

THE SCAI'S THE LIMIT

Honda PROFILE

SUNRISE CHILDREN

That's 'SCAI' as in Sunrise Children's Association Inc., an organisation caring for orphans in Nepal run by three remarkable young Australians - one of whom has a close relationship with Honda also in her past. Her story is a rare example of the Power of Dreams

"After experiencing first-hand in 2004 the poor conditions in which they lived and the limited future ahead of them, I came away with a clear vision and determination to improve the lives of these children and give them - and hopefully many others in need - a much brighter future."



THE KINGDOM OF NEPAL LIES IN THE SOUTHERN HIMALAYA BETWEEN INDIA TO THE SOUTH AND CHINA TO THE NORTH

- Nepal occupies 147,181 sq km of the planet
- That's a little more than half the area of Victoria - yet Nepal's population is larger than that of Australia
- Its population is concentrated in the temperate central valleys and the sub-tropical south
- The Nepalese earn their living mainly through agriculture, forestry, textiles and, increasingly, tourism
- The country's unemployment rate is 47%
- Some 86% live in rural areas - and 50% in absolute poverty
- Orphans are the victims of political, economic and social factors - the conflict in Nepal has left over 13,000 dead since 1996
- The child mortality rate is put at around 10.4% of under-fives



Emma Taylor used to work in the media. To be more precise, she worked in a Melbourne agency, one of whose main clients was Honda Australia. But two years ago Emma and two friends, Michaela Drapes and Sarah Kemp, had what we call a life-changing experience - but for this trio, it really did change the way they live. It led to the founding of Sunrise, a volunteer-run not-for-profit body that is building hope for some of Nepal's desperately needy young.

"Sunrise came about after we each spent time working as volunteers in a terribly poor and run down orphanage in Kathmandu back in 2004," Emma told us. "After experiencing first hand the poor conditions in which they lived and the limited future ahead of them, I came away with a clear vision and determination to improve the lives of these children, and give them and hopefully many others in need a much brighter future.

"One of the first things that made an impact on me was that despite having no material possessions and living in such awful conditions, these children still have hopes and dreams just like any other child, they just rarely have the opportunity to achieve them."

There are countless stories, though, of good works being done to send good money after bad, and that's a syndrome Emma and her friends were determined to avoid at all costs. "We wanted to be able to control the policies, future direction and, importantly, the way the money raised was spent," she says. "This way we could ensure all the funds were used efficiently and we could maximise the benefit to the ones that mattered most - the children!"

That led to the creation of SCAI in Australia in 2005, a move taken to establish the infrastructure required to do some long-term planning and work. "Our first major project was to open Sunrise Orphanage in Kathmandu, which we did in close collaboration with a team of dedicated Nepali volunteers, and with the support of local child welfare organisations," says Emma. "Sunrise now provides a stable, loving home for 41 children. As well as this, we continue to provide an education for a further 32 children who are currently living at another orphanage in Kathmandu."

Some of those children came from rural villages and brought with them two key needs: the chance to be well and the opportunity to learn. Those are the areas Emma and her colleagues addressed: "With basic medical treatment, a good diet, a bit of love and a good education, they are now thriving. With the overwhelming support we have received from the community so far, we have not only been able to provide a stable home and a good education for these children, we have also been able to totally transform



"it's truly amazing that a child who has rarely, if at all, experienced being loved, encouraged, accepted or shown any affection, can so freely give it"

the lives of a few children that would almost certainly have been left with little if any future."

That transformation comes in part from education - the surest way to open the doors to life. English is a key ingredient, in a country so heavily reliant on tourist revenues. In practical local terms, Sunrise fosters links between the children and local business, both as potential donors, but also as possible employers. And that's not all.

"We are planning to establish work experience programs, study programs and mentor programs to give the children every opportunity of developing into happy, confident and self-reliant members of the community," explains Emma. "We are putting together a children's home that is not simply sticking a bandage over a wound, but striving to build an environment where these unfortunate children have a realistic and practical chance of contributing to their own communities and country."

Now back in full-time work in the Melbourne media, Emma still gives around 30 hours a week on top of her 'daytime' job to Sunrise. When we spoke she and her team had just collected \$16000 through their annual fundraiser in Melbourne, and she was exhausted. But her enthusiasm is undimmed, and she and her colleagues still visit Nepal regularly to spend time with their young charges.

"Not too many organisations know every child they support personally, not only their names and faces, but their personalities, aspirations and personal achievements," she claims with a justifiable



NEEDY CHILDREN IN NEPAL

The high incidence of abandoned or orphaned children in Nepal can be traced to a number of causes:

- The overwhelming majority - some 86% - live in rural areas, around half of them in abject poverty
- Internal conflict and guerrilla activity since 1996 has seen more than 13,000 people killed
- Women who lose their husband or the father of their family tend to make for Kathmandu or send their children there as the only perceived place where they may survive
- Child mortality in Nepal is estimated at 10.4% of those under five

CASE STUDY: GANESH'S TALE Ganesh Rokaya had just given up. He was a bright, healthy boy of nine, living in a very poor local orphanage, but he became severely ill with a fever and was left untreated and uncared for by his guardians. After being neglected and bedridden for six months, his muscles seized up, so much so that he could no longer stand up at all, and he became severely depressed and withdrawn. He could no longer go to school, and he lost his famous smile. As soon as I saw Ganesh in this condition, knowing how bright and healthy he had been before he fell ill, I took it upon myself to help him. Together Ganesh and I (he on my back!) went to see some local specialists and learnt the necessary stretching and strengthening exercises, and after only four weeks of doing these together twice a day, he was up walking around on his own, and his infectious smile was back, bigger than ever. I have never seen a child enjoy painful exercise so much! What Ganesh needed was someone to show they cared for him and that he was worth something. Doctors predicted that, if uncared for, he would never have walked again. Now back to his normal self, Ganesh is one of our brightest and most enthusiastic students. **EMMA TAYLOR**

tinge of pride. But there is still so much to do.

"Whilst we have come a tremendously long way so far," she reminds us, "we still have a long way to go in securing a permanent home for these children. We are so blessed to have met so many generous people over the past two years, of which many are now sponsoring our children. However, we still need considerably more financial support to continue our work and turn our dream of Sunrise Children's Village into a reality.

"We have long-term plans to build the village on the outskirts of Kathmandu, which will provide a permanent home for these children, and many more once they transition into the workforce. Regardless of which direction they take in the future, Sunrise will continue to support them, just as any loving family would - they will not be thrown back out on to the streets once they turn 18."



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SUNRISE CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION

visit www.scai.org.au or contact Emma Taylor directly on emma@scai.org.au

There are numerous ways of helping:

- Sponsoring a child
- Sponsorship of household expenses, such as rent, carer salaries and amenities
- Contributions towards the foundation of Sunrise Children's Village
- Membership of Sunrise Children's Association
- Volunteer work in Nepal or in Australia