of NYOF. Here is his account of the visit he and his wife Barbara made to Nepal last month.*

**In October my wife, Barbara and I visited Nepal for the third time. This visit was our most deeply satisfying visit, due in large part to our increased involvement with NYOF's in-country staff and with many of the specific children we serve. The time we spent with the children we have sponsored for five years was particularly rewarding, and we now have agreed to sponsor others whom we got to know! These young people are often irresistible!**

**Barbara, who has a PhD in transpersonal psychology, spent the better part of two weeks working with the children at J and K Houses. I went on a trek in Upper Mustang, after which I spent eight days in Kathmandu working with our Nepal staff and Olga. Also, Olga, Barbara and I took 22 J and K House children and 10 youngsters who attend English language schools to Nagarkot, above Kathmandu Valley, for two days. It's hard to imagine 32 children anywhere being better behaved or more cooperative. We were especially impressed that the older children took care of the younger ones without being asked.**

**The support and love NYOF provides to these children, along with their own natural resiliency, has brought them a long way from their usually desperate beginnings. They still have many needs and many issues to face, but, unlike so many other needy children in Nepal, they have a chance. We felt joy being with them, sadness at parting, and hope for their future.**

## SUMMARY OF NYOF PROGRAMS

**INDENTURED DAUGHTERS** – NYOF rescues girls in the Dang District of Nepal, some as young as seven, from indentured servitude by convincing parents to bring their daughters home from their jobs as servants far from home and sending them to school. As compensation for the girls' lost wages, NYOF gives the parents a piglet or a goat, which the family can raise on kitchen scraps and sell at the end of the year for the same amount, or more, than they would receive for their daughter's labor. And NYOF pays the cost of education as well. It costs only \$100 to save one girl, pay her school expenses for a year, and compensate her family for her lost wages.

**NUTRITIONAL REHABILITATION HOMES**– NYOF operates three residential homes for severely malnourished children in different parts of the country. The children live with their mothers at these homes and, while the kids are restored to normal weight and health, the mothers are trained in nutrition and other matters relating to the health of their

children. For only a little over \$250, a child is restored to health and the mother is educated in childcare.

**J HOUSE (FOR BOYS) AND K HOUSE (FOR GIRLS)** – NYOF operates two small homes in Kathmandu for some of the most vulnerable children in Nepal. These formerly bottom-of-the-barrel kids live in a warm, homey environment, attend good private schools, and receive everything they need to grow up strong and happy. You can sponsor a child at J and K House for only \$1,000 a year.

**SCHOLARSHIPS** - About 1700 youngsters, from kindergarten to medical school, are being educated by NYOF. These youngsters live in Kathmandu as well as in remote rural areas. They attend boarding school, day school, special schools for the blind and deaf, college, or graduate school. None would be able to attend school without NYOF's help. Most of those who receive scholarships from NYOF are girls because women are severely disadvantaged in Nepali society. The cost of an

education for a village child is as little as \$50 a year, and it costs only \$300 a year to send a blind or deaf child to boarding school to learn the special skills he or she will need.

**RURAL SCHOOLS** - NYOF also supports schools in rural areas by providing teachers to those that have either no teachers or only one. We conduct training for 100 teachers a year, provide teaching material for 100 schools, and support a model school in a remote part of Nepal.

**AIDING AND ABETTING** – Every day, impoverished Nepalis turn to NYOF for help. Whether NYOF pays for critical medical procedures, provides emergency funds for destitute families, or job training for unemployed and despairing young people, we stand ready to offer assistance.

The cost for this help ranges from \$3 for overnight lodging for a destitute mother and her child to several hundred dollars for heart surgery.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Nishanta's surgery is just one example of NYOF's work in "Aiding and Abetting" the most helpless children in Nepal. Your generous support makes this kind of quick response possible. There is virtually no government "safety net" for the children we help – no SSI, no food stamps, no Medicare – so NYOF's aid is critical.

Not only that, our donors get more for their dollar than they would get from almost any other charitable organization I can think of. Even \$50 goes a long way here – it will pay the annual school costs of a village child. A girl can be saved from indentured labor for \$100, and it costs only a bit more than \$250 to save the life of a malnourished baby. In a time of often gloomy news, every dollar you give brings hope to a Nepalese child and encourages our staff in the work to which it is totally committed.

Your role as an ongoing donor is the key to the success of our work and to the dramatic improvement in the lives of thousands of children in Nepal. Please give as generously as you can. On behalf of the children we serve, I thank you and wish you every happiness in the coming holiday season.

Warm regards,

P.S. If you would like to receive a video or DVD copy of a documentary filmed in Nepal earlier this year featuring the projects described above, please let us know. To help defray the cost of postage and handling, please send a donation of \$15.

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

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**One of the most satisfying things about working with kids in Nepal is that so many of those we have helped are passionate about giving back to other less fortunate children. Many of our older kids want to be social workers, and some of the earlier graduates have started their own charitable organizations. One J House alumnus, now a law student, recently filed a case in the Nepalese Supreme Court with three other students to compel the government to comply with its own laws prohibiting child labor, especially the practice of bonding children. These kids are carrying on the NYOF tradition, and it is clear to me that they will make significant contributions to the development of this beautiful but impoverished country.**

