

# Empower the Children



Fall 2017

Dear Friends,

When Janet Grosshandler and I co-founded **Empower The Children** in Kolkata, India, our first endeavor in 2001 was to open a small tutorial center for 25 girls to provide educational after-school support. The second and more difficult challenge was persuading illiterate parents to enroll their daughters in school. Culturally, girls were meant to stay at home, get married and bear children, all without the benefit of a basic education. The notion of girls sitting in a classroom was seen as unimportant, frivolous and even threatening. Remarkably, over 15 years, **ETC's** enrollment has grown exponentially to 850 boys and girls at ten locations, with hot lunches served to 650 students five days a week. Parents understand that with a proper foundation, their children can make academic progress, secure good jobs and help the entire family to rise up out of poverty.



*Raising the consciousness* of our students through art, drama, writing, and mime has become the new focus of **ETC's** educational programs. Discussions centered on pollution, overpopulation, education of girls, climate change, poverty, charity, and city life vs. village life have taken front and center as these students move toward adulthood with new energy and aspirations for their future. We are proud of our students who have found their voices. As our children are given the opportunity to express opinions, listen to others and engage in meaningful and substantive discussions, they realize that their ideas do matter.

On behalf of our **ETC** staff, I thank you, our patrons and supporters, who continue to bless our children with your generous contributions. Those whose lives you have touched went on to complete vocational training and higher education, enabling them to help their parents, siblings and communities. By your unflinching commitment to sustain our **ETC** programs, those coming up in the ranks will enjoy these same benefits. The children of Kolkata thank you from the bottom of their hearts!

*Love,*

*Rosalie*

*Without raising human consciousness,  
whatever we do in the world will only lead to more and more suffering. Jaggi Vasudev*



*Ideological differences such as religion, ethnicity, language and culture serve as divisive points between India and Pakistan. The commonality between them is their vast population of women and girls who desire an education to improve their lives and those of their children .....to build a better and safer world.*



**MALALA**—It is implausible that a 15 year-old advocate for girls’ education would pose a grave threat to a male-dominated society where half of its population is denied basic human rights. When an assassin’s bullet failed to silence her in 2012, Malala Yousafzai became a champion for young girls in their pursuit of education. In 2014, she became the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Laureate and addressed the United Nations as a spokeswoman for women worldwide.

After re-enacting the events that almost took her life, students reflected on Malala’s contributions as a human rights advocate. Malala remains steadfast in her vision to raise social consciousness, and serves as a powerful role model for students everywhere.



On her 18th birthday, Malala proclaimed: *“Today on my first day as an adult, on behalf of the world’s children, I demand of leaders that we invest in books instead of bullets.”*

A student from Bangalore said it best: *“As youngsters, we tend to look up to parents, teachers, even fictional characters for inspiration. But now, we’re all looking at you. Because you stand for something that millions die for—HOPE.”*



**MITHU**—Love and a conscious desire to secure a better life for their 10 year old daughter inspired Mithu’s parents to enroll her in ETC’s Khamagarchi Education Center. Mithu admits that she was not a strong student, but with perseverance and gratitude for her parents’ sacrifices, she achieved good grades. And, with the help of ETC teachers by her side, Mithu Majhi began to believe in herself.

Even as a young child, Mithu realized her parents’ struggle to keep the family together. Her father, Dinabandhu, continues to work as a day laborer in paddy fields, often until sunset. Extra money is earned transporting heavy loads throughout the city with his cycle van, often competing with motorized vans. Mithu’s mother, Parinita, earns a daily wage of approximately \$5 US dollars for seven hours in a government program that guarantees only 100 days of work annually. For many years this hardworking family lived in a mud house until the local government stepped in and built a brick and cement house. With no indoor plumbing, they still rely on a nearby well for drinking water and a local pond for bathing, washing their clothes and cleaning utensils.

