



# 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** *I am back from Nepal, and missing the kids already. Some of you may have been reading about the political situation there, which is very worrisome, but the children we help are all safe and continuing their education. One area where the Maoist insurgents have been active is in the Dang District, the location of our project for indentured girls, but our program continues with the children remaining unscathed.*

*In fact, we made great progress this year in “rescuing” additional little girls who had been or were in danger of being sold by their families as indentured servants. This year, we have been able to help a total of 329 girls! The story of this program is so compelling that we are devoting most of this letter to it. Read on.*

## INDENTURED DAUGHTERS: A DESPERATE TRADE

As many of you know from prior letters, impoverished families of the Tharu ethnic group in Dang have a practice of bonding their young daughters to labor contractors to work in faraway cities as servants. These kids are often very young—7, 8, 9, 10 years old. They have never been away from home before and usually speak a different language than their employers. No one looks into their working conditions. The girls seldom go to school, are sometimes beaten, and live under conditions that are entirely at the discretion of the families with which they live. The girl’s family receives an average of \$50 for her labor for the year—and the girl receives nothing.

We learned of this practice in late 1999 and discovered that no one was working to end it, so we decided to try. In December of that year, Som Paneru, our Director of Administration in Nepal, traveled to Dang with a college friend who lived in the area. This terrible practice had become a custom in this community, but it was the result of extreme poverty. The

average income in Nepal is about \$200 a year, and families are very large. They simply could not do without the income their daughters’ labor brought in. We also learned that the labor contracts are renewed each year on a January holiday called Maghe Sakrante.

We decided to try an experiment: We spoke to the fathers of 37 girls who had been contracted away and urged them to bring their daughters home for Maghe Sakrante the following month, assuring them that if they would allow their daughters to stay home and attend school, we would replace the lost income.

When our staff returned the following month, they discovered that 32 of the 37 families had brought their daughters home for the holiday—proof that they loved their children but were forced by their dire circumstances to “sell” them.

At first, we considered replacing in cash the amount the families received from the labor contractors. But before making the offer, Som and his friend nosed around

**JUNE 2002**



This little girl has already worked for two years ... now she is free



A sad parting between mother and daughter

the village a bit, and a good thing they did. The mothers of the girls privately implored us not to give cash to their husbands. Alcoholism was rife in the area. We learned something else of interest: This community placed a high value on piglets, which could be raised on kitchen scraps and had a ready market.

So—we gave each participating family a piglet, a kerosene lamp, and two liters of kerosene a month (there is no electricity in the area). The girls received a book

bag, a school uniform, and school supplies. NYOF paid all school fees, and off the girls went to school—most for the first time ever. Initially they entered a special NYOF literacy program to give them a leg up before starting at the regular local school in the summer.

We gave another treat to the girls: a colorful traditional Tharu costume. Each year when the labor contractors would visit the villages on Maghe Sakrante, they would bring a few already-bonded girls dressed in nice city clothes to help induce their local sisters to sign up. Now the village girls were just as well-dressed.

## FROM 32 GIRLS TO 329

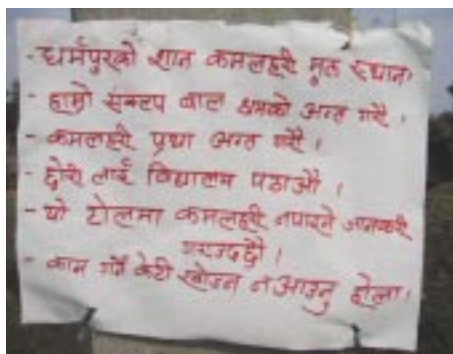
In the two years of the program, the number of girls “rescued” has increased more than ten-fold. Equally important, opposition to the practice has begun to take root in the local culture.

When we first went to Dang, the villages accepted and even promoted the practice of indenturing daughters. But this year, as we entered the villages we saw houses, stores, schools, poles, and tree trunks plastered with hand-lettered signs speaking out against the practice. They said things like:

“This village is free of bonded laborers—the pride of our community!”

“Send daughters to school!”

“Girls in this village are not available for sale!”



