



Next Generation Nepal

A photograph showing two young women from behind, walking away from the camera. They are both wearing large backpacks. The woman on the left has a black and red backpack and is wearing a blue patterned top and a bright blue skirt. The woman on the right has a blue and grey backpack and is wearing a bright green shirt and blue jeans. They are in an outdoor setting with other people and buildings in the background.

The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering

Combating child trafficking through ethical voluntourism

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There were so many volunteers: short-time, long-time, middle-time, according to visa! ... Sometimes they organize program and I don't want to go. Children sometimes feel angry because they want to do what they want. There is a nice movie and children they want to watch, but volunteers organize a football program and house managers say you have to go. And all children were angry ... Why foreigners come to Nepal? Why do they go in orphanage? That time they come for short time and they give love to us, but then they leave, and when I write they don't reply. I say to a volunteer, 'Sister, I am very lonely', and they say, 'No problem I am here', but then they go their country and I write but they don't reply. When I was little everyone can love me, now I am big and I need love.

Karjit, a youth from Humla who grew up in a series of children's homes in Kathmandu and Pokhara, despite not being an orphan.

About the authors

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Note on sources

To protect their privacy and identity, the names of all children, victims of trafficking and institutionalization, beneficiaries of NGN and voluntourists who have been quoted or discussed in this report have been changed, unless an individual has specifically requested that their real name be used.

A shorter version of this report was published by the same authors in 2014. See: Punaks, M & Feit, K. 2014. 'Orphanage voluntourism in Nepal and its links to the displacement and unnecessary institutionalization of children'. In: *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond*. Vol. 1, No. 2, pp 179 –192.

Foreword by NGN President and founder

Let me start by saying this: I believe passionately in the value and power of volunteering. Volunteering has changed my own life in so many ways. What started as a short volunteering trip (two trips, actually) for me turned into the organization we know as Next Generation Nepal (NGN). We have helped change the lives of hundreds if not thousands of vulnerable children. When volunteering can benefit the individual *and* others, then I am its biggest advocate – not just because of what it did for me, but because most of the NGN staff and Board members began their careers as volunteers. Volunteering is in our DNA.

But there are inherent risks to volunteering. Not to the volunteer as much as to the beneficiaries. Almost by definition, an international volunteer will know little about the people, the culture or the nuances of the place they are trying to help. This leaves us vulnerable to those who would prey on our good intentions.

When I hear stories of well-intentioned volunteers in Nepal inadvertently causing more trafficking by paying to volunteer in corrupt orphanages, it breaks my heart. These are good people who want to help Nepal, who have spent their own time and money to help. There must be a way to address the problem and the risk.

That's what this report is all about. It is about explaining to these good-hearted volunteers, donor agencies, NGOs, embassies and the Government of Nepal the things that we are witnessing in Nepal today with orphanage trafficking and its links to voluntourism. Moreover, it offers advice and recommendations for everyone who has a part to play in encouraging 'ethical voluntourism.'

I hope this report spreads awareness of orphanage voluntourism. I hope that it helps us to take a small step towards ethical voluntourism. I hope that, together, we can work to make volunteering the force for good that we all know it can be.



Conor Grennan
NGN President

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Many individuals and organizations have played an important part in the development of this report. Whilst it would be impossible to mention all of them by name, there are some whom we believe deserve special mention. Within Next Generation Nepal (NGN) itself there are a number of individuals who inspired us to develop this report. They are Conor Grennan and our esteemed Board members, as well the following staff and advisers: Anna Howe, Farid Ait-Mansour, Julien Lovera, Ryna Sherazi, Ram Sharan Shrestha, Kiran Moktan, Larry Closs, Sarah Charlesworth, Nancy Wong, Leonard Noel, Sarah Andrews, Scott Rosefeld and Esmeralda Gaba. NGN would particularly like to thank Romeo Teyssier Dumont, Rachel Krulewich and Jessica O'Neill who donated their time and expertise in researching for, and advising on, the content of this report. Furthermore, this report would not have been possible without NGN's close partnership with The Himalayan Innovative Society (THIS), which is responsible for implementing our programs in Nepal, and through which we have been able to understand in such depth the phenomenon of orphanage trafficking and its links to voluntourism.

We would also like to thank our beneficiaries and the many volunteers and donors in Nepal who willingly chose to share their stories and knowledge with us so that we could document the process of orphanage trafficking and understand how orphanage voluntourism works. Other organizations that have helped us to build our understanding in these areas are the Central Child Welfare Board, several District Child Welfare Boards across Nepal, UNICEF, the Swiss Embassy, the United States Embassy, the French Embassy, the British Embassy, Terre des hommes, Forget Me Not, Mission East, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Nepal, the Umbrella Foundation, the Esther Benjamin Trust, Freedom Matters, Sano Paila and Karya. Those we would particularly like to show our appreciation towards are Tarak Dhital, Dharma Raj Shrestha, Namuna Bhusal, Jhanahari Bhattarai, Pratistha Koirala, Thomas Gass, Patrick McNeil, Keith Kadlec, Scott Sanford, Geoffrey Chanin, Mireille Borne, Guy Harrison, Dhan Bahadur Lama, Jason Squire, Eva Capozzola, Brigitte Sonnois, Virginia Perez, Munir Mammadzade, Radha Gurung, Megan Jones, Evan Rai, Simon Lewis, Caroline Scheffer, Leslie Brown, Neesha Bremmer, Claire Bennett and Anna McKeon. We would also like to show our appreciation to those individuals and organizations that have inspired us in the evolving sector of ethical voluntourism, in particular, Friends International, the ChildSafe Network, the Orphanages.no campaign, Where There Be Dragons, Learning Service, and the Better Volunteering, Better Care project. We would like to thank Susan Sellars-Shrestha and Ali Malcolm for copyediting and proofreading and Sigma Press for design and printing. Finally, we would like to thank Forget Me Not, ADRA Nepal, several generous individuals from Woodbridge, Suffolk in the United Kingdom, Sabha Agra and friends in the United Kingdom, and other donors who have asked not to be named for contributing towards the funding of the publication of this report and collaborating with us in providing technical advice and support. It is the combination of these incredible individuals and agencies that has made this report possible.

Acronyms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CCWB	Central Child Welfare Board
DCWB	District Child Welfare Board
INGO	international non-governmental organization
NGN	Next Generation Nepal
NGO	non-governmental organization
THIS	The Himalayan Innovative Society
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USD	United States dollar

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Definition of terms

The following definitions are proposed by NGN and are given to help explain the technical terms used in this report.

Alternative care: All forms of child care that may be used as an alternative to the parental care of children including kinship care, foster care, domestic adoption, inter-country adoption and child care homes.

Children's home: An institution, usually set up as a non-governmental organization in Nepal, that cares for children who have been separated from their families in the absence of other family-based care settings such as parents, kinship care, foster care or adoption. The term 'children's home' is generally used interchangeably with the term 'orphanage' and 'child care home' in Nepal. These terms are also used interchangeably in this publication together with the more technical term, 'institution.'

Displacement: The act of removing a child from his or her parents, family or community, usually so they can be placed in an alternative care setting such as an institution or exploited through trafficking.

Ethical voluntourism: Voluntourism practices that do not harm the host community in any way and, ideally, improve the lives of the people in the host community alongside the personal development of the volunteer. Also see *Voluntourism*.

Family-based care: This includes all forms of parental child care or alternative care in which a child is raised by a family, rather than within an institution. Family-based care includes parental care, kinship care, foster care and adoption. Some forms of institutional care use models that replicate family-based care as closely as possible, for example, by caring for children in small units run by a 'mother figure' who is able to form close bonds with the children.

Institution: The technical term for a 'children's home', 'orphanage' or other formal organizational setting that takes responsibility for caring for children who have been separated from their families, in the absence of other family-based care settings such as kinship care, foster care or adoption. This term is used in this publication interchangeably with 'children's home', 'child care home' and 'orphanage.'

Institutionalization: The process of placing or raising a child in an institutional setting, such as an orphanage or children's home, instead of with his or her family or in other family-based care settings such as kinship care, foster care or adoption.

Orphanage: Technically an orphanage is an institution that cares for children whose parents are deceased. However, in Nepal, the term is used interchangeably with the term 'children's home' and many orphanages in Nepal care for children who are not technically orphans. The term 'orphanage' is used in this publication interchangeably with the terms 'children's home' and 'institution.'

Orphanage voluntourism: Orphanage voluntourism is a term used to define a spectrum of activities related to the support of orphanages and children's homes by individuals who are primarily, or were initially, tourists on vacation. In most cases, orphanage voluntourism involves a tourist who wishes to include an element of social work-oriented volunteering in their vacation or travels and who chooses to do this by volunteering their time – sometimes coupled with financial or material support – to an orphanage. For some tourists this element of volunteering may be planned in advance of their vacation, whilst for others it may be more spontaneously arranged once they are already on vacation. It is common for the tourist to pay for this experience, either directly to the orphanage, or through a volunteer agency or tour company. Having volunteered in an orphanage, some tourists return to their place of origin and continue to financially or materially support their chosen orphanage, and may even establish more formalized fundraising mechanisms to achieve this. In some instances, the tourist may establish a registered charity or an international non-governmental organization to continue financially supporting the orphanage. A tourist who engages in any of these activities can be referred to as an 'orphanage voluntourist.'

