



## ORPHANAGE VOLUNTEERING: A CASE STUDY BY NGN

This is the case of a corrupt but legally registered orphanage in Kathmandu that was run by a local Nepali woman beginning in 2003. The owner used the orphanage as her income source by obtaining funding and support from international volunteers and donors. She advertised through volunteering agencies for foreign volunteers to work in the orphanage for a fee and was successful in attracting people from around the world to come and pay to care for the “orphans” in her care. Many of these volunteers helped her raise money by writing funding proposals and letters of solicitation to ex-volunteers, as well as by directly donating material goods to the orphanage. Despite securing a core individual donor from Spain--who covered all the operating costs of the orphanage (approximately \$300 US)--the owner continued to solicit funds with the help of volunteers, and any extra money went into her pockets.

She presented herself as a dedicated social worker who selflessly cared for abandoned and orphaned children. However, in truth, she was a ruthless woman who beat and neglected the children. What’s more, she presented the children as orphans, when in fact, most of them had families who they were denied contact with. The children were threatened that if they told the foreigners they were not orphans then they, or their families, would be harmed.

In late 2010, a girl at the orphanage was hit by a vehicle on her way home from school. She became very sick and, instead of caring for her, the owner put her on the roof of the orphanage and tortured her to unconsciousness. She even forced the other children to beat the girl with metal rods and nettles. Although the injured girl was eventually taken to a hospital by a relative of the owner, she later died of her injuries. The owner convinced the authorities that she was not responsible for the child's death and no legal action was taken against her.

A few months later, an ex-volunteer came to visit the orphanage, and the children began to speak to this person about what was happening to them there. Deeply concerned, the ex-volunteer gathered evidence and reported the case to an intermediary organization (Terre des Hommes). Thanks to these efforts, a rescue was enacted by the government with the support of several INGOs and NGOs, including Next Generation Nepal (NGN). The 20 boys and girls between the ages of seven and 15 were transferred to the NGN/THIS transit home. The children were not well. They were underfed; they'd not been given adequate education; they'd not been properly cared for and they had been physically and mentally abused.

While at the orphanage, the children had been severely traumatized and required psychological treatment. The disturbing truth of what had happened to them became evident as they began to open up to NGN's team of social workers. In the case of one girl who was from the Dalit or "Untouchable" caste, had not been allowed to enter the kitchen, touch food or water that would be

shared with others, and had been humiliated by the owner in front of the other children. In at least one case, she stole two children from a family and the family never had the chance to find their children. At one point, the owner went on vacation and left the children alone to care for themselves. Upon returning she beat them for having eaten whatever they could find in the orphanage. The owner went so far as to take the identity of some of the children away and changed some of their names.

Of the children rescued, nearly all of them had at least one living parent, and over the next two and a half years, 18 of them were reunified with their families. The families were greatly relieved to have their children back. During the time that their children had been in the orphanage, the parents who had tried to gain access to their children were routinely denied, and their children were sometimes punished for the attempted contact by the parents. It was a great relief to be reunited with their sons and daughters again. They were very happy with NGN for the help provided to their children.

***Were it not for the willingness of the fee paying volunteers and donors who supported the orphanage- in the genuine belief they were helping a good cause - it would never have existed, the children may never have been removed from their families and the deceased girl may still be alive.***