Sign in village opposing bonded labor



The three little traitors

Who was responsible for this media blitz? The girls who had previously entered our program had made the signs and posted them throughout the villages, with the help of our local “motivators.” In each village where we work, we appoint a “motivator”—usually a school-teacher who abhors the practice of indentured servitude. They serve as the local “spin doctors” for NYOF, speaking out continuously against the custom.

When our team arrives in a village during Maghe Sakrante to try to convince the girls and their parents to choose education over servitude, these motivators arrange meetings for us. We talk to the girls who are in danger of being sent to work as well as those who are already working but are home for the holiday. We discuss the importance of an education, their right to go to school, and the hardships and dangers of life as a servant far from their families.

Our representatives assure the girls that if they want to go to school, we will compensate their families for the lost wages. They then urge the girls who are already in our program to fan out through the village and help convince the parents of girls who are already indentured or about to be. If any of the children in the audience are at risk of being sent back to work against their will, we offer to try to convince their parents.

This year at Maghe Sakrante, we had an especially sweet victory. Three girls—all dressed up in city clothes—had been brought back to the village by labor contractors to entice their friends to sign up for work. After they sat in on our sermon, they mutinied and refused to return to their jobs.

## FROM PIGLETS TO POWER LUNCHES

And now the story of how three former servant girls who had slaved in the homes of strangers for years ended up at lunch at the most elegant hotel in Kathmandu, sitting at a table with the wife of the Prime Minister and other “tulo manchhes” (big shots).

The wife of the head of the United Nations Development Program had arranged a lunch with some of the most important women of the country to celebrate International Women’s Day. A strong supporter of our work in Dang, she asked us to bring three children who were “rescued” by NYOF to tell their stories. Well, since the girls spoke only Tharu and not Nepali and would have been terrified in any event to address this great sea of faces, our local representative in Dang had to do it for them. We were pleased that our program came to the attention of influential people, and the girls were delighted with their tour of the sights of Kathmandu, their new clothes, and a chance to meet women who admired them.

We plan, of course, to have a presence in Dang next year at Maghe Sakrante to attack this inhumane practice on several fronts. We intend to rescue more girls and also to expand the opportunities for the families to generate income. For the most part, the piglets did well: Though some died, others have produced many little piglets, which earned for the families more than the amount their daughters’ labor would have brought in. But we want to organize a micro-lending program so as to enable the families to start small enterprises of their choosing. We also want to intensify our efforts to instill in these communities the conviction that it is wrong to allow their daughters to work as servants in the homes of strangers.

But it won’t be easy. We estimate that between 1,500–2,000 young girls have been sold from the single valley where we have been working. There are perhaps tens of thousands of these “indentured daughters” throughout the country.



Janaki believing she was rescued and going to school—happiness shortlived



Janaki about to be sold



A baby restored to health at NRH  
Who can resist helping such babies and mothers?

### HEARTBREAK AND HOPE

For every girl we save, there are hundreds more who need our help. This year we knew one who broke our hearts.

Janaki, now thirteen, started working far from home as a servant in the city when she was nine. This past January, against her father's objections she showed up at our meeting in her village, Dharmapur. As Som, our administrator, described her, this little girl was one of the brightest, most fearless Tharu girls he had ever met—and yet one of the saddest. Parents of 22 local girls had agreed to put their daughters in our program, but Janaki's father had refused. All Janaki's friends were going to school while she was being forced to go to work. She had come to seek our help in convincing her father.

So we went to the house. In front of us, Janaki literally begged her father to let her stay home. After a ten-minute conference with his wife, he asked Janaki if she really wanted to go to school. She leapt to reply "yes" even before he had finished his question. He said, "OK, if you insist." The first picture above shows Janaki smiling at this victory.

Unfortunately, her happiness did not last long. After we left the village, her parents changed their minds. Janaki was sent off to work once more.

We last saw her at the bus stop in the nearby settlement of Lamahi. It is a gloomy place where the girls say goodbye to their families, not knowing when they will see one another again, and dreading the labor that lies before them. We are determined to return next January and try doubly hard to liberate Janaki and other girls like her. Please help us do so!