Although it would have been much easier to send Mithu to work after her high school graduation, her parents took the more selfless step, realizing that a higher education would guarantee their daughter a better life. When they heard about ETC’s college fund, they didn’t hesitate to encourage Mithu to apply for funding so she could attend Balagarh Bijoy Krishna Mahayidlalya University. Mithu now looks forward to fulfilling her dream of becoming a teacher so that young girls, like herself, will be able to aspire to their own dreams. All things ARE possible through LOVE.



**MIME:** *the theatrical technique of suggesting action, character, or emotion without words, using only gesture, expression, and movement.*

Children in Kolkata are experiencing rapid changes to their daily routines; however, in some ways, their lives are still stuck in the past.

Normal classroom activity is typically controlled by teachers in the traditional Indian school system; however, our ETC students have the benefit of conveying their commentaries *in their own voice*. To illustrate their concerns, students of Preyona schools use the mime art form as an effective medium of communication. With the guidance of their mime teacher, Susanta Das, students are encouraged to use their own creative energy to develop socially relevant themes on topics such as education, industrial pollution and commercialization of life.



### **EDUCATION**

*The Parrot's Tale*, written by Tagore in 1918, attacks the educational system in India because it relies so heavily on memorization which stifles creativity and critical thinking. Unfortunately, 100 years later, the same system is still in place.

ETC students demonstrated their dramatic prowess in their production of this ancient tale.



### **COMMERCIALIZATION**

The commercialization of life is symbolized by the change from local bazaars to impersonal shopping malls and the use of plastic bags.

People are growing increasingly insensitive to Mother Earth as progress is equated with accumulation of material goods.



*Never get a mime talking.  
He won't stop.* Marcel Marceau



### **INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION**

Executives from big corporations convince farmers it is a good idea to build factories on their land. Waste materials from the factories pollute the water and soil causing illness, birth defects and irreparable harm to the environment.



THROUGH THE EYES OF CHILDREN ■■— A A FRESH LOOK AT THEIR WORLD



### Involvement....Experience....Caring....Respect....Connectedness

Volunteer Charlotte van Londen returned to Kolkata early in the year to share an invaluable lesson with ETC students. In a society of over a billion people which holds little regard for a clean and healthy environment, how does one impress a class of 8 to 12 year olds in three short days that each one of them can make a difference for a lifetime?

Staging a model that replicates the polluted Hoogly River in Kolkata was an easy task for students. From birth, they learn by example that dumping plastic bottles, cans, garbage, batteries, newspapers, food waste, to name a few, is the **NORM!**



Get them *involved*.... Have them create and experience the beauty of a wide clear river and stock it with colorful fish. Plant trees and grasses along the shores which are home to all kinds of wildlife that live in harmony with nature.



FRESH AIR ■ CLEAN WATER ■ RECYCLING ■ PROTECTING WILDLIFE



Sober-faced students learned that most of these pollutants take years to break down, but worse yet, *some never do!*

*“What can we do?”* they asked, as the enormity of the problem took hold. Recycling, reuse and proper disposal of garbage were new concepts that had to be **demonstrated** and **experienced**. Students then spent several hours making posters illustrating their willingness to tackle these new ideas and share their responsibility to **care and respect** the world of nature.



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.  
*Margaret Mead*



When we heal the earth, we heal ourselves.  
*David Orr*



More than a billion people lack adequate access to clean water.  
*David Suzuki*



**POSTER HANGING** was the best way to get the word out! And so ETC students completed their assignments by going into their neighborhoods to spread the word that everyone is **connected** to the earth.

*“Each and every one of us can make changes in the way we live our lives and become part of the solution.” Al Gore*

## ETC's Youngest Environmentalists



Save A Tree



Plant A Tree

It is never too early to plant the seeds of renewal. Teaching children to work together to improve Planet Earth awakens a new love, respect and responsibility for the world in which they live.