Paper orphan: A child who has at least one living parent, but for whom official-looking paperwork has been fraudulently created to give the impression that he or she is an orphan and, therefore, suitable for adoption or other forms of financial or material support that will profit a trafficker or orphanage manager.

Reconnection: The process through which a child re-establishes connections with his or her family, community and culture. Reconnection usually refers to a specific step in this process, such as a telephone conversation or meeting.

Reintegration: The process through which a child is supported in adjusting to his or her community's lifestyle, culture and maternal dialect through carefully managed time spent with the child's family and community. This process usually starts from the point of reconnection and continues beyond the point of legal reunification.

Reunification: The action taken by an organization to move a child from an institutional care setting to his or her community of origin and to transfer his or her legal guardianship back to responsible family members.

Trafficking: NGN uses the definition of trafficking provided in the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act and United States policy on trafficking. Under this definition, trafficking must include three elements: (i) a process action, which refers to the harboring, moving or obtaining of a person (such as the moving of a child from their village to an institution); (ii) a particular means of trafficking (such as by defrauding the parents into believing that their child will go to boarding school or receive a good education or by use of force and coercion, e.g., by threatening the child in the institution that they or their family will be harmed if they reveal that they are not an orphan or that they are being kept against their free will); and (iii) for the purpose of slavery or forced labor (e.g., forcing a child to lie about their background, change their name, dance or act in a particular way to please tourists, starve or remain unhealthy to enable the orphanage owner to commercially gain from donations made by donors, volunteers and tourists). NGN frequently uses the term 'orphanage trafficking' to refer to cases that we believe meet this definition.



Transit home: A temporary shelter where children can stay after a rescue during the process of rehabilitation, family tracing, reconnection and reintegration. Transit homes in Nepal are required to meet the same government standards as children's homes. Sometimes children may remain in a transit home for up to one or two years, but transit homes should never become permanent shelters for children. If the permanent reunification of a child is not possible, then other permanent alternative care options should be sought for the child.

Voluntourism: A term used to describe short-term volunteering placements by tourists as part of their overall vacation or travels in a country. In many cases of voluntourism, the 'voluntourist' does not need to have prior skills or experience relevant to the position and the volunteering placement has been designed as much with the intention of providing an experience to the tourist as fulfilling a need within the host community. Voluntourists often pay for these experiences and tourist and volunteering agencies that offer these experiences often do so for profit-making purposes.



Executive summary

The significant rise in children being separated from their parents to live in orphanages is a relatively new phenomenon in Nepal with its roots in the 10-year civil war, which ended in 2006. During the conflict, traffickers portrayed themselves as boarding school representatives and made promises to parents about modern schools and safe living conditions in Kathmandu, which their children could benefit from. However, instead of being taken to educational institutions, these children were taken to under-resourced children's homes where they were at risk of exploitation and inter-country adoption as 'paper orphans' (children with living parents whose legal papers have been falsified to portray them as orphans).

In post-conflict Nepal, the traffickers' sales-pitch has evolved from offering 'safety from bullets' to the promise of an 'education, wealth and success' in the city, and there continues to be a ready supply of poverty-stricken and desperate families willing to pay for their children to receive this apparently 'golden opportunity.' The orphanages and children's homes have also adapted to the changing times. Having lost the revenue from inter-country adoption (which is now illegal to most Western countries), they have shifted their focus to the increasing number of charities and tourists who come to Nepal to take part in development activities and tourism. With money to be made from running orphanages in tourist areas, the traffickers have simply had to ensure an ongoing supply of 'destitute' children to attract donations from sympathetic tourists.

Over 15,000 children are believed to be living in registered children's homes and orphanages in Nepal and the data suggest that two out of three children living in 'orphanages' in Nepal are not in fact orphans. Whilst the Government of Nepal's Child Policy, 2012 – as well as many other international and national laws and policies – is clear that the institutionalization of children should only be a last resort and that all efforts should be made to keep children with their families, the reality in Nepal is quite the opposite. The institutionalization of children in Nepal has become the first choice for many rural families. The evidence indicates that institutional care is more likely to cause physical, mental and sexual harm to children than if they grow up in a family-based care setting.

'Orphanage voluntourism' is a term used to define a spectrum of activities related to the support of orphanages and children's homes by individuals who are primarily, or were initially, tourists on vacation. Next Generation Nepal (NGN) argues that there is a direct link between orphanage trafficking, institutionalization and the phenomenon of orphanage voluntourism.

The vast majority of orphanages and children's homes in Nepal are located in the main tourist areas. Of the registered orphanages and children's homes in Nepal, almost 90% are located in the 5 main tourist districts (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kaski and Chitwan), out of a total of 75 districts across the whole country. NGN has received reports of orphanage managers in Nepal asking traffickers to "bring them children" specifically because they have foreign donors willing to support their children's home and they, therefore, need 'poor' looking children to meet the donors' criteria. Similarly, NGN has received reports of orphanage owners deliberately keeping children in destitute or unhealthy conditions to attract more financial donations. Furthermore, foreign voluntourists have witnessed children being made to undertake activities, sometimes against their will, to please the fee-paying voluntourists. There are also cases of voluntourists themselves being used to help raise funds for their chosen orphanage. A slightly different scenario – but one that is also

common in Nepal – is where children are separated from their families and institutionalized for the purpose of making a profit from foreign voluntourists or donors, but the children are materially well cared for on the whole, which makes the problem more hidden. In accordance with the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act and United States policy on trafficking, NGN considers these types of behavior by brokers and orphanage managers to be acts of human trafficking.

The evidence would suggest that orphanage voluntourism is having the very opposite effect to that which was intended; it is keeping children away from their families and, sometimes, in destitute conditions. Children have become a lucrative poverty commodity in Nepal, and the willingness of voluntourists and donors to provide funds ensures the ongoing demand for children to be unnecessarily displaced from their families.

Voluntourism is growing internationally. A large proportion of people who partake in voluntourism are young, recent graduates who see volunteering as a good way to help those less fortunate than themselves, whilst simultaneously gaining valuable experience to strengthen their *curricula vitae*. However, in recent years, the concept of voluntourism has come under significant criticism by those who accuse it of being rooted in neo-colonial values and ‘Orientalism.’ However, there are also counter-arguments that encourage us to see the benefits of voluntourism. These arguments focus on the cultural transactions and learning that take place on both sides as a result of voluntourism, as well as the benefits that successful and sustainable voluntourism projects have brought to local communities.

The motives of voluntourists appear to be a mixture of *both* altruism and self-interest, and voluntourism can have *both* positive and negative impacts on host communities. Once we accept this as a reality, NGN recommends that we objectively consider how to reduce the problems caused by voluntourism and enhance its benefits. In an increasingly globalized world, NGN believes this is the only sensible approach. However, it should be noted that under the Nepal Immigration Act 1994, volunteering in Nepal on a tourist visa is technically illegal, and NGN does not in any way endorse illegal volunteering in Nepal.

‘Ethical voluntourism’ can be defined as voluntourism practices that do not harm the host community in any way and that, ideally, improve the lives of the people in the host community. Progress has been made in recent times in the debate on what is ‘ethical voluntourism’, in spreading awareness of unethical voluntourism practices (to help people to avoid them), and in developing guidelines and services that guide people in practicing ethical voluntourism. In this report, NGN explores some examples of good practice by the tourism industry, the Government of Nepal and civil society, the media, campaign groups and diplomatic missions in Nepal. NGN goes on to make recommendations for the same stakeholders on how to improve ethical voluntourism practices.

Finally, NGN outlines its thoughts and advice on how to practice ethical voluntourism. This includes adopting a ‘learning mindset,’ researching potential volunteering placements, considering the suitability of the voluntourist’s skills for the volunteering placement, considering the sustainability of the volunteering project, and creating a demand for an ethical market place for voluntourism. If this is too challenging, then NGN recommends simply being an ethical tourist. NGN does not endorse orphanage voluntourism, except for a minority of professionally-skilled volunteers and, even then, there are only a few ‘good’ orphanages in Nepal that NGN would consider it to be ethical to volunteer in. By practicing ethical voluntourism, NGN concludes that orphanage trafficking and the unnecessary institutionalization and abuse of children in Nepal can be reduced.

01

Introduction

In search of education, wealth and success

Next Generation Nepal's (NGN's) origins in Nepal stem back to 2005, towards the end of the civil war. Two foreign volunteers – Conor Grennan from the United States and Farid Ait-Mansour from France – had been happily volunteering in an 'orphanage' at Godavari on the outskirts of the Kathmandu valley when they discovered a terrible truth. The children they had grown to love and care for were not orphans after all; most of them had living parents and had been trafficked¹ to Kathmandu from their remote mountain homes in Humla. The children had been neglected, forced to beg and threatened by the traffickers that they or their families would be harmed if anyone came to know the truth. Conor personally travelled to Humla to set about trying to find these children's families, whilst Farid set up a transit home and care facilities in Kathmandu. As their work progressed, they discovered that more and more children were suffering a similar fate. NGN was officially founded as an international non-governmental organization (INGO) in the United States in 2006. Its mission is to reconnect and reunify orphanage trafficked children with their families.

