

Empower the Children

Fall 2011



Rosalie's Message



Dear Friends,

Because you are reading this letter, it is likely that you are a supporter of **Empower The Children (ETC)**. Perhaps you are a volunteer who travels to India each year to join in classes and special projects. Or you may represent one of ETC's worldwide partners whose singular efforts are acknowledged within the pages of this newsletter. If your annual contribution honors ETC's lunch program appeal or ensures a child's education, please know that you are all part of an extraordinary group of people who, together, are helping to shape the lives of hundreds of disadvantaged and disabled children living in Kolkata.



"No one can whistle a symphony; it takes an entire orchestra to play it."

H. E. Luccock

At ETC, "hope" is a virtue which continually nurtures our need to plan, implement and sustain our goals - even when they may seem out of reach. For example, a seemingly impossible dream was realized when Help2Help, ETC's Dutch partner, brightened our horizon with funds for a new Preyrona 2 School. In addition - and thanks to several invaluable partners - our special needs students were provided with new hearing aids. Other disabled students have been given opportunities for productive livelihoods. One small boy, who spent all of his formative years in isolation, now has a new beginning. And a bright young lady - who had only dreamed of attending college someday - will become ETC's second college graduate!

I wish that each one of you could join me in Kolkata to personally witness the enthusiasm and earnestness these children bring to their new learning environments. Their appreciation is uplifting and rewarding to all who work with them.

Now, as we venture into another year, there is more to hope for.....and more to accomplish. After all, we are each a part of ETC's symphony: some of us have small parts, some of us may perform an occasional solo, but in the end, we come together for the *grand finale* - to raise the consciousness of everyone around us so that our achievements, big and small, are felt around the globe. Thank you one and all for your invaluable help!

With love,

Rosalie Giffoniello
Co-Founder
Empower The Children



Together: second chances

*A dream you dream alone is only a dream.
A dream you dream together is reality.*
John Lennon

Any child's world can change in an instant, and so it was for 9 year old Madhurima Banerjee. After her father died suddenly in 2002, her mother could no longer afford tuition for her education at Holy Child School. It was a very difficult time for her as she loved her studies, but had reached only Class 4. Today Madhurima is attending Surendranath College. This heartwarming story tells of her dedication to her father's memory, her interest in becoming a teacher, and an avocation that contributes to her family's livelihood.

"My world opened up again when Champa Sarkar, who monitors some of ETC programs, heard of my plight," relates Madhurima. "When I was offered an ETC sponsorship, I decided to make my father proud of me. As a clerk, he always emphasized the importance of learning English. I studied diligently to gain fluency in my new language which has been invaluable as I am pursuing a degree in English Honors and eventually hope to attain a post-graduate degree.

In addition to my studies, cooking has become my second passion - and so I look forward to spending Sundays with my mother who cooks for a local hostel seven days a week. I am very grateful to ETC for its continuing support which has allowed me to fulfill my father's dream."

Madhurima is ETC's second student to attend college. Sultana Khanam, who graduated in 2007, has been working in Scotland in Hotel Management. She is currently helping to support younger siblings as they attend school.

ETC looks forward to enabling more students to achieve higher levels of education as its school population matures. We commend each student for his or her determination, but most of all we thank YOU, our generous supporters, for giving these children an opportunity to excel.

MADHURIMA



PANKAJ



Due to genetics, environmental factors or maternal malnutrition, thousands of children worldwide are born with cleft lips and palates so that they are unable to eat, speak or enjoy a normal childhood.

Three-year old Pankaj suffered from this deformity. After Rosalie met Pankaj, she immediately enlisted the aid of Jannie deRijke, nurse and founder of ETC's Dutch partner *HelpIndiaHelpen*. When Jannie first visited Pankaj's impoverished family to explain the corrective surgical procedures, she discovered an unexpected obstacle: his family's fear that one of Pankaj's kidneys would be secretly removed - which is a practice that unfortunately pervades Third World countries. Only patience, kindness and determination eventually melted away the family's objections to this vital corrective surgery.



