

Empower the Children

Fall 2008



Sultana Khanam
ETC's First College Graduate

Rosalie's Message

Dear Friends,

The sky's the limit when it comes to dreaming!

My own experience began eight years ago when my dream of working in Mother Teresa's orphanage was realized. I took an early retirement from my position as a speech therapist at a New Jersey school, moved to Kolkata, and changed my world forever. This decision led to the founding of **Empower The Children** and also to the beginning of a dynamic and growing movement.

How could I have known then that my dream would encourage others to walk in the same path? Last year more than 90 volunteers from around the world visited Kolkata and **ETC's** children. Perhaps they too dreamed about doing volunteer work and discovered the right time and the right place. We thank each and every one of them - those who have experienced the joy of giving and those who have used their creative fundraising talents to help support children in **ETC** programs.

Our children have been inspired as well. Sultana graduated from college, Chottu learned to walk again, and all of our students can dream of a better future.

Thanks to all of you, our generous supporters, we will continue our efforts to bring opportunity and joy to the children of Kolkata.



Empower The Children hopes to make *your dream* of a better world come true!

Love,

Rosalie Giffoniello

"You gotta have a dream.

If you don't
have a dream,

how you gonna make
a dream come true?"

...South Pacific

Oscar Hammerstein

Preyrona II Brings Hope

It is difficult to imagine the crowded conditions which exist in Dakhindari, with as many as eight children to a room. Without proper drainage systems, stagnant rainwater collects everywhere which often attracts malaria-breeding mosquitoes. With only one public toilet to service a large number of people, health and environmental hazards abound.

Is it any wonder that parents are excited about sending their children to Preyrona II, a safe and secure environment for several hours a day? A simple lunch, often the only meal of the day, offers an added incentive for parents to educate their children.



Children from the ages five to fourteen are becoming skilled in reading, writing and mathematics. The older students also receive pre-vocational training in bookbinding, painting on glass, batik, silkscreen design and stitching. Hopefully, generational menial jobs such as rickshaw pullers will become a thing of the past for our **ETC** kids.



The joy that is manifested in these young faces as they experience the world around them through **ETC**'s curriculum is a tribute to **ETC** supporters like you who make it all possible.



“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?”

Imagine a beautiful auditorium...an audience of 550 children and adults...thunderous applause and a well-deserved standing ovation!

This was the scene of a special performance at the Girish Mancha auditorium, given by two groups of **ETC** kids...the slum-dwelling children of Preyrona School and the differently-abled kids of Prabartak Orphanage. Their performance of “Bimbaboti” (Magic Mirror) would certainly have made Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore very proud.



His poem echoes the classic tale of Snow White and the jealous evil queen who wants to be the fairest in the land. Prior to rehearsals, workshops provided the students with performance skills in body movement, dance and song. When these two groups met for the first time, they worked with a full spirit of unity.

It would be *fair* to say that all the children involved in this production could take pride in their wonderful performance. **ETC** engages the talents and imagination of these special children by providing opportunities that allow them to take pride in their accomplishments.





USA Volunteers Weather Monsoon Season



The word “*monsoon*” evokes trepidation for the heartiest of travelers when hot seasonal winds and heavy rains descend upon the Indian subcontinent. However, when 30 volunteers from the Unity Church, USA arrived in Kolkata in September of 2007, they not only braved the monsoon season, but also had a very positive impact on the children recovering from surgery at the Rehabilitation Center for Children.

An especially festive occasion marked their visit when Karuna Chitrakar, a local artist versed in the Patua tradition, shared her special talents. For many generations West Bengal folk artists like Karuna have created colored scrolls from flowers, spices, fruits and dried mud. These scrolls are designed to be slowly unfurled to tell a story and are ultimately sung by the artists to their enthusiastic audiences. Due to changing social and economic conditions, the Patua tradition is becoming a dying art, which made this experience for the children and our volunteers a very special treat.



To everyone’s delight, the volunteers and children were paired to create their own scrolls. The volunteers received the scrolls as cherished mementos of their time spent together with the children.

The tradition of volunteerism has become very strong at ETC. We appreciate all those who have visited Kolkata and welcome newcomers to discover the joy in the work and festivities of ETC’s programs.

Dream Team at St. Aloysius

On May 23d, students in the Social Justice Group at St. Aloysius Catholic School, Jackson, NJ presented Rosalie Giffoniello, co-founder of **Empower the Children**, with a check for \$2245. In April Rosalie was invited to address the students in grades 6-8. They learned of ETC’s programs and she learned of the group’s mission... *“to think, feel, and act with justice as they address social issues and problems in the community and the world.”* Saddened by the poverty that affects so many slum-dwelling children in Kolkata, these students wanted to make a difference.