Since NGN was founded, we have witnessed the continuing evolution of orphanage trafficking. When Farid and Conor began working in Nepal almost a decade ago, most of the children being brought to orphanages in Kathmandu were from remote areas like Humla, often to escape being forcibly conscripted into armed groups by Maoist rebels. Whilst profit could be made for the traffickers by charging the parents a fee for this service, additional profits could also be made in Kathmandu by charging foreigners high fees to adopt an 'orphan' to take back to their home country.

Then the civil conflict ended in 2006. The Maoists stopped conscripting children into armed groups, schools were gradually reopened in rural areas and the situation began to change.

¹ NGN uses the terms 'trafficked' and 'trafficking' throughout this report to refer to situations where children have been fraudulently displaced from their families by brokers and harbored in orphanages to be used for commercial purposes – see our definition of 'trafficking' in the 'Definition of terms' section of this report. We recognize that whether or not such cases are legally considered to be 'trafficking' is contested. Whatever the view of the reader on this issue, we hope that our choice to use the term 'trafficking' will not detract from the main purpose of this report, which is to evidence the link between child displacement and orphanage voluntourism, and the harm it causes to children.

Inter-country adoption was formally suspended by most Western countries in 2010 after a high-profile expose revealed that many of the documents used in Nepal to show that children were orphans were in fact fake. The original 'push' and 'pull' factors for trafficking children to orphanages were no longer relevant, so the entrepreneurial traffickers had to adapt their approach to continue profiting from the lucrative trade in children.

Today, rural areas in Nepal are still ravaged by poverty after 10 years of civil war. Families are desperate for a way out and they have learned from the Government and civil society that to become 'educated' is the best way to achieve this. As for the traffickers, buoyed by the networks and reputations they built during the conflict, they have simply adapted their sales-pitch from offering 'safety from bullets' to the promise of an 'education, wealth and success' in the city. There continues to be a ready supply of desperate families willing to pay hefty sums for their children to take up this apparent 'golden opportunity.'

Meanwhile, in Kathmandu, the orphanages have also adapted. Having lost the revenue from corrupt inter-country adoptions, they have shifted their focus towards the increasing number of charities and tourists who come to Nepal to participate in development work. It has not been hard to find small donors that want to support a destitute orphanage or tourists who are willing to pay to volunteer for a few weeks. With money to be made from running orphanages in tourist areas such as Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan, all the traffickers have to do is ensure an ongoing supply of 'destitute' children to attract the sympathetic tourist dollar.

And this is the paradox of orphanage volunteering in Nepal. It is a paradox because it contradicts the very motives the tourists and donors have for supporting orphanages. They volunteer their time and money to support needy children and develop a poor country, yet, in doing so, they are inadvertently keeping children away from their families, tearing apart rural communities, and fuelling a criminal and corrupt industry that ultimately prevents Nepal from developing.

Purpose and methodology

This purpose of this report is to collate and synthesize the plethora of valuable information NGN has on orphanage trafficking and orphanage voluntourism in Nepal. Our methodology in developing the report has involved using existing research and reports, government statistics, media articles, laws and policies, interviews with victims of trafficking and institutionalization, interviews with voluntourists, and our wealth of field experience from having worked at the coal-face of this problem for eight years. NGN does not profess to know 'the truth' and our findings in this report are based on our own limited experience and knowledge of a highly complex problem. However, ultimately, we are of the opinion that our experience and research are broad enough to qualify us to present this report in the hope that it will generate an open and lively debate on this subject, in which all opinions can be expressed.

This report has been written for everyone – governments, donors, multinational and bilateral development agencies, INGOs, NGOs, embassies, the media, the tourism industry, volunteers, tourists, travelers and concerned members of the public. We want it to be as accessible as possible so that it influences the largest number of people. For those who are skeptical of the link between trafficking and voluntourism, this report is designed to

persuade them. For those who want to do something about it, this report provides practical recommendations. For those who simply want to learn more about the problem, this report is the place to start.

Structure of report

This report has been split into ten chapters. Chapter 2 considers the historical context in which orphanage trafficking began and how it has evolved into its present form. Chapter 3 discusses the problems inherent in the institutionalization of children in orphanages and children's homes. Chapter 4 gives an overview of the legal and policy provisions in Nepal and internationally that protect children from institutional care. Chapter 5 considers the links between orphanage trafficking, the unnecessary institutionalization of children in Nepal, and orphanage voluntourism. The global growth in voluntourism, the motives of voluntourists, and the ethics and legality of voluntourism are analyzed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 considers what 'ethical voluntourism' looks like and Chapter 8 makes recommendations for those who have a part to play in preventing orphanage trafficking and improving ethical voluntourism practices. For those who would still like to contribute as a volunteer, Chapter 9 explains how to volunteer ethically. Finally, Chapter 10 gives a short conclusion and more information about NGN. We hope you find this report interesting, enlightening and, most of all, useful.

The civil war and trafficking in the Karnali region

Historically, it has been common in Nepal for wealthier families to send their children away to boarding schools for a secular education or for Buddhist families to send their children to monasteries for a religious education. However, the significant rise in the number of children being separated from their parents to live in orphanages is a relatively new phenomenon, with roots that can be traced back to the 10-year civil war in Nepal, which ran from 1996 to 2006. During this time, the rural, western mountain districts of Nepal – known as the Karnali region – became a focal point for the conflict between the Maoist forces and the government. Schools became battlegrounds from which resources were re-directed for military purposes and strikes and closures were commonplace (in Humla all schools were reportedly closed throughout the conflict¹). Teachers were internally displaced, which left the student-teacher ratio in some areas as high as 70:1². Children were forcibly conscripted by Maoist rebels into armed groups such as the Peoples Liberation Army³. These factors, along with the already existing high levels of poverty and food insecurity, created fertile ground for traffickers to prey on vulnerable families⁴. Traffickers trekked deep into rural areas and often portrayed themselves as boarding school representatives. They made promises to parents about modern schools and safe living conditions in Kathmandu, which their children could benefit from should they decide to join the traffickers.

Many parents were understandably misled by these promises and used their savings or borrowed to pay the traffickers to give their children what they believed would be a safe and promising future. Parents were led to believe that their children would return to the village as educated young adults to assist with farming and local enterprises, or perhaps even become doctors, lawyers or local politicians. For most children this never happened. Instead of being taken to educational institutions, the children were taken to under-resourced children's homes where it was not uncommon for their identities to be changed and records falsified

1 UNICEF; Forum for Women Law and Development. 2005. *Report of fact finding mission on displacement of children from Humla*. Unpublished report. Available at: <http://poundpuplegacy.org/files/UNICEF-FWLD-Displacement-of-Children-From-Humla-2005-s.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2014)

2 Shields, R.; Rappleye, J. 2008. 'Differentiation, development, (dis)integration: Education in Nepal's 'People's War'.' *Research in Comparative and International Education* (2008) 3 (1): 91–102, p 95

3 Grennan, C. 2011. *Little princes: One man's promise to bring home the lost children of Nepal*. New York: William Morrow & Co.

4 Internal NGN case records

Box 1 From Humla to Kathmandu

"I was taken from my village to get a better education. When I reached the house where I would stay, I saw many children there. At first I thought it was not bad, but after one month, it was getting worse and worse. There was not enough food for the children and there were not enough clothes for us to wear. After a while the food completely finished and we needed to go to the street to beg for money to buy food. On some days we did not eat any food and went to sleep without eating. We did not go to school and we did not get an education."

Chhetra, a 19-year-old boy from Humla who was displaced from his home into an orphanage in Kathmandu at the age of 9 or 10.

or destroyed. Sometimes the only way for them to survive was to beg on the streets and scavenge for food.

Inter-country adoption and 'paper orphans'

Many of the children trafficked to Kathmandu were turned into 'paper orphans', meaning that false records were created in their name to portray them as having deceased parents. In the year 2000, the law in Nepal was changed to allow the majority of children's homes to process inter-country adoptions⁵; this led to a drastic increase in the number of paper orphans being adopted overseas⁶. Between the years 2000 and 2007 the number of inter-country adoptions increased by 50–100 each year⁷. Huge profits were made by traffickers and brokers by charging well-intentioned foreigners to adopt a child whom they believed was an orphan, but, in reality, still had parents living in remote areas of Nepal who believed that their child was being happily educated in Kathmandu⁸. Due to concerns about corruption and fraud, many Western governments suspended inter-country adoption from Nepal in 2010 (a ban which remains in place for most of these countries). With these restrictions in place, a major source of income for traffickers and brokers was curtailed.

The 'push' of poverty and 'pull' of education

With the violent conflict now over and inter-country adoption suspended, traffickers and profiteers have had to find new ways of making money from children. The methods and networks used by the traffickers during the conflict were effective and are still largely intact, so it did not take much adaption for the traffickers to continue profiting from displacing children.