In November 2008 a severely underweight and malnourished Pankaj made his initial visit to Kolkata Hospital for surgery, where he was prescribed a strict regimen of good nutrition and a vitamin-mineral supplement. One year later Pankaj reached a normal weight but his surgery was postponed due to a persistent infection that required three different courses of antibiotics. Finally on September 15, 2010, Dr. Ccaher - a physician specializing in cleft lip/palate surgery - performed the six-hour surgical procedure. Needless to say, Pankaj's family expressed their deepest gratitude for the generosity offered by Jannie at *HelpIndiaHelpen*, the dedication shown by ETC's staff, and Dr. Ccaher's expertise - all working together to change this little boy's life forever.

In Our Global Village



kolkata, india

What prompted you to visit Kolkata?

I was inspired to volunteer with ETC when I first met Rosalie while on holiday six years ago. After I completed a study-abroad course, I took the opportunity to meet her in Kolkata. She asked me to develop a book that illustrated life in Kolkata as seen through the eyes of the children. Volunteers would assist the children and share in their experiences. It turned out to be a perfect fit during my two-month stay in Kolkata.

What were the fundamental purposes underlying the project?

The book is to be used as part of ETC's cultural exchange between Indian and Scottish schools. Volunteers and 135 students would team up to create a picture book documenting how these children live, study and play. Photos, drawings and texts would speak about their everyday lives. The volunteers would have a unique opportunity to become part of a marginalized community which generally tends to view outsiders with suspicion. And through this interaction, each would gain acceptance of one another.

Given the cultural differences, how did you connect with the children?

At first I was at a loss as to how to approach the students. A simple question such as "What are your hobbies?" makes no sense to children living in a slum who have no idea what a 'normal childhood' implies. Nevertheless, I decided that our book would celebrate the lives of these children and not focus on any cultural boundaries.

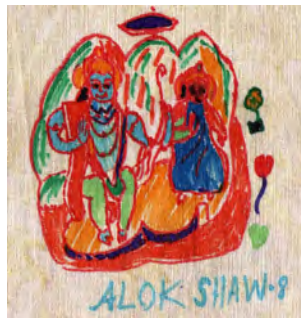
How did you get started?

I asked each child to draw a self-portrait and, as a model, drew a picture of myself. To everyone's amusement each child drew a picture of *me* including the boys who drew themselves with long blond hair and blue eyes!

A new approach had the volunteers trace outlines of the children's bodies on long sheets of paper - the students quickly grasped the concept of drawing themselves and we soon had a good facsimile of each child for our booklet.



ETC volunteer Elizabeth Harris is a senior at the University of Chicago.



What other book-related activities did the children perform?

...The children at Preyrone 1 were asked to assume the roles of gods and goddesses depicting their special Hindu holidays. Students also participated in a "mock" cooking class to demonstrate local dishes by listing ingredients and the processes by which this cuisine is prepared.

...Accompanied by volunteers and cameras, the children of Preyrone 2 documented their bustling neighborhoods. Their astounding pictures captured their home life, busy work places and teeming streets - as seen through their young eyes. Our volunteers were amazed to witness the children's resiliency and determination to learn and grow in spite of their impoverished lifestyles.

How did the volunteers benefit from this experience?

The volunteers' personal comments speak for themselves... "It truly gave me a new-found appreciation for every little thing that I have." "The girl who led me around was amazing! She was so sweet and made me feel so accepted and loved. Despite the language barrier, we found that at times we could actually understand each other." "I was struck by my own lack of joy in the context of my 'comfortable' life as contrasted by the wide smiles and simple enjoyment of all the children. It has challenged me to consider what I am grateful for and how I express the blessings in my life."

How did this experience affect you?

Understanding another person's culture offers a new and profound perspective to one's own life experience. This has been an amazing opportunity - "empowering these children" to fulfill their dreams has given me new confidence to realize my own personal goals. Therefore, I would like to thank Rosalie for her vision, the Lisle Foundation for making this project a reality and the children of Kolkata for bringing their world into the global community.