With this in mind, a letter-writing campaign was organized. Local businesses responded generously, donating over \$1100. Student representatives also spoke to their classmates, asking them to donate a portion of their snack money to help a needy child. The student body readily embraced this idea. In just three short weeks, students raised more than \$900.

Fr. Scott Schaffer, Pastor of St. Aloysius said, “I am so proud of all the hard work and creative ways in which our young people are using their time, talents and treasures to help others less fortunate.” Rosalie added, “This amount represents the equivalent of more than 8,000 meals. The “*dream team*” at St. Aloysius will be long remembered in Kolkata!”



ETC Outreaches

KENYA... On the outskirts of Nairobi, Sister Susan runs the Mary Immaculata Primary School. Books, stationery, food and supplies for the dormitories are purchased with **ETC** funds. Most of the schoolchildren are orphans, having lost their parents to AIDS. The generosity and love of donors around the world is visible through the happy, smiling faces of these children.



CIUDAD JUAREZ, MEXICO... In one of the unincorporated areas known as 'colonias,' Dominican Sister Donna Kutusch runs Centro Santa Catalina. With the help of **ETC** funds, she established a day care center and started classes where children learn basic skills. Amidst stark poverty in this garbage-strewn area of Juarez, CSC has become an oasis for women and children who come for support and enrichment.

Empower The Children contributes to "*Happiness is Camping*" a summer camp in northwest NJ. Doctors, nurses, and staff members volunteer their time for children with cancer who have medical needs that would not allow them to attend a regular camp. Often campers come back year after year. Some pass on and are remembered lovingly.

ETC also donates to *Monmouth County (NJ) Child Advocacy Center*, a child-friendly facility for victims of abuse, assault, and neglect. Families can access all the professional services to begin the healing process.

Congratulations Reena!

Reena Das, **Empower The Children's** newly appointed administrative assistant has her hands full, and she loves it!

Reena Das was introduced to **ETC** in 2001. With **ETC's** support, she opened Kolkata's Park Street School for a group of 50 street children. During the past several years, she has been instrumental in the opening and operation of Preyrona 1 and 2. She also plays a major role in **ETC's** Inclusion Project which brings disabled and non-disabled children together.



Reena is a true champion of the needy and vulnerable children of Kolkata. Her dedication and boundless enthusiasm energizes everyone who knows her. **ETC** is both grateful and proud to have Reena as part of its team.



Hats Off to our

Traveling from far and wide around the globe, many **ETC** volunteers carry on their charitable work at home. Many have sponsored novel fundraisers, allowing arm-chair travelers to take part in the festivities while experiencing the **JOY OF GIVING!** Altogether they have raised \$8,500.

Meet our ETC Angels!



“Let’s Dance”...**Pushpita Bandy**, a dedicated advocate of **ETC**, hosted an evening of Indian culture in **Kendall Park, NJ** with dance performances, Bengali and English songs, and an international buffet.

The wonderful work being done by Rosalie and her volunteers was highlighted by a special video shown throughout the evening.

“Getting in Dutch”...Help2Help, a Dutch charity foundation, was established by **Willeke van Nieuwenhuijze** in **Holland**. Her mother, **Ria** and her best friend **Maatje** play a key role in raising funds for **ETC** programs. These talented and energetic women embroider linens and towels and create birthday and get well cards. They sell their crafts in their homes, at flea markets and church bazaars. The Help2Help 2008 calendar of smiling Kolkata kids (beautifully photographed by Willeke) was also a big hit! Named "Charity of the Year" by the Reformed Church of Haamstede, all profits from the church's fundraising activities are being donated to **ETC** programs.



“Hooray for Bollywood”...According to **Fiona Clark**, Perth's 2nd Annual Bollywood Night was a huge success. The night was festive as many of the 90 guests arrived in colorful Indian dress, danced to live music, and enjoyed a wonderful Indian meal. Exciting Bollywood and Belly Dancing added spice to the evening.

All proceeds from the tickets, auction and raffle will benefit **ETC's** ongoing programs. Thanks to Fiona and all of our friends in **Scotland!**

ETC Partners



“Bare Feet to Happy Feet”...Aileen Parker, an employee at Nike Shoes in **Portland, Oregon**, inspired her co-workers to donate 60 pairs of sneakers for the children of Kolkata. They believed the children would be exchanging tattered shoes for new ones. But, when Aileen and her husband **Tony Nemeth** arrived at Preyrona II they were surprised to learn that the new shoes were covering little feet that had never been anything but bare.



