

NCEFGYAN

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE NEPALESE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND

What's Inside:

Interview with Apsara Khanal, Area Coordinator for Nepalgunj

Sharing Our Happiness: Jill and Tom Kornack

Updates on our Calendar



gyan: *n.* knowledge acquired
by direct perception

2005 Financial Report

NCEF raised U.S. \$11,032.62 in the year 2005. We would like to appreciate all our donors for their generous support to enable disadvantaged children of Nepal obtain education. Thank you.

2006 NCEF Calendar

The Calendar team is making progress in designing the 2006 calendar. The calendar will be available in the beginning of April. You can still pre-order your copy by sending a request email to calendar2006@nepalchildren.org. More information and nice pictures of children are available in the last page of this newsletter.

DID YOU NOTICE?

We have started a new layout for our newsletter. The new design can accommodate more contents such as interviews, student visit reports and the latest developments and activities happening in NCEF.

In Nepali, *Gyan* means knowledge acquired through direct perception. That is what we seek to fulfill through our newsletter: spread *Gyan* about education-deprived children in an effort to develop their potential through education.



An interview with Nepalgunj Area Coordinator Ms. Apsara Khanal

NCEF depends on the hard work and commitment of our area coordinators in Nepal. With responsibilities of visiting students and parents, directing other volunteers and communicating with the board, a coordinator is one of the most important players in fulfilling NCEF's mission. But many of us do not know what experiences or beliefs led them to dedicate so much of their time for the well-being of disadvantaged Nepalese children. Let us find the answer to this question first hand from Ms. Apsara Khanal, the Area Coordinator for Nepalgunj.

A short introduction of Ms. Khanal: Originally from Biratnagar, Ms. Khanal is pursuing a B.A. degree in Social Science. In the past, she has worked as a teacher in Dadeldhura, a far-western hilly district of Nepal, and an assistant in the finance and administration sector of Save the Children US. She is also a community reporter of Nepalgunj.

1. What motivated you to work with NCEF?

About eight years ago I had gone to Dadeldhura, the far western district. On seeing the situation of women there, I became unbearably sad. The women there had been left behind academically, economically, socially, and politically - in all of these areas. I saw the custom of looking upon women as servants, the custom of not sending a girl to school because she is destined to be sent off to another person's home, the Chaupadi tradition, and the Deuki Tradition.¹ The women themselves, either directly or indirectly, had to bear many blows. I even used to counsel many of them. When I saw this, I thought that the main reason for this was a lack of education and I wanted to do something. One day I had the opportunity to go to a school to attend a function. When I got to the school, I could only see two or four kids in the first and second grades, there were no students

above the seventh grade, and in the tenth grade, there was only one girl- the principal's daughter. Some months later, I received the opportunity to be a teacher in that very school and understood that the main reason that children were not sent to school was because of their poverty and poor girls were less likely to be sent to school than poor boys because of the acceptance that girls should not be educated. Some years later, I came to Nepalgunj and had the opportunity to be employed at a social organization there. In this process, nearly three years ago, I met Shreejana Pokharel who worked at Save the Children. She told me about NCEF and I wanted to work as a volunteer for NCEF. Having lived in Nepalgunj's context for many years, I knew more about the situation than she did. At that time, I was pregnant and Shreejana ji asked me, "You are pregnant. How will you do it?" I told to her, "No, I am eager and I can do it." When I told her that if by my small contribution

the life of another is improved then the work itself is blessed and I will do it. She said, "Ok, if you would like to work then it is all right." Thus I began to work as a volunteer. Shortly after that, Shreejana ji had to leave and handed the responsibility to Rajendra Mahato. From then on, Rajendra ji and myself began to work together. Approximately a year later, when in the course of his work, he also he left for Birgunj and two volunteers and myself remained. NCEF then gave me the opportunity to be Area Coordinator and right now, I work accordingly. Right now, we have ten students from Banke District, of which nine are being successfully educated at good schools with an adequate standard of education. And one of the students, being in a remote area, is studying at a government school. As we hoped, with their own determination aided by NCEF's financial assistance they are gaining an education. I am fully satisfied with the work I have done.

2. How have the experiences working with NCEF been?

I have been working for three years. The work to date has been very good. NCEF's funds are being used in the appropriate place and my sense is that the funds have been used successfully.