In 2010 Empower The Children received a grant from the Lisle Foundation to document the lives of ETC children in Kolkata. This non-profit organization focuses on raising awareness in the global community.

To order the book, Google Search In Our Global Village: Kolkata, India

Together: making it happen

From Dakhindari



To The Netherlands and Back...

In Dakhindari, one of Kolkata's poorest slums, large families live in single rooms with no running water; communal bathrooms are the norm. Cooking is done outdoors over coal or wood stoves which causes multi-levels of pollution. Homes are situated alongside the railway tracks and tiny babies are often seen crawling on those tracks. Young children work at menial or sometimes dangerous tasks. Without an education, past generations were unable to plan for their future and lived a day-to-day existence.



In 2002, **Empower The Children** opened Preyrona 2 School which was the first time in the slum's history that the potential of Dakhindari's children would be addressed. Unfortunately, the only space available was one room housed in a dilapidated building with a broken roof that leaks during monsoon season. Smoke from nearby cooking fires blows in through windows lacking glass, stinging the eyes and throats of students. Inadequate light and distracting noise from the surrounding slums make it almost impossible for the children to concentrate. In addition, Preyrona 2 has no running water. All meals are cooked off the premises and brought to the school six days a week.

In spite of these lamentable conditions, attendance at Preyrona 2 continues to grow. Students understand that getting an education will eventually provide them with meaningful and financially rewarding work. Free nutritious lunches (consisting of rice, vegetables and eggs) provide an incentive for good attendance and contribute to our students' health and well-being.

Through the years many attempts to remedy the building's inherent problems have proven futile. It was time to find another location or build a new school that would accommodate 60 students and 20 vocational trainees plus vocational equipment. How and when this would be accomplished was a true dilemma. Willeke van Neuenhuijze, founder of *Help2Help* and *ETC* volunteer *extraordinaire*, had visited Dakhindari many times and witnessed firsthand the appalling conditions under which the children of Preyrona 2 School live and study. She made a plan to "**Make It Happen!**"



Wilbert, Willeke, Rosalie and Ilse prepare for the Grijpskerke Bazaar to help ETC kids.



In dreams and in love there are no impossibilities.
Janos Arany

A small Dutch island in southwest Netherlands may seem as remote as a communal village in Kolkata to many of us. But the people of Grijpskerke did not let the mere distance of 4,000 miles deter them from helping **Empower The Children** realize its dream. Every year the people of this idyllic community organize a giant fundraiser with its proceeds going to a noteworthy cause of choice. Willeke offered pictures and stories about the children of Dakhindari, and Preyrona 2 School was elected to be the recipient of the 2010 fundraiser proceeds.

The festive spirit of the people of Grijpskerke was contagious as rain gave way to bright sunshine on September 11, 2010. For their 30th annual fundraising drive, thousands of items including furniture, electronics, housewares, toys, clothing and books had been collected, categorized and displayed in a gymnasium and outdoor booths - a monumental task performed by about 200 volunteers. Over a thousand people from neighboring hamlets, towns and cities browsed, sampled the local foods, and tried their luck at the wheel of fortune and the event's special lottery. Many returned home with treasures they found rummaging through the vast assortment of potpourri.



Help2Help's booth furnished information about Empower The Children's work in Kolkata.

September 11th will always be remembered as a day that compassionate and caring people from The Netherlands went to great lengths to finance a brand-new building with proper lighting, running water, restroom facilities, a kitchen, desks, and a comprehensive vocational program.



When Rosalie received the generous check for 17,000 Euros, she expressed her heartfelt feelings in Dutch, “*Bedankt voor het liefhebben van mijn kinderen in Kolkata*” which means, “*Thank you for loving my children in Kolkata.*”



Now that the funding was in place, a new building for Preyrona 2 was becoming a reality. The next priority was to find a location in close proximity to the old schoolroom due to the lack of transportation in the area. What we did not foresee was the dearth of suitable buildings or land for sale - another dilemma!