No Plastic



Keep India Clean

*"Share your dreams and they will be inspired. Plant seeds of knowledge and they will grow and reproduce beyond measure."* Terry A. O'Neal

## Actions Speak Louder Than Words



At first glance, Khamargachi appears to be a small picturesque and peaceful village—a world apart from the teeming city of Kolkata. At second glance, though, the eye takes in the seemingly insurmountable problem that besets every city, waterway and countryside in India—environmental pollution! It was in such a trash-strewn field that ETC students enjoyed a picnic lunch, badminton, board games and jigsaw puzzles. However, the most rewarding part of the day was their collective effort in returning the field to its natural state, part of ETC's program to raise social awareness. As these young children took a giant step forward in creating a fresh environment in their hometown, they learned that *"Discussion + Action = Results!"*



## PREM KUMAR



Prem Kumar founded the Indian American Education Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, dedicated to elevating the quality of life for children with disabilities in India. Over the past ten years, Dr. Kumar has been a generous partner and supporter of ETC programs. His most recent contributions— refurbishing the classrooms at Prabartak Home, an air conditioner for the Rehabilitation Centre for Children and holiday presents for all. These gifts not only lifted morale but have earned the deepest gratitude from residents, young patients and staff.

## EDITH CURTIS BORDEN

It is not known how the late Edith Curtis Borden of Rumson, NJ learned of Empower The Children, but her very generous bequest has enabled ETC students to follow their dreams.



Edith lived a rich life volunteering for the Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic in Princeton, caring for animals at the Monmouth County SPCA, and blessing several local choirs and theater groups with her beautiful soprano voice. The children of Kolkata thank Edith for her very gracious donation to ETC.



## JANET GROSSHANDLER



Empower The Children's co-founder, Janet Grosshandler, has been an educator and school counselor for 32 years. Rosalie's counterpart in the U.S., Janet serves as the administrator of ETC funds for eight schools, tutorial centers and vocational programs. Together with Rosalie, she believes in the children of Kolkata, helping them to ignite their hopes and dreams and to develop their talents and skills by preparing them for higher education. Thanks Janet!

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## OORJA



Twice a month a group of friends come together to serve their community in a variety of ways through their non-profit organization, Oorja. What makes them so special is that they bring their own children along so that even the youngest ones learn lasting values of giving and sharing.

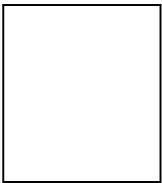
Students from Preyrona 2 and 3 Schools were the happy recipients of book bags, school supplies and new friendships.



“Like” us on Facebook—Empower The Children



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**MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**E = encourage**

**M = motivate**

**P = protect**

**O = opportunity**

**W = wisdom**

**E = educate**

**R = rejoice**

**THE CHILDREN**



# Empower The Children



Computer Science



Vocational Training



College Scholarships



Holiday Clothing



Special Needs Programs



ETC's Lunch Program

There are many ways in which you can support the children of Kolkata.....  
 ETC's Lunch Program has always been featured in our newsletters because it is our largest and most inclusive program, feeding 650 students five days a week. However, as our other programs expand, so does our budget! Please take a look and contribute to the one closest and dearest to your heart.

*Help us make a difference. Thank you for your generous support.*

Lunch Programs  
  College Fund  
  Clothing  
  Vocational Training  
  Computer Science  
  Special Needs

USD	<input type="text"/> 25.00	<input type="text"/> 50.00	<input type="text"/> 75.00	<input type="text"/> 100.00	<input type="text"/> Other
Euro	<input type="text"/> 23.87	<input type="text"/> 47.74	<input type="text"/> 71.61	<input type="text"/> 95.48	<input type="text"/> Other
Pound	<input type="text"/> 20.33	<input type="text"/> 40.66	<input type="text"/> 61.00	<input type="text"/> 81.33	<input type="text"/> Other

Donate online at [www.empower-children.org](http://www.empower-children.org)

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