“Reading their cares away”...The Rehabilitation Center for Children (RCFC), a "home-away-from-home" for many children who are long-term surgical patients, has been granted a new library by the **Indian American Education Foundation**. For the past several years, this **Seattle**-based organization has repaired the playground and donated musical instruments, classroom aids, and educational materials. Thanks to IAEF, the children now have a chance to escape into the world of books!

“The Sound of Music”...For several years our friends at **Project Ahimsa** in **San Francisco** have supported a music therapy program for the young patients at Rehabilitation Center for Children. Now an additional grant has been used to create a music room and purchase musical instruments, CDs and a CD player. The music room has become “the place to be” between physiotherapy sessions.



“Trekking for ETC kids”...Irish cabinetmaker, **Leonard Cooney**, is an avid supporter of **Empower The Children**. This is his account of a special fundraiser he organized for **ETC**: “I wanted to do something special for the children of Kolkata, so I decided to do a trek-a-thon. I contacted my mother who agreed to organize sponsors and collect donations in **Ireland**. In May of 2007, I embarked on this “high” adventure to the base camp of Annapurna.

Located in the Himalayas (House of Snow), Annapurna is the 10th highest mountain in the world and is one of the most famous Nepal treks. The trek took six days. Each passing day brought new challenges as the oxygen thinned, making it more difficult to climb. When I reached the camp summit at an altitude of 4,130 meters, I experienced a great sense of satisfaction knowing that *each step of my walk benefited a child*.

Thanks to the generous support of all the trek-a-thon donors (and Mom’s help), a total of 270 euros (\$440) was collected. The children were able to celebrate the holidays with new clothes and special festivities. But more importantly, they learned that people around the world really care about them.”





MEET THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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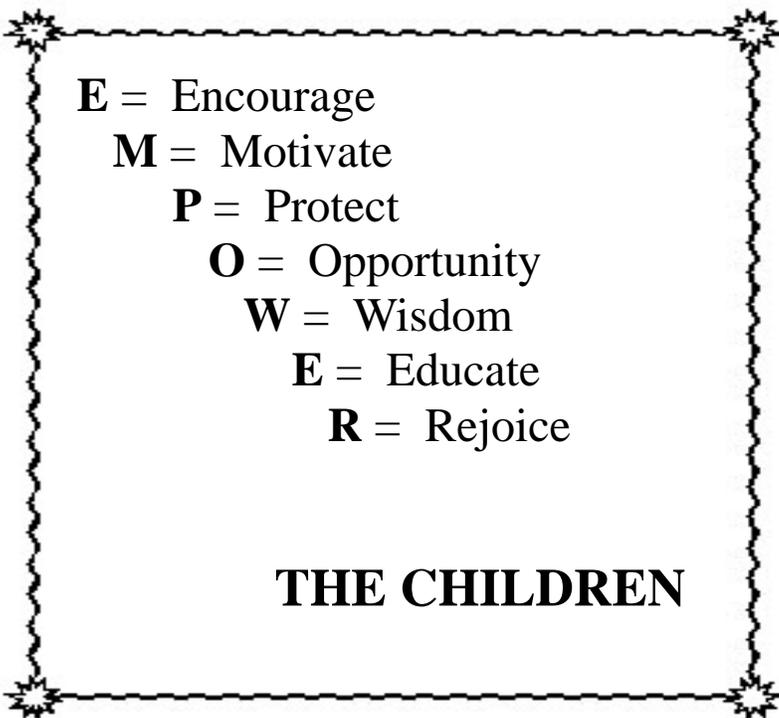
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LUNCH PROGRAMS

"If you can't feed a hundred people, then just feed one."
- Mother Teresa

There are approximately 100,000 slum-dwelling children in Kolkata alone. This is a staggering number of hungry mouths to feed. However, we are taking Mother Teresa's advice. Through your continuing support, **Empower The Children** is providing nutritious lunches six days a week for children attending these schools:



- ☺ **Preyrona I**
- ☺ **Preyrona II**
- ☺ **Nivedita Colony Pre-School**
- ☺ **Atmarasksha Colony Pre-School**
- ☺ **BBD School**



ATTENDANCE IS UP...CHILDREN ARE HEALTHIER...PARENTS ARE SUPPORTIVE!

We ask once more for your help in providing well-balanced meals for our ETC kids.

Stretch your dollars— \$7.50 feeds 30 children per day or one child for a month.



Help us make a difference.....thank you for your generous support.

Enclosed is my donation in the amount of \$_____.

All donations are tax deductible.

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