3. Please describe a memorable moment with children?

There are many memorable moments. The happiness of parents seeing their children who were far from school and did not have access to education now wearing the school uniforms of private schools, carrying backpacks and going to school as well as the respect and gratitude they express to NCEF and donors make me happy. But what makes me even happier (than their own parents) is seeing the children progressing in their studies and benefiting from the overall influence of schooling.

Another memorable moment was the time when a student who had started on an NCEF scholarship at grade 9 passed her SLC (School Leaving Certificate, 10th grade finals) examinations and we realized that the NCEF budget of Rs. 7500 (\$100) per child would not be enough to pay for her 11th grade. She would also have to pay the transportation cost of living two hours away from the campus. We made many requests to NCEF but got the reply that the budget for all students from grade 1 through 12 was only Rs. 7500. I felt very bad. So how was I to continue Seema's education? I went to private campuses in the Nepalgunj area and told the operational committees about NCEF and its budget. One or two of them even said that they could not do it (enroll Seema without payment of the school fees). But the Banke Educational Academy said, "It is alright. Since you are working as a volunteer yourself, we will also try to help out." They waived many charges for Seema and we were able to enroll her in a good school with adequate facilities. Similarly for Sujana in UKG, we were able to secure free transportation (in a rickshaw) from ABC Residential Boarding School. This required us to do a lot of discussing and running around. But despite that, the children were able to study and that is a source of happiness. We were convinced that if we tried then things would become possible. And finally, last year, through NCEF, we had taken the students on a picnic and to the zoo. The words they said that day still echo in my ears today. It turns out that that was their first picnic, and the first time they had ever been to a zoo. Their happiness knew no bounds. Being children of impoverished parents, they have to struggle to have two square meals a day; how could the poor children know picnics and zoos?



3. What improvements do you think will be beneficial for children?

If other activities to aid children's studies could also be included, it would be more effective.

4. General Statement:

My experience working with NCEF is very positive. I am very happy with my volunteer work. If my small help makes someone's future or improves it a lot, then I will never shy away from this sort of work. However, it is apparent to me that the number of students should be increased and I am prepared to do work accordingly. Should the assistance from donors go on increasing continuously, I am ready to do the required work.

At present, I work as a Community Reporter for the General Welfare Academy's radio news show "Listening, Changing." It is a radio show developed especially for the purpose of reducing the many types of violence towards women - economic, educational, and sexual. Through this, I am able to go to the community and see up close the situation of women and children. I am also able to find out who is most in need. In Nepalgunj, there are many children who are in great need and are in contact with me. Some [parents] even come to my house and beg for us to help their children. We are not yet able to do as much as we want. We have 10 children of which 8 are girls and 2 are boys. Including three volunteers and one coordinator we are a family of 14. We have one volunteer meeting every month, and once every three months we have a meeting with parents, students and volunteers. These meetings are conducted at very low cost. For the meeting venue, we have been using a field in a public space. But there is some difficulty here. Firstly, during the winter and monsoons months, it is difficult to meet. Secondly, during Nepal's current political situation, as both sides [military and Maoists] tend to be curious about all happenings, we feel a little uncomfortable meeting in such a public space. If from NCEF we could have a room, sitting mats and a filing cabinet for Financial Documents, it would be easier to conduct meetings and keep Financial Documents safe. We are hopeful about this. And I make a request on this behalf.

Endnotes:

[Deuki tradition: tradition of offering a virgin, pre-menstrual girl to a temple as an offering for life. Chaupadi tradition: the practice of segregating menstruating women (and women who are about to give birth) from the community by sending them to live in a cowshed or cave. New mothers in some areas are also not given salt, meat or vegetables to eat, because this is considered harmful to her health.]

(Due to the lack of convenient communication medium, the interview was conducted through email. The original response was in Nepali language, which was later translated into English.)

Sharing Our Happiness

In October of 2005, Dr. Tom Kornack wed Dr. Jill Foley and they encouraged guests to donate to NCEF in lieu of a wedding gift. We asked Tom



what led him to decide to direct the generosity of his guests to giving the gift of education to children in Nepal.

I had been studying Linguistics in college, so Nepal originally attracted my attention because it has the second-highest language density in the world (aside from Papua New Guinea) and many friends had great experiences as visiting students there. I was also drawn by the big mountains and enormous natural diversity. I took a year off after graduation from college and enrolled in Nepali language classes given by Pitzer College in Nepal. I lived with a family in a rural area just outside of Kathmandu and participated thoroughly in the farming and family life. In that family, education improved dramatically with each generation: the grandparents were illiterate, the father was somewhat literate yet the mother was illiterate, and the sons and daughters of my age held advanced degrees in biology and business. It was clear that their opportunities were expanded as a direct result of their education.