Post-conflict rural Nepal remains desperately poor (25% of Nepalis live below the national poverty line of USD 1.25 per person, per day⁹). Public services are few, food security is a constant concern, and the imminent risk of flood, famine, fire and earthquake poses an

5 Terre des hommes; UNICEF. 2008. *Adopting the rights of the child: A study on intercountry adoption and its influence on child protection in Nepal*. Nepal: Terre des hommes, Nepal, p 9

6 Aguetant, J. 2010. *Paper orphans*. A documentary co-produced by UNICEF and Terre des hommes. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1B5QiFFxAu4> (accessed August 26, 2014)

7 Terre des hommes; UNICEF. 2008. *Adopting the rights of the child*, p 9

8 UNICEF; Forum for Women Law and Development. 2010 and Terre des hommes; UNICEF. 2008. *Adopting the rights of the child*.

9 Mercy Corps. 2013. *Mercy Corps in Nepal: Working for change that's community-led and market-driven*. Available at: http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/MercyCorps_NepalFactSheet.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014)

ongoing threat. Furthermore, the perception by rural communities that education standards are much higher in the cities persists in the same way as it did during the conflict. In the post-conflict era of national development, parents believe the rhetoric of the Government and NGOs that a good education will release their children from the cycle of poverty and open the door to lucrative and powerful jobs. They believe that if their children can obtain a good education in the city, they will return to their rural community and support their family later in life. The key difference now, from during the conflict, that NGN has observed, is that this problem has spread from the Karnali region to across the whole of Nepal. We now work with children who have been trafficked and displaced into orphanages from districts in the east to the west; from the mountains, hills and Terai; and from rural and sometimes urban areas. The traffickers – whom we hear about from the children and families we work with – have also expanded in number and scope of operation, perhaps inspired by the profits made by the original traffickers who operated during the conflict. Whereas eight years ago, NGN was aware of a small group of highly technical traffickers operating in the Karnali region, we now hear reports of small-scale, but equally dangerous, traffickers operating across the whole country.

The child traffickers are entrepreneurs, of a sort, who understand the desperation of rural villagers. By promising a place for their child in a quality boarding school or foreign-funded orphanage in Kathmandu, they are able to charge a transaction fee from parents, which in NGN's experience can be as high as 20,000–50,000 Nepali rupees (about USD 200–500)¹⁰. For the parents of these children, the trafficker's offer represents a 'golden opportunity.' Whilst the family is, of course, concerned about the safety of their child going to a boarding school or orphanage in Kathmandu, overall, it seems like a sensible option. The family rationalizes that whilst there are risks to the child leaving, the risks attached to remaining in the village in poverty and insecurity are also very real. Parents believe that, in the long-term, their child will receive an education, which will free him or her from poverty.

In NGN's experience, the trafficker is often known to the family – he or she may be another villager or even a relative – so there is an element of trust in the promises the trafficker is making. All in all, in the mind of the rural villager – who has probably never been to Kathmandu and, therefore, has no concept of where their child is going – the trafficker's proposal makes sense. This is not to say that families make these decisions lightly, or that there are not families who choose not to send their children away, but as external observers we should at least understand the difficult decisions such families have to make about their children's future. It is fair to say that, generally, these families act in a way that they *believe* is in the best interests of their children.

Once the child is taken from the village, the family usually loses contact with him or her. Due to the remoteness of many villages in Nepal, lack of communication channels, lack of transport links, and lack of funds to make the expensive journey to Kathmandu, it is difficult for families to stay in touch with their children. Usually, a family's only link to their child is through the trafficker, so the trafficker can claim whatever he or she wants about the child's welfare and the family has no way of verifying their story.

NGN believes that hundreds, if not thousands, of children are displaced from their families every year in Nepal, based on the promise of a good education and a better life. Many of these children end up in children's homes or orphanages funded by foreign donors and paying volunteers.

¹⁰ Case records of NGN and THIS

Box 2 A father whose children were rescued

“The economic conditions in my village were not good, so I moved our family to the Kathmandu Valley. But the children’s mother ended up in jail, and I was working as a servant so I was not able to properly care for the children. I sent Archana and Balaji to an orphanage because I thought they would be better off there than with me. Little did I know, Goma [the woman running the orphanage] would make a business out of it. I guess I was ignorant about the conditions before the rescue. I used to go to the orphanage to pick up my kids for their long holidays, but I was never allowed in the rooms of the house. I only realized how horrible things really were after Archana and Balaji were rescued and NGN found me. ...I missed them! I felt very sad. But beyond missing them, I convinced myself that it was for the better. I used to hear all these stories about children growing up in orphanages – well fed and properly educated. I really had no choice but to send them away because we were struggling financially. I had to work, and their mother was not around to take care of them. I just had no choice.”

NGN interview with Manish, whose children were rescued by Central Child Welfare Board in 2011.

Institutionalization as a first choice

Over 15,000 children are believed to be living in registered children's homes and orphanages in Nepal¹. If unregistered and illegal children's homes were included, this number would probably be much higher. Furthermore, the most recent accurate data collected suggests that two out of three children living in orphanages in Nepal are not in fact orphans². Whilst the Government of Nepal's Child Policy, 2012 and other related policies are clear that the institutionalization of children should be a last resort and all efforts should be made to keep children with their families and return children to their families when separated³, the reality in Nepal is quite different. The institutionalization of children in Nepal has become the first choice for many families because they have been led to believe that this will best serve their children's interests.

A child growing up in institutional care – a children's home or orphanage – is significantly more likely to suffer harm than a child growing up in a family-based care setting. The evidence against the use of institutional care – except in cases where it is absolutely necessary – is substantial⁴. In this chapter, we will provide a brief overview of the harm caused by institutional care with particular reference to the context of Nepal.

Impaired physical and mental development

Institutional care is not able to provide an adequate level of child-centered attention from consistent and long-term care givers, which is critical for a child's emotional, physical, mental, and social development⁵. It is usually within the context of the parent-

1 CCWB. 2013. *State of children in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Government of Nepal

2 The UNICEF and Terre des hommes publication '*Adopting the rights of the child*' (2008) estimates that 85% of children in children's homes have at least one living parent. Another report in 2008 by CCWB '*Report on survey of the childcare homes*', an unpublished report submitted to Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare, estimates that 58% of children have at least one living parent. Even though this data is now 6 years old, there is no reason to believe that the figures have changed significantly; if anything, there are fewer reasons now for children to be orphaned today than there were in 2008, because nearly a decade has passed since the civil war ended.

3 Government of Nepal. 2012a. *Child policy*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal; Government of Nepal. 2012b. *Standards for the operation and management of residential child care homes*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal

4 For example, see Terre des hommes; UNICEF. 2008. *Adopting the rights of the child* and Better Care Network website: <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/bcn/>.

5 European Commission Daphne Programme Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs; WHO Regional Office for Europe;

child relationship that children accomplish essential developmental tasks related to their psychological and cognitive maturation. When a child is separated from his or her parents at a young age, the opportunity to develop in this way is denied to them. In a typical institution, staff turnover is frequent (in the context of a child's life) and the ratio of children to care givers prevents the child from being able to form a close bond with a unique care giver. This damages the child's capacity to form healthy attachments with adults in later life.

In Nepal, where children are often being cared for by a revolving roster of international volunteers, this problem is amplified. In the words of Karjit, a youth from Humla who was institutionalized in Kathmandu from a young age:

There were so many volunteers: short-time, long-time, middle-time, according to visa! ... Sometimes they organize program and I don't want to go. Children sometimes feel angry because they want to do what they want. There is a nice movie and children they want to watch, but volunteers organize a football program and house managers say you have to go. And all children were angry ... Why foreigners come to Nepal? Why do they go in orphanage? That time they come for short time and they give love to us, but then they leave, and when I write they don't reply. I say to a volunteer, 'Sister, I am very lonely', and they say, 'No problem I am here', but then they go their country and I write but they don't reply. When I was little everyone can love me, now I am big and I need love⁶.

Impaired post-care survival skills

Children leaving institutional care often lack the skills, education and coping mechanisms that are necessary to survive in the external world⁷. In Nepal, a young person's links to their family, community and local dialect are essential social capital, which help that young person to obtain employment, arrange a marriage and inherit land. When these links with the family are broken, it leaves the young person isolated and vulnerable in a society with minimal social welfare provisions. In Nepal, the institutions of 'family' and 'community' are often the only social welfare structures that young people can rely on and, when these are removed or weakened through institutionalization, it affects the entire society. As expressed by Karjit:

Even after completing Class 12 they can't go back to the village. They don't know how to do agriculture. If they want to stay in Kathmandu and study, even they cannot get an opportunity⁸.

A typical focus of institutions in Nepal is on academic achievement, based on the assumption that this alone will lead to independence as an adult. Academic achievement is, of course, important, but it is only one of the things needed to support youth into adulthood. Without emotional support through adolescence and into adulthood, relationship advice and marriage arrangements, support with career opportunities, and financial and material assistance, young people leaving institutions are vulnerable. This can lead to confusion about identity and anger directed towards institutional care givers, distant family members or other figures of authority. In NGN's experience, young people who grow up in institutions – and especially those who have not been reconnected with their families and communities – are more likely

University of Birmingham. 2007. *De-institutionalizing and transforming children's services – A guide to good practice*. Birmingham: WHO Collaborating Centre for Child Care and Protection, University of Birmingham

6 NGN interview by Rachel Krulewich in Kathmandu, Nepal, 2012

7 European Commission Daphne Programme Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs et al. 2007. *De-institutionalizing and transforming children's services – A guide to good practice*.