On May 9, NYOF was profiled on "The Oprah Show" as part of a program on helping children of the world. Oprah interviewed Olga along with one of NYOF's J House boys. Video footage from Julie Bridgham, our professional filmmaker, eloquently depicted the NYOF story. We were honored to share the program with Nelson Mandela! (And yes, Oprah is as warm, funny, and unassuming off the air as she is in public.) For a transcript of the show, go to Oprah's website—[www.oprah.com](http://www.oprah.com).

NYOF has several other programs as well. The kids at J and K Houses—our children's homes—are thriving! Several new children arrived from very remote parts of the country. Mostly orphans, they now have nearly 50 rambunctious, adoring brothers and sisters, 24-hour caretakers, education, and—most of all—love.

The Nutritional Rehabilitation Home has a beautiful new location with an enviable vegetable garden and more beds for malnourished children and their mothers. We are saving lives "one child at a time," as we like to put it. Encouraged by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health, we hope soon to launch satellite NRHs in remote areas.

The rosters of our school programs are bursting with nearly a thousand kids in Kathmandu and the villages. We are especially excited about a new program, generously supported by the Skoll Community Fund, to provide full scholarships for impoverished medical students and young people entering Nepal's first graduate program in rural development. Upon graduation, these Skoll Scholarship students will share the bounty by serving desperately poor and/or rural people.





These little girls can't wait to start school

Your help makes these efforts possible. Without your generosity, more than 300 little girls would be slaving away from morning until night in cities far from their families, with no hope for a decent life. Your support also puts hundreds of other impoverished children in school, helps disabled youth find independence, saves the lives of starving babies while educating their mothers—and so much more. We appreciate any help you can offer by writing a check, donating by credit card or stock gift, or joining our Legacy Circle of donors who include NYOF in their estate plans (see Stan Hobbs' story). Every gift goes very far.

Warm regards,

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

## DONOR PROFILE: LEGACIES FOR LIFE

Stan Hobbs, a retired real estate broker, learned of NYOF when he read a story in the local Marin County newspaper about a Nepalese girl brought to the U.S. for an operation. Known as a decisive person, he put down the paper, called NYOF, and soon was sponsoring two J House boys.

When later he decided to sell some stock holdings and mutual funds, he took the occasion to make a stock gift to NYOF.

In 1998, after being stuck in Marin County traffic once too often, he made up his mind to sell his home and investment properties and move to Arizona. Once again he cut NYOF in on the deal, making the organization the beneficiary of a charitable remainder unitrust established with the proceeds.

Late last year Olga emailed him from Nepal about a woman with a damaged heart valve. He covered the cost of surgery.

How does he explain such generosity? Hobbs, 65, says simply, "Why shouldn't I give to others?" But he also has a long history of philanthropy and scrutinizes potential recipients carefully. "Donors have to look at how efficiently an organization is run," he advises. "NYOF is marvelously run. The funding goes where it's supposed to go."

Hobbs says he wishes he could help physically with the children in Kathmandu. Instead, he has shared another form of resources, financial assistance. His help will transform the lives of many children today and in years to come.

For including NYOF as a beneficiary of his charitable trust, NYOF is honored to include Stan Hobbs in its Legacy Circle. Stan, the children thank you!

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



Namaste from Nepal! Another NRH miracle.

### EASIER WAYS TO HELP!

You've known how far your dollars can go in helping children in Nepal, but now your donations can begin working even faster. You can make a secure online donation on our web site, [www.nyof.org](http://www.nyof.org). Or you can use the enclosed envelope that sends donations directly to our bank – which, by the way, is also a donor to NYOF! (In fact, it's best not to use the old envelopes; they might be returned since we've consolidated some accounts.) Our friends at the bank will give us the details of your donation, including any personal notes, so we can thank you properly.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OLGA D. MURRAY  
President

TOTTON P. HEFFELFINGER  
Secretary

CAREY CHENOWETH

JOHN HOWE

YALE JONES

CHERYLYN PARSONS

MIKE PREISS

JOHN W. ROSSTON  
Honorary Director