Little did we know that good fortune would once more shine upon Preyrona 2. This story took another incredible turn when the owners of the school's property, India Alkalies Limited, agreed to gift the land to Preyrona 2. On November 3, 2010 Ashit Sur, Preyrona Coordinator, registered the deed with the Municipal Court of West Bengal. At the time this newsletter goes to press, the architectural plans for the new school are already in place. Construction for the building awaits final approval from the government of West Bengal.

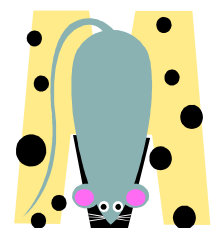


ETC will be ever grateful to Willeke, Help2Help, the people of Grijskerke, India Alkalies Limited, and Ashit Sur for teaming up and making this dream a reality!



Thanks to ETC volunteers Ali Manik, Maadh Shaan, and Ibrahim Iyan, Empower The Children now boasts an updated interactive website.

Please visit
www.empower-children.org



Together - breaking the barriers

Exclusion; to shut out (from using or participating) = rejection; isolation. These are harsh words for deaf and mentally challenged children who live in fear and loneliness in Calcutta society.

The **Preyrona 3 School (P3)** and the **Prabartak Home** serve as two shining stars in ETC's ground-breaking inclusion projects that integrate special-needs students into mainstream society.

At the opening of P3, in 2009, four deaf and two mentally-challenged students (ages 10-20) were enrolled and mainstreamed into the classrooms - giving P3 the distinction of becoming an *inclusion school*. Certified speech therapist, Santus Barman, was hired to develop the language skills of these students and teach them to speak.

When ETC's partner from Holland, *HelpIndiaHelpen*, generously donated and fitted these deaf students with digital hearing aids, new worlds opened up for them. Multi-levels of frustration dissolved into joyous communication at home, greater understanding in the classroom and delight in listening to music for the first time. Word spread and another deaf student soon enrolled in P3's Special Education Program.



"Deaf people can do anything except hear," said Dr. Jordan, former Gallaudet University President and leader in deaf education. His statement was affirmed by P3's special-needs students who thoughtfully scripted and self-directed a mime based on **Raksha Bandhan**, a brother-sister holiday in which sisters honor their brothers. In the students' version, a sister refuses to honor her mentally challenged brother. When a friend takes pity and performs the acknowledgment ceremony, the sister is brought to a new awareness, feels the shame of her actions and repents.

This mime was performed at ETC's annual 'Celebration of Diversity' program. Additional performances included classical Indian dances by a girl with Downs Syndrome, a drama, a comedy and a mime performed by students from Preyrona Schools 1, 2, and 3, and the disabled residents from Prabartak Home.

When Rosalie first visited Prabartak Home in 2002, 60 physically and mentally challenged adults were living in cheerless and drab surroundings. ETC soon transformed not only Prabartak's dreary walls with buckets of fresh paint and posters, but also the lives of its residents by introducing weekly classes, field trips and inclusion in the annual 'Celebration of Diversity' program, jointly sponsored by *Project Ahimsa, Indian American Education Foundation and Kolkata Seeds-Japan*.



"Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children." Sitting Bull

Today industry is the 'buzz' word, thanks to three organizations that have brought creative and rewarding enterprises to Prabartak Home. In 2007 the **Ram Krishna Mission** delivered five goats; today the milk from this growing herd is very much in demand while male goats are sold for additional income. Some residents make and sell envelopes from recycled paper that is generously donated by **Tata International**. Other students collect used coconut husks from local vendors which are split, dried in the sun and then converted into fuel. As unlikely as it may seem.....

**Goats, Used Paper and Coconut Husks =
Self-Esteem, Self-Sufficiency, Pride in One's Work, and Lots of Smiles at Prabartak Home!**

Together: what we make with our hands, we give with our hearts!

Sandy Andersen, who hails from Oregon, is not a newcomer to **Empower The Children**. She returned to Kolkata after two years when she learned that **ETC** was in need of a special project for its cultural exchange program shared by schools in Kolkata and Perth/ Kinross, Scotland. Sandy, a master quilter, used her unique talents to engage 245 **ETC** students in creating a patchwork quilt for each of the seven schools in Scotland.