8 NGN interview by Rachel Krulewich in Kathmandu, Nepal, 2012

than their peers to suffer from homelessness, be involved in criminal activity, be unemployed, experience poverty and lack proper healthcare. These problems impact on Nepal's broader society, as much as they affect the individual.

Risk of physical, verbal and sexual abuse

Children who grow up in institutional care are more at risk of physical, verbal and sexual abuse than those who grow up in family-based care⁹. There have been several high-profile cases of Nepali orphanage managers physically and sexually abusing children in their care. In 2011, the proprietor of Nepal Tuhura Kalyan Sangh orphanage in Kirtipur, Nazar Ram, was charged with the sexual abuse of children in his care¹⁰; in 2012, the directors of Morning Start Children's Charity orphanage were charged with the rape and sexual abuse of children in their care¹¹; and, in 2013, the manager of Abinas Anath Ashram orphanage in Rupandehi, Ashish Thapa, was prosecuted for the rape and 'mentality to rape' a number of girls in his care¹². There are also documented cases of foreign orphanage volunteers being involved in similar crimes: Jean-Jaques Hayes (French), Geoffrey John-Prigge (Australian) and Simon Jasper-MacCarthy (British) have all been prosecuted for sexually abusing children in orphanages in Nepal¹³. In a country where legal impunity is high for offenders, it is likely that these high-profile cases are simply the tip of the iceberg.

Best interests of the institution over the best interests of the child

A problem that is particularly relevant to Nepal is that once a financial and managerial investment is made in an institution it becomes a fixed resource, which actors are reluctant to change. Even when viable alternatives are proposed that may be more cost-effective and better serve the needs of the children, closing down the institution is seen as a challenge to the *status quo*; it may make fundraising more difficult if there are no longer permanent children in the organization's care and it may threaten staff jobs and livelihoods. When institutions are not closely monitored and regulated, they can easily become profit-making 'businesses', in which the principle of keeping children with their families wherever possible runs counter to the profit-making ethos of the organization. In this situation, the best interests of the child come second to the interests of the institution¹⁴.



9 Terre des homes; UNICEF. 2008. *Adopting the rights of the child*.

10 Neupane, S. 2012. 'Importance of effective regulation in orphanages.' *Republica*. Available at: http://myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=37574 (accessed August 26, 2014)

11 *Ibid.*

12 Ekantipur. 2013. 'Fifteen years in jail for rape.' ekantipur.com [online], January 24, 2013. Available at: http://www.ekantipur.com/kantipur/news/news-detail.php?news_id=288330#.UQKcKaEP8qU.gmail (accessed January 24, 2013)

13 McArthur, D. 2010. *Ten steps forward to deinstitutionalization: Building communities to support children's rights*. Kathmandu: Terre des homes Foundation and Hope for Himalayan Kids; McQueeny, K. 2012. 'Son of Yardbirds drummer jailed for 30 years for posing as charity volunteer to sexually abuse children as young as SIX.' *The Coventry Telegraph*. Available at: <http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/2012/09/08/charity-boss-jailed-after-sex-abuse-of-west-midlands-boy-92746-31790874/> (accessed August 26, 2014)

14 Save the Children. 2009. *Institutional care: The last resort*. Policy Brief, Save the Children. Available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/policy-brief-institutional-care-last-resort> (accessed August 26, 2014)



Photograph credit: Next Generation Nepal / The Himalayan Innovative Society

Children rescued by CCWB and DCWB Kavre from a profit-making orphanage in Kavre in November 2013. Nineteen children had been forced to sleep in one small room in a building with no running water and minimal food. Many of the children were suffering from chronic malnutrition and other health conditions.

04

Legal and policy provisions against institutional care

International and Nepali laws and policies are clearly against the unnecessary separation of a child from his or her family, and against the institutionalized care of children, except as a last and temporary resort. Some of the main laws and policies that reflect these values in Nepal are summarized here.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹ is a treaty that details the rights of children and sets out the obligations of states to recognize, protect and promote those rights. States that are party to the convention are legally obliged to institutionalize its provisions within their legal and policy frameworks. Nepal became a party to this treaty in 1990, which implies that Nepal recognizes that children have all of the rights mentioned in the convention and imposes a responsibility and legal obligation on the Government to protect and promote these rights.

The following rights provided for in the Convention are relevant to the issue of child reintegration and reunification:

- **Right to a family environment:** The Preamble recognizes that “the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”
- **Right to be cared for by parents:** Article 7.1 provides that the child has the “right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.”
- **Right to live with parents:** Article 9.1 provides that the child has the right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed incompatible with the child’s best interests.

¹ United Nations Centre for Human Rights; UNICEF; United Nations. 1993. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund

- **Right to maintain contact with parents:** Article 9.3 provides that the child has the right to maintain contact with his or her parents if separated.

UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009

The United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children were formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 2009². These Guidelines supplement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and aim to aid in its implementation. The Guidelines are international recognition of the fact that reintegration is sound, correct and in the best interests of the child. Article 3 states that “the family is the best place for a child and efforts should be primarily directed to enable a child to remain or return to his/her parents or, where appropriate, to other close family members.”

Child Policy, 2012

In 2012, the Government of Nepal updated its official Child Policy³. The Child Policy now stands as one of the most progressive and powerful policies in Nepal in relation to child protection. The Policy recognizes that children's homes should be a last resort and that all efforts should be made to reintegrate children with their families. The Policy also states one of its objectives as: “To protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence and harms, abuses [sic], abandon, undermine, exploitation and sexual abuses.”⁴

Standards for the Operation and Management of Residential Child Care Homes, 2012

The Standards for the Operation and Management of Residential Child Care Homes⁵ consists of a series of standards that all institutions in Nepal providing residential care for children should meet to ensure that they are legally compliant. The Standards are tough and it is widely acknowledged that most homes fail to fully meet them. The Standards consistently state that the family is the best place for children; that children should only be admitted and kept in children's homes as a final resort and temporary measure; and that all efforts should be made to maintain contact between the child and their family whilst the child is living in a children's home. The predecessor to these Standards were the Minimum Standards of Operation for Residential Child Care Homes 2003⁶, and government data shows that only 10% of children's homes in Nepal met these standards in 2011⁷.

2 United Nations. 2010. *Guidelines for the alternative care of children*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, on the report of the Third Committee, A/RES/64/142. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English\(2\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English(2).pdf) (accessed August 26, 2014)

3 Government of Nepal. 2012a. *Child policy*.

4 *Ibid.*, Clause 7.1.

5 Government of Nepal. 2012b. *Standards for the operation and management of residential child care homes*.

6 Government of Nepal. 2003. *Minimum standards of operation for residential child care homes*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal

7 A publication by the CCWB in 2011, ‘*Status of children in Nepal*,’ shows that only 10.3% of children's homes meet the Government of Nepal's *Minimum Standards of Operation for Residential Child Care Homes* (2003). Note that these standards have now been replaced with new standards and the new monitoring of homes is currently being undertaken.

Defining orphanage voluntourism

Before we delve into a more detailed discussion about orphanage voluntourism, it is necessary to define what we mean by this term. NGN defines 'orphanage voluntourism' as a spectrum of activities related to the support of orphanages and children's homes by individuals who are primarily, or were initially, tourists on vacation. In most cases, orphanage voluntourism involves a tourist who wishes to include an element of social work-oriented volunteering in their vacation or travels and who chooses to do this by volunteering their time – sometimes coupled with financial or material support – to an orphanage. For some tourists this element of volunteering may be planned in advance of their vacation, whilst for others it may be more spontaneously arranged once they are already on vacation. It is common for the tourist to pay for this experience, either directly to the orphanage, or through a volunteer agency or tour company. Having volunteered in an orphanage, some tourists return to their place of origin and continue to financially or materially support their chosen orphanage, and may even establish more formalized fundraising mechanisms to achieve this. In some instances, the tourist may establish a registered charity or an international non-governmental organization to continue financially supporting the orphanage. A tourist who engages in any of these activities can be referred to as an 'orphanage voluntourist.'

The link between trafficking, institutionalization and voluntourism

Whilst the link between orphanage trafficking and the unnecessary institutionalization of children has been clearly established in the above chapters, NGN believes that there is *also* a direct link between these phenomena and the apparently separate phenomenon of orphanage voluntourism. The vast majority of orphanages and children's homes in Nepal are located in the main tourist areas of the country where foreign volunteers are most likely to spend time. Of the registered orphanages and children's homes in Nepal, up to 90% are located in the five main tourist districts (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kaski and Chitwan)¹, out of a total of 75 districts across the country. If non-registered children's

¹ Data from CCWB published in 2012 in '*Some facts on child care homes in Nepal*' puts this figure at 90%; whilst data from, CCWB published in 2013 in '*State of children in Nepal*' puts this figure at 82%.

homes were taken into account, this proportion would probably be even higher. The high concentration of orphanages in tourist areas does not necessarily match the high areas of population or need. NGN believes that it is no coincidence that orphanages are being set up in areas where paying tourists can most easily be lured in.

