



APRIL 2004

Dear Friends:

I'm back in San Francisco after my usual half year in Nepal. And a wonderfully successful six months it was. I will write you in my Spring letter about our other projects, but for now I want to share with you the thrilling events of last January 15th in Dang, a remote western district of Nepal.

As most of you know, NYOF has a program there to free young girls who are contracted away by their parents to work in distant cities as servants. The fathers receive about \$50 a year for their daughters' labor; the girls are not paid and are subject to all kinds of abuse. The UN calls this practice "tantamount to slavery."

Four years ago, NYOF representatives went to Dang to try to do something about it. We came up with a solution: If the parents would bring their daughters home, we would pay their school expenses and give the parents a piglet to make up for their daughters' lost wages. They raise the piglet and sell it at the end of the year for about the same amount they received for their daughters' labor. (They often end up with baby piglets too: The ultimate sustainability.) Four years ago, when we started the program, 32 girls were enrolled. Now there are over 500.

The agreements for the girls' labor are made between the parents and labor contractors on January 15th, during the festival of Maghe Sakrante. This year, as usual, we traveled to Dang to persuade parents to keep their daughters at home. We also ramped up our "public relations" efforts to persuade the community at large that selling their daughters is a bad idea. But this year, we were far from the only voice.

We were helped by the hundreds of girls whom NYOF had returned home in the prior four years. Not only did they distribute leaflets and posters. They marched in a demonstration in their school uniforms, chanting slogans against bonding children and carrying banners with anti-bonding slogans. They also helped as a local group acted out street plays they had created in the local dialect, which is effective since most of the community is illiterate.

We were all too successful. More families wanted to enroll their girls than we could afford to take. We felt badly that, after encouraging families to keep their girls at home, we could not afford to take all of the girls into the program. So we broke the bank and accepted 200 new girls.

But there were still some girls left. They desperately wanted to stay home and go to school, but their parents (and our maxed-out resources) defied their hopes. So they were immediately returned to work. It broke our hearts.

Then an astonishing thing happened: A few of them ran away from their jobs, came back home, and demanded to go to school-- unheard of in a culture where children, especially girls, are taught to obey their parents without question. Are we fomenting a revolution, or what?!

We will intensify our efforts to eradicate this practice in the area where we are working, and with your help we will succeed. We estimate that 2,000 girls have been sent off to work from the valley where we are working, so we have our work cut out for us. It costs \$100 a year to bring a girl home, send her to school, and compensate her parents for her lost wages. We would very much appreciate your help in this effort.

Warm regards,



Street play – "Please don't send me to work"



Girls marching in protest of bonding practice

P.S. Please read the back side of this page to see how one of our rescued girls, Nirmala, was able to give back to her community!

Changing the world...one child at a time.



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Nirmala



Marching with anti-bonding slogans

Among the marchers was Nirmala Chaudhary. Some of you might remember her from the video we made in Dang three years ago. She was then walking dejectedly with her mother on her way to the bus to return to work in Kathmandu. She was about 10 years old and had already been working for a couple of years far from home. On the tape, her weeping mother talks about how reluctant she is to send her daughter to work and live with a family that beats her and gives her only scraps of food, but that she must do so because Nirmala is the sole wage-earner in the family. Nirmala stands by, clutching the burlap bag with all her possessions, looking down, depressed and scared. Well, almost to the day, three years later, here she is last January 15, striding briskly along, in a demonstration to protest the bonding of other little girls in her village.

The Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation is a U.S. based non-profit organization devoted to bringing hope to the most destitute children in the beautiful but impoverished kingdom in Nepal. With a personal touch, we provide them with what should be every child's birthright—education, housing, medical care and loving support.

We support more than 1700 children in school from kindergarten to medical school. An education is the only way a youngster in Nepal can break the cycle of extreme poverty. This is especially true of children who are from the untouchable caste, the disabled, or women. Most of the NYOF scholarships are granted to youngsters in these categories.

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