Under her direction each child was given a 6 by 6 inch piece of cloth. The youngest children were shown how to make 'thumb-print' images of butterflies and their favorite animals while older students created pictures that depicted scenes from their own personal lives - such as their homes, family members and holidays. Each square was then personalized with the student's name and age.

When these hand-decorated pieces were completed, Sandy's quilting friends assembled them at their local fabric store which opened on two Sundays for this purpose alone. Then those 'busy Oregon beavers' performed the daunting task of stitching individual borders on each of these 245 squares that were ultimately pieced together - resulting in seven completed quilts, each beautifully designed with colorful bindings that added the "final touch."

It is said that quilts are "patchworks of love" and love lasts forever!

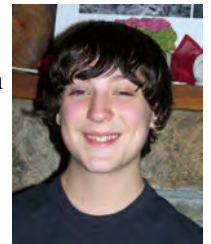
Friendship cards, banners and alphabet books were the first contributions to **ETC's** newly formed cultural exchange program among Indian and Scottish students who, in 2010, first learned about each other's way of life. These special handmade quilts will now serve as another way to cement friendships among **ETC** students and their new friends in Perth/Kinross, Scotland.

Meet **ETC's** Front Line....



What could be more exciting for children recovering from multiple surgeries than to be introduced to the fascinating world of computers? Generously donated by the **Indian American Education Foundation**, these computers have transformed long tedious hospital stays into positive learning experiences for the children at Rehabilitation Center for Children (RCFC).

Thirteen-year old **Willson Wallace**, **ETC's** youngest volunteer, has much to tell his friends at home in Connecticut. "I now realize how fortunate I am to be living with running water, toilets, electricity, etc. I think these people deserve the privilege of living like that too. I would like to continue coming to Kolkata in years to come to help people like this."



For many years **ETC** has relied upon **Shelley Chatterjee's** excellent administrative skills. Her gentle yet persuasive manner has been instrumental in convincing reluctant parents to send their young sons and daughters to Khamargachi and Dankuni schools - a life-changing event for many children hungry for knowledge.

Kakali Samadder is a skillful translator at Rehabilitation Center for Children which is essential for teaching **ETC's** interactive curriculum. Kakali brings Rosalie's lessons to life with imagination and enthusiasm. She also coordinates special events, making them memorable occasions for our teams of volunteers.



Rosalie and Jannie were very grateful to receive videophones from **The Brielle, Netherlands Kiwanis Club** which facilitate communications between **ETC** and its partner *HelpIndianHelpen*.



MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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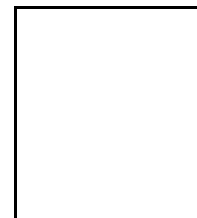
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E = Encourage
M = Motivate
P = Protect
O = Opportunity
W = Wisdom
E = Educate
R = Rejoice

THE CHILDREN



P.O. Box 1412
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Lunch Programs

*"Feeding a child at school is such a simple thing - but it works miracles."
Drew Barrymore
Ambassador Against Hunger*



Healthy Appetites make Happy Students!

Many worldwide celebrities - including Sean Penn, Penelope Cruz and Drew Barrymore - are showing us how to fight worldwide hunger. Their *pro bono* efforts have set off an awareness campaign that urges individuals to take action so that every child who lays down his or her head at night does not go to bed hungry.

Major economic gains in India during the past decade have not helped everyone. According to statistics from the *World Food Program*, it is still home to about 25 percent of the world's hungry poor. For example, about 43 per cent of India's children under age five are malnourished, while many of India's pregnant females (between the ages of 15 and 49) suffer from anemia.

ETC's promise to serve one nutritious meal a day is a huge incentive for Indian parents to send their children to school. Although food is relatively inexpensive in India, our annual lunch budget continues to increase as we strive to feed the growing population of students. Please help us fulfill our commitment to keep our kids happy, healthy and strong.

LET'S ALL 'GO TO BAT' FOR OUR LUNCH PROGRAMS!



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First Base	\$ 7.50	feeds one child for one month
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