NGN has received reports of orphanage managers in Nepal asking traffickers to 'bring them children' specifically because they have foreign donors willing to support their children's home and, therefore, need 'poor' and 'orphaned' looking children to meet the donors' criteria². Similarly, NGN has received reports of orphanage owners deliberately keeping children in destitute or unhealthy conditions to attract more and larger financial donations³. In several cases, we have witnessed traffickers gathering children from villages with the promise of an education and setting up an orphanage *before* they have even identified possible donors. In such cases, there are inevitably few funds available to care for the children, so, whilst the trafficker/orphanage manager attempts to find donors or voluntourists to support them, the children live in dangerously unhealthy and unsanitary conditions, some of them even starving or becoming seriously ill. In these situations, the unhealthy state of the children becomes the basis upon which they believe they can attract donors and voluntourists. In one case of an orphanage in the Lakeside North area of Pokhara, NGN received a report of a man running a small orphanage that became so popular with fee-paying voluntourists that he made plans to expand his orphanage and bring more children from the villages to meet the demand for orphanage voluntourism and, thus, increase his profits.

The reports NGN has received from foreign fee-paying voluntourists are equally disturbing⁴. Ex-voluntourists have described witnessing children being made to undertake activities, sometimes against their will, to please voluntourists. Such activities have included: dancing, playing sports and games, going on day trips, accompanying voluntourists back to their hotel rooms, and even 'showering' (an activity in which the voluntourist has the experience of washing a Nepali child). In one report, an American voluntourist was allegedly allowed to regularly take his favorite children from an orphanage in Pokhara to his hotel room for 'showering.' All these voluntourists paid fees for the privilege of these experiences. Reports from ex-voluntourists tell of children becoming ill and not being treated, despite the high-fees being paid by the voluntourists, which should have easily covered any medical costs. There are also reports of voluntourists leaving money with managers for the treatment of sick children, only to return at a later time to learn that no treatment was given. Furthermore, there is evidence of volunteers being recruited to actively support orphanage managers in raising funds from donors (see Box 3).

In accordance with the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act and United States policy on trafficking, NGN considers much of this behavior by brokers and orphanage managers to be acts of human trafficking. Under the definition in the Act, trafficking must include three elements: (i) a process action, which refers to the harboring, moving or obtaining of a person (such as the moving of a child from their village to an institution, or

2 The case of Abinas Anath Ashram in Rupandehi, from where CCWB transferred eight children into the care of NGN/THIS in July 2013. Available at: http://www.nextgenerationnepal.org/Press_Releases (accessed September 4, 2014)

3 Based on internal and confidential NGN/THIS case records, which include the public case of Garib Sudhar Manch from where 18 children were rescued by CCWB and transferred into the care of NGN/THIS in November 2013, see: NGN. 2013. *Next Generation Nepal assists in rescue of 18 children from squalor and neglect*, [online], November 10, 2013. Available at: http://www.nextgenerationnepal.org/Press_Releases (accessed August 26, 2014)

4 Based on confidential reports to NGN from foreign voluntourists, recorded between 2012 and 2014.

Box 3 Mukti Nepal⁵

Mukti Nepal was an orphanage in Kathmandu established by a Nepali woman, Goma Luitel. Luitel advertised through volunteering agencies for foreign volunteers to work in the orphanage for a fee. She was successful in attracting a large number of foreign volunteers. Luitel's apparent dedication towards her social work with children presented as 'orphans' was an inspiration to the foreign volunteers. Many of them helped her fundraise by writing funding proposals and letters of solicitation to ex-volunteers and donated material goods to the orphanage themselves. By 2010, Luitel had secured a core donor in Spain who was able to cover all of the running costs associated with the orphanage, yet she still continued to fundraise with help from volunteers. She even created a fundraising video that showed a fabricated story of how she had rescued vulnerable children from the street. Yet behind the facade of the selfless and caring social worker, Luitel would severely beat and neglect the children. She would also threaten them that if they informed the foreigners that they were not orphans then they or their families would be harmed. Parents who tried to gain access to their children were routinely denied.

In late 2010, a girl at the orphanage was hit by a vehicle on her way home from school. She became very sick and Luitel instructed that she be placed on the roof of the orphanage and beaten with metal rods and nettles by the other children. Although the injured girl was taken to hospital by a relative of Luitel's, she later died of her injuries. Luitel was able to convince the authorities that she was not in any way responsible for the child's death and no legal action was taken against her.

A few months later during a visit to the orphanage by an ex-volunteer from Germany, some of the children began to talk to the ex-volunteer about the truth of what was happening in Mukti Nepal. The ex-volunteer gathered evidence from the children and reported the case to Terre des hommes. Thanks to these efforts, a rescue was enacted by the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) and the police in March 2011, with support from several INGOs and NGOs, including NGN and THIS. Twenty children were transferred to an NGN/THIS transit home and, over the next two and a half years, eighteen of them were reunified with their families (the remaining two children were transferred to a 'good' children's home because NGN/THIS were unable to trace their families due to lack of information). All of the children had suffered significant psychological trauma as a result of their time spent living under the guardianship of Luitel; all had been denied access to their families.

In 2012, Luitel was successfully convicted under Article 7 of the Children's Act of torturing sixteen children. Her punishment was one month's imprisonment and a fine of Nepali rupees 5,000 (approximately USD \$50) to be paid as restitution for the sixteen victims. Luitel was never arrested and has not paid her fine or served her sentence. Were it not for the willingness of the fee paying volunteers and donors who supported Luitel – in the genuine belief they were helping a good cause – Mukti Nepal would never have existed, the children may never have been removed from their families, and the deceased girl may still be alive.

5 NGN/THIS case records; testimonies given to NGN by an anonymous ex-volunteer; NGN interviews conducted by Rachel Krulewich in Kathmandu in 2012 and Martin Punaks in Kathmandu in 2014; medical records of child victims; various news reports; the blog of Nicolle Davis, see Davis, N. 2006. *Mukti Nepal – Week 7*, [Blog], September 17, 2006 Available at: <http://www.travelblog.org/Asia/Nepal/Kathmandu/blog-86320.html> (accessed August 26, 2014)

keeping them in an institution); (ii) a particular means of trafficking (such as by defrauding the parents into believing that their children will go to boarding school and receive a good education, or by use of force and coercion, such as by threatening the child in the institution that they or their family will be harmed if they reveal that they are not an orphan or are being kept against their free will); and (iii) for the purpose of slavery or forced labor (e.g., forcing a child to lie about their background, change their name, dance or act in a particular way to please tourists, starve or remain unhealthy to enable the orphanage owner to commercially gain from donations made by donors, volunteers and tourists).⁶

However, in our interviews with traffickers, brokers and orphanage managers, they certainly do not consider themselves to be engaging in 'trafficking.' Instead they often describe themselves as 'social workers' who are acting in the best interests of the children by taking them out of 'risky' situations in rural villages and placing them in institutions where they stand a better chance of having basic facilities and receiving an education. They consider that any profits that they personally make from this 'service' are rightly deserved because of the good work that they are doing for the children and their families. Of course, NGN strongly disagrees with this view in so far as we believe that unnecessarily separating children from their families and exposing them to physical and psychological harm in an institution can never be in a child's best interests. NGN is supported in this view by international and Nepali laws and policies.

A slightly different scenario – but one that is also common in Nepal – is where children are separated from their families and institutionalized for the purpose of making a profit from foreign voluntourists or donors, but the children are, on the whole, materially well cared for. This scenario is perhaps best demonstrated by the case of Forget Me Not (Box 4). These situations are, in many ways, better than the situations in which children are being obviously starved, beaten or sexually abused. However, they also present a more worrying prospect in so far as the underlying trafficking and denial of human rights is hidden. The children have still been displaced, they are still being used to make a profit, they are still being denied their right to see their families, and they are still being threatened that if they disclose the truth then harm will come to them, but, on the surface, they appear happy, healthy and are receiving a good education. NGN has witnessed several cases where children are being cared for in apparently high-quality orphanages and children's homes – some of which even meet the government's legal standards – but they have in fact been intentionally displaced from their family or trafficked, sometimes with the orphanage managers' knowledge and sometimes without.

6 It should be noted that the US State Department is yet to include this phenomenon in its annual Trafficking in Persons Report despite an argument made by NGN and others that it should be. The phenomenon was, however, recorded and discussed in the National Human Rights Commission. 2012. *Trafficking in persons especially on women and children in Nepal: National report 2011*. Kathmandu: National Human Rights Commission. Therefore, whether or not these activities are legally accepted as a form of 'trafficking' is contested, but this does not in any way deflect from the accuracy of the activities and processes described in this report, and the harm they cause to children and families. The purpose of this report is not to convince the readers that these activities are a form of 'trafficking', but rather to bring to the attention of a broad audience the links between these activities, institutionalization and orphanage voluntourism.

Box 4 Forget Me Not⁷

In 2004, an Australian volunteered his time in several orphanages in Nepal. On seeing the poor condition of the children in the places he visited, he decided to establish his own orphanage. He approached a group of Nepali women he trusted to set up an NGO in Kathmandu and act as the orphanage's governance body. He returned to Australia where he founded Forget Me Not Children's Home as an Australian NGO in 2005. The children's home was opened in Kathmandu in 2006.