The importance of basic education and literacy was brought into sharp focus by

my frustration with my own illiteracy in Nepali. Though there was plenty of English in tourist areas, elsewhere newspapers and most shop signs were intractable to

me. Thus, I came to believe firsthand that basic education for literacy and math is essential to obtain jobs that raise the standard of living and bootstrap the economy. Since the cost of school in Nepal is on the order of \$100/year, I decided to help fund the education of a few acquaintances' children myself. I found that this amount is indeed effective at providing an education to children. When I later learned about NCEF, I was thrilled to find out that they operated in this highly effective manner, where money goes almost exclusively to the students' educations in Nepal.

When Jill and I were preparing for our wedding, we thought that a nice way to share our happiness would be to suggest that people give to causes that we believe in. In lieu of gifts, we encouraged our guests to give to two charities, NCEF and a local organization. Both charities had some personal connection to us, worked on important causes and were highly effective organizations. We have been absolutely thrilled by the generous response from our friends and family.

ABOUT NCEF

NCEF is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to develop the potential of disadvantaged Nepalese children through education. Need-based scholarships are provided to deserving students who would otherwise be unable to attend school. Our social workers in Nepal meet regularly with the selected children and their parents to assist in each child's development. We dedicate our resources to each NCEF child until they complete high school (twelfth grade).

2006 FUNDRAISING METER



\$1850

MAKING DONATIONS

□ **Online:**

www.nepalchildren.org/donation.html

□ **Checks:**

Make checks payable to:

Nepalese Children Education Fund or NCEF

Mailing address:

Nepalese Children's Education Fund

P.O. Box 380061

Cambridge, MA 02238-0061

Questions?

Website: www.nepalchildren.org

Email: contact@nepalchildren.org

THANK YOU!

WHAT ARE CHILDREN DOING?

Sunita in Kavre enjoyed a recent debate competition where she took second place.

Shanta in Kavre had fun at a picnic recently.

Pabitra in Nepalgunj enjoyed reading a Nepali poem in his school.

In Kathmandu, Sumiya's teacher says she is very smart and very enthusiastic in her studies.

Manish in Nepalgunj liked going to the zoo with his uncle.

Update on the Calendar Project

Dear Readers,

In our original vision for the NCEF Calendar, we wanted to include the Gregorian (the one used in most countries) as well as Hindu Calendars (the one in use in Nepal, and according to which dates for festivals are determined at the beginning of every year). We also wanted to get it to you early enough to let you start the new year with the bright faces of NCEF children on your wall.

Very early on, we encountered problems. Among other things, it was too early to know the auspicious dates for next year's Nepali Calendar. And thus if we were to aim for a Gregorian new year, we would lose out on the most useful part of the Nepali calendar: the location of the religious holidays.

It was a difficult decision but we aimed for the Gregorian New Year. Ultimately, it was something more serious that forced our hand back to the original idea. Squeezed into an ambitiously tight deadline in the midst of our efforts we realized that we needed more time to give you the best calendar that we can. Fortunately, the new year on the Hindu

Calendar begins on April 14th (this is the only major difference between the two calendars), and this offered another possible, and just as appropriate, release date. So, we will be releasing the NCEF calendar with both Hindu and Gregorian dates slightly before the Hindu New Year in April,

You will hear from us again soon as we pass through the various stages of the project. At present we are selecting photographs, which seem to be as tough as selecting children. In the meantime, we would like to share some of the photos from our photo shoot which you may not get to see in the final product. It would be a shame for you to miss them. They were made possible by the dedicated effort of the Area Coordinators, volunteers and Mr. Gnawali in Kathmandu.

As always, we thank you for your support.

The NCEF Calendar Team



Patan



Kavre



Nepalgunj



Kathmandu

GETTING INVOLVED

Why?

- To make a lasting difference in the lives of children.
- To be a part of an exciting team of interesting and dedicated volunteers.
- To put your spare time, no matter how little, to good use.

How?

- **Join** our announcements list!
- Help fundraise money for NCEF scholarships.
- Help with the administrative aspects of NCEF.
- Take part in discussions to ensure NCEF is increasingly effective.
- Help expand NCEF to new areas in Nepal
- Become a field volunteer in Nepal.
- Help lead NCEF by running for a position on the Board or Executive Committee.

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NCEF PAMPHLET

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