Forget Me Not continually fundraised for the 20 girls who were believed to be civil war victims with genuine documents supporting their orphan status. The girls were provided with a quality home with excellent facilities. They were well cared for with quality education, nutritious food, clothes and material goods. The Australian founder, along with members of his Board and other donors, would regularly visit the orphanage in Nepal to monitor and evaluate the children's welfare, bring letters and gifts from their sponsors, and meet with the management of the orphanage. It was viewed by many as a 'model of excellence.'

All was well until 2012, when Forget Me Not achieved INGO status and appointed its first in-country Country Director. The Country Director had experience of working in Nepal and spoke Nepali. As trust between her and the children grew, her suspicions were raised when the girls began to tell her stories of living family members they were not allowed to see. They told of threats by some of the Nepali management and staff that if they spoke to the Australians about this, they would be evicted from the home, abandoned or beaten.

Upon hearing these stories from the girls, Forget Me Not challenged the local management committee, and with the support of Forget Me Not Australia, the Country Director began investigating the claims more thoroughly. As a result of this investigation, she was shut out of the home by the local management committee and refused access to monitor the girls. At this point, Forget Me Not entered into a legal conflict with the local management committee.

After working closely with Government of Nepal agencies and enduring seven months of painstaking legal work, Forget Me Not was eventually able to secure the legal transfer of the girls from the local management committee to another trustworthy local NGO, which rescued the girls and settled them into a transit home.

The full stories of the ordeal the girls had been through then began to surface. Most of the girls had been brought to Kathmandu by traffickers and were 'paper orphans.' They had all lived under intimidation, cohesion and threats. They were not allowed to speak of their true backgrounds to the Australian Board, donors or sponsors. Many had their names changed and believed they had been forgotten by their families.

This was a difficult time for those involved in Forget Me Not, both in Nepal and Australia. As a result of their experience, they reviewed their organization's entire strategic approach in Nepal. Through their new local NGO partner, they recruited reintegration officers who were able to trace the girls' families and reconnect them. At the time of writing this report, 95% of the girls had been reconnected with their families and the majority had been legally reunified with their families.



7 NGN/THIS case records; information shared with permission from Forget Me Not.



Photograph credit: Eva Capozzola/Forget Me Not

The Forget Me Not girls after their release from the orphanage where they had been kept prior to November 2012.

This experience was traumatic for both the girls and the members of the Australian organization. In the first six years of running the NGO there had been nothing to suggest that their beneficiaries were victims of trafficking. Forget Me Not had financial audits over the six years of operation and believed that all documentation was genuine and bona fide. They had also viewed the documents claiming to be death certificates of the parents of the children in their care. Despite the deception, Forget Me Not refused to abandon the children under their care. They acted responsibly, 'rescued' the girls, and went on to change their mission from one of institutionalization to family-based care.

Reports and stories such as these suggest that voluntourism sometimes has the very opposite effect from that which was intended; it is keeping children away from their families, sometimes in destitute conditions. Children have become a lucrative commodity in Nepal, and the willingness of voluntourists and donors to provide funds ensures the ongoing demand for children to be unnecessarily displaced from their families. Volunteers regularly pay around USD 200 per week to volunteer in a children's home and, if they arrange their placement through an agency based in their home country, it is not uncommon for them to pay much higher fees.



Urgent Notice for Foreigner

Needed volunteer in orphanage home

International Social Centre is a orphanage home, just 25 min far from Thamel. We have 10 children's (7 boys and 3 girls) who are totally orphans and poor. Till the date of establishment the organization is run by just 1 person without any governmental support and non from the factories or any organization. so , it been a long time that only one person is running this organization, which is making so much difficult to provide the children's the basic things as well from the one person only. Being there is no any hand support ,our orphanage need immediate volunteering help from the foreigners.

In this immediate urgency of ours, if you will like to volunteer in orphanage home or just want to visit our orphanage, then please contact us on:-

Government Regd no:- 988

Email:- www@internationalcenter@gmail.com

Phone:- +977 97 4222222

website:- www.internationalcenter.com



Advertisements such as these are commonly posted on notice-boards in cafes, restaurants and bars in the tourist areas of Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan.

There are many volunteer and tourist agencies based in both Nepal and foreign countries that offer orphanage voluntourism services (it is likely that most foreign-based agencies are unaware of the illicit business they are involved in). A simple Internet search for 'Nepal orphanage volunteer' will bring up hundreds of opportunities for volunteering in orphanages.

When voluntourists or donors discover the truth about how their funds have been used, not only do they have to come to terms with feelings of guilt and anger, but they can face a difficult legal battle to address the problem. Ex-voluntourist foreigners who have tried to intervene against exploitative children's homes have also at times received violent threats from individuals and organized criminal groups that profit from this business. The evidence is clear: orphanage voluntourism is partly responsible for fuelling orphanage trafficking and the unnecessary institutionalization of children in Nepal.

A note on 'good' orphanages

The evidence we have presented in this report could easily be misconstrued as suggesting that *all* orphanages and children's homes in Nepal are corrupt and abusive. We certainly do not wish to give this impression. There are some very high-quality children's homes operating in Nepal that meet the government's legal standards. However, we want our readership to remain open to the possibility that even these so called well run homes may have unwittingly and indirectly displaced children from their families (e.g., because a trafficker may have brought them 'destitute' children without telling them the truth about the children's backgrounds).

Some children's homes and orphanages in Nepal have taken positive steps to actively search for children's families, and reconnect and reunify children with their families. NGN endorses this approach and approves of the financial support of these kinds of organizations. The Umbrella Foundation is one such 'good' child care organization, which has changed its focus to the reconnection and reunification of children in its care. There are a number of other organizations in Nepal that have followed a similar path and efforts should be made to support them in this process.

Similarly, the evidence we have presented in this report could be misconstrued to suggest that NGN believes there is no place for orphanages or children's homes in Nepal. This is also not true. There is a place for well-run children's homes, when all other family-based care options have been exhausted. In a country such as Nepal, there are few family-based care options for children who have been separated from their parents and who also have no option for reunification. Until family-based care options become available for these children, children's homes may be the only option available. The point NGN is making is simply that there are still many children living in orphanages and children's homes who do not need to be there.

The previous chapters illustrate how voluntourism is fueling orphanage trafficking and why Nepali families are unwittingly complicit in this trade. But, what has not yet been considered is why voluntourism – and, in particular, orphanage voluntourism – has become so popular with foreign tourists. Related to this is the broader question of whether or not voluntourism can indeed be the force for good that it claims to be and, finally, whether or not it is in fact legal. These are interesting questions in their own right and deserve examination. Only by finding answers to these questions will we be able to consider what 'ethical voluntourism' is and identify strategies to address the particular problems associated with orphanage voluntourism.

The rise in international voluntourism

Voluntourism is a growing trend internationally. In 2008, it was estimated that the value of volunteer tourism globally was approximately USD 2 billion and there were an average of 1.6 million voluntourists a year¹. Historically, the creation of organizations and programs in the 1950s, notably Voluntary Service Overseas, the United States Peace Corps, and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme (now Australian Volunteers International), were the catalysts for international volunteering². It is only in the last 20 years, however, that the concept of 'voluntourism' as a niche market within the broader tourism industry has really taken off. A combination of factors – including greater awareness of what is going on in the world, growing concern about the state of the environment and global poverty, and the desire of young people to gain experience for their curricula vitae – have helped create a high demand among tourists for a volunteer component to their travel experiences. Whilst construction, teaching, research, environmental cleanups and conservation are activities that voluntourists routinely engage in, projects involving children – including orphanages – are one of the most popular³.

1 Sloat, S. 2013. *Volunteer tourism doesn't work* [online], August 23, 2013. Available at: http://www.salon.com/2013/08/23/volunteer_tourism_doesnt_work_partner/singleton/ (accessed June 6, 2014)

2 See Lamoureux, K. 2011. 'Chapter 3: Voluntourism: An Overview.' In: Honey, M. (ed.) 2011. *Travelers philanthropy handbook*. Washington DC: Center for Responsible Travel. Available at: <http://www.travelersphilanthropy.org/resources/publications.shtml> (accessed August 26, 2014)

3 *Ibid.*, 'Chapter 3: Voluntourism: An Overview'

Causes, motivations and ethics of voluntourism

With globalization and constant access to information and the media, people are more aware of what is going on in the world and the disparities that exist between developed and developing countries. A large percentage of people who partake in voluntourism are young, recent graduates who see volunteering as a good way to help those less fortunate than themselves, whilst simultaneously gaining valuable experience to strengthen their curricula vitae. It is easier and cheaper to travel around the world than it has ever been. Guidebooks and information online make traveling to remote areas more accessible for the average person than ever before. Many people want to travel, but with their increased social awareness, many also want to 'give back' to the countries they visit. Incorporating a short volunteer component into their travel plans is seen as an easy way to do this. Additionally, as voluntourism grows, more and more people learn about it and, therefore, consider it as an option that might not have crossed their mind before. For many voluntourists, their motives are connected with altruism, adventure, discovery, learning new skills, and trying to capture a sense of "reality, or authenticity, which is not available to them in the modern, developed world they come from"⁴.

However, in recent years voluntourism has also come under significant criticism in the media and academia. Most critics allege that the concept of voluntourism is rooted in neo-colonial values and 'Orientalism.' The critics focus on the lack of relevant skills of many young foreign voluntourists who, despite their inexperience, believe that they can be of more value to developing countries than local people (indeed, few orphanage voluntourists have relevant childcare or social work skills)⁵. The critics also focus on the voluntourists' inherent potential to cause more harm than good (as has been demonstrated in this report with regards to orphanage voluntourism)⁶. Finally, critics accuse the voluntourists of being equally motivated by satisfying their own desires and egos as they are by meeting the needs of the people they proclaim to be helping⁷.

In early 2014, a previously unknown 21-year-old white American woman from New York City, called Pippa Biddle, published an online blog post. The post was called: *The Problem with Little White Girls (and Boys): Why I Stopped Being a Voluntourist*⁸. The post went viral, receiving over 2 million views. Biddle concisely summarizes the views of many who criticize voluntourism:

It turns out that I, a little white girl, am good at a lot of things. I am good at raising money, training volunteers, collecting items, coordinating programs, and telling stories. I am flexible, creative, and able to think on my feet. On paper I am, by most people's standards, highly qualified to do international aid. But I shouldn't be.

4 Gula, L. 2006. *Backpacking tourism: Morally sound travel or neo-colonial conquest?* Honors Thesis, International Development Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

5 Brown, F.; Hall, D. 2008. 'Tourism and development in the Global South: The Issues.' *Third World Quarterly*, 29(5): 839–849

6 Palacios, C.M. 2010. 'Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid.' *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 18(7): 861–878

7 Moore, E. 2001. *Guilt trips: A personal perspective on the ethical quandaries of travel in the developing world*. Essay submitted for the Irving and Jeanne Glovin Award Essay Competition, Dalhousie Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Available at: http://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/fass/Glovin_2011_Moore.pdf (accessed June 6, 2014)

8 Biddle, P. 2014. *The problem with little white girls (and boys): Why I stopped being a voluntourist* [blog], February 18, 2014. <http://pipabiddle.com/2014/02/18/the-problem-with-little-white-girls-and-boys/> (accessed June 6, 2014)

I am not a teacher, a doctor, a carpenter, a scientist, an engineer, or any other professional that could provide concrete support and long-term solutions to communities in developing countries. I am a 5' 4" white girl who can carry bags of moderately heavy stuff, horse around with kids, attempt to teach a class, tell the story of how I found myself (with accompanying powerpoint) to a few thousand people and not much else.

However, even the critics have their critics, and there are increasing counter-arguments that encourage us to look beyond the doom and gloom of neo-colonialist theories and see the benefits of voluntourism. These arguments focus on the personal relationships that are formed between individuals in developed and developing countries as a result of voluntourism and the cultural transactions and learning that takes place on both sides as a result. Simone Galimberti, an advocate of this approach who is based in Nepal, describes this as: "a sort of smart diplomacy that plays a key role in enhancing a sense of good will among locals in relation to the country of origin of the volunteers"⁹. Whatever else may be said about the dangers of orphanage voluntourism, it is hard to argue against the value of Nepali children learning English in a world where English has become the international language.

The proponents of voluntourism also cite evidence of successful and sustainable development projects that voluntourists have played a role in creating¹⁰. Furthermore, they consider what happens to the voluntourist when he or she returns to their country of origin with greater awareness of, and sensitivity towards, the problems affecting the developing world¹¹. Some ex-voluntourists are inspired to become professional international development workers, acquiring the skills and training needed to tackle global poverty and inequality through formal development agencies and INGOs. Indeed, most of the international staff working for NGN were inspired by such voluntourism experiences in their youth.

In an interview NGN undertook with an American voluntourist called Nathan – who volunteered at an orphanage in Pokhara in 2012 (see Box 5) – we can see elements of all the arguments for and against voluntourism. This case perhaps best represents the conclusions we can draw about the ethics of international voluntourism: voluntourists' motives appear to be a mixture of *both* altruism and self-interest and voluntourism can have *both* positive and negative impacts on host communities. Once we accept this as a reality, we can work within this framework and objectively consider how to reduce the problems voluntourism causes and enhance its benefits. In an increasingly globalized world, NGN believes this is the only sensible approach; it would be foolhardy to believe that voluntourism will simply go away.

9 Galimberti, S. 2013. *International volunteering in Nepal: Such a bad thing?* [online], August 27, 2013. Available at: <http://www.sharing4good.org/article/international-volunteering-nepal-such-bad-thing> (accessed June 6, 2014)

10 Blackledge, S. 2013. 'In defence of 'voluntourists': Ignore the cynics, charity schemes do great work and can benefit both the volunteers and the communities they serve.' *The Guardian* [blog], February 25, 2013. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/25/in-defence-of-voluntourism1> (accessed June 6, 2014)

11 *Ibid.*

Box 5 The volunteer mindset¹²

Nathan was a 27-year-old professional from the United States who was enticed by the idea of an exotic vacation in Nepal. By Nathan's own admission, he is a bit shy and was intimidated by the idea of navigating Asia by himself. However, he also felt compelled to do something for the good of humanity, so he began researching voluntourism opportunities in the hope that it would help him structure his trip.

Upon finding an agency in the United States that was able to arrange an orphanage placement, he paid USD 250 as a deposit and booked his trip. He arrived in Nepal and stayed for one month at the orphanage in Pokhara. He stayed in separate sleeping quarters from the children. His role was broad and involved helping to look after the children in the orphanage.

Nathan was under no false pretense that these children were orphans; he says that he was made aware from the beginning that many of the children were there because they were from poor families and were in the orphanage so that they could receive a level of education not available to them in their villages. But, nevertheless, he could not understand why the parents never visited the orphanage in person and, instead, family members were sometimes seen 'hanging around' near the orphanage and out-of-sight. As time went on, Nathan felt strongly that many of his fellow volunteers at the orphanage were lazy and lacked initiative. Furthermore, the staff never put any pressure on the volunteers to help with daily tasks. A lot of the volunteers' time was spent playing video games or football with the children. Nathan formed a close relationship with two young sisters who were devastated when he left the home. "It felt so sweet to see them cry. It meant that I really reached out to them and they really cared about me."

Nathan says that he chose this voluntourism option for a few reasons: (i) he wanted to do something good for others; (ii) he did not want to be lonely on his trip, and by volunteering he believed he would meet other like-minded people; (iii) he knew that he could become complacent when left to his own devices, so he thought the structure of the orphanage would keep him from wasting his vacation; and (iv) he believed that this would be an interesting talking point for future friendships.

25

The legality of voluntourism

Despite the overwhelming popularity of voluntourism in Nepal – over 30,000 foreigners are believed to volunteer in Nepal each year, according to the Social Welfare Council¹³ – the official position of the Government of Nepal is that international volunteering is illegal for most tourists. Clause 19 of the Immigration Act 1994 states:

- (1) A foreigner having obtained a visa as a tourist or his family member pursuant to these Rules shall not be allowed to work, with or without receiving remuneration, in any industry, business, enterprise or organisation during his stay in Nepal.

¹² NGN interview conducted by Jessica O'Neill, Kathmandu, 2013

¹³ See: Teo, B.E. 2014. 'Volunteering to be a tourist.' *Nepali Times*, June 27, 2014. Available at: <http://nepalitimes.com/page/volunteering-programs-scams-foreigners> (accessed August 26, 2014)

- (2) A foreigner having obtained a visa pursuant to these Rules shall not be allowed to carry out any work other than that for which purpose he has obtained the visa.¹⁴

This position is clearly stated on the immigration forms that foreigners are required to complete when entering the country in Tribhuvan International Airport. This position has also been stated by the Department of Labour which claims that volunteers in Nepal are required to apply for work permits¹⁵. However, in practice, tens of thousands of tourists do volunteer in Nepal each year on tourist visas and most of them are probably completely unaware that it is illegal. The tourism industry provides a huge range of well-publicised services to encourage voluntourism, which are overlooked by the Government. An Internet search for 'volunteering in Nepal' – or a walk through the tourist districts of Thamel in Kathmandu or Lakeside in Pokhara – is enough to prove this. This divergence between the official legal position and what is widely practiced, presents some additional challenges for people and organizations that want to openly debate ways of improving ethical voluntourism options in Nepal.

14 Clause 19, *Immigration Act 1994*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal

15 Minutes of meeting between Department of Labour and Association of International NGOs, March 12, 2014

Having demonstrated the links between trafficking, institutionalization and voluntourism, and having considered the motives for, and ethics of, voluntourism, the most important question still remains: how can people practice ethical voluntourism? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question. NGN defines 'ethical voluntourism' as voluntourism practices that do not harm the host community in any way and that, ideally, improve the lives of the people in the host community alongside the personal development of the volunteer. However, 'ethical' and 'unethical' voluntourism practices are not black and white distinctions, and ethical behavior involves many factors that vary from situation to situation. Despite these challenges, huge progress has been made in recent times in debating these questions, spreading awareness of unethical voluntourism practices in the hope that people can avoid them, and developing guidelines and services that help people to practice ethical voluntourism. This chapter looks at some of the good practices developed in relation to ethical voluntourism in different sectors.

Tourism industry

The tourism industry itself has begun to respond to the demand for ethical voluntourism services internationally and at the local level. A few particularly good examples are showcased here:

ResponsibleTravel.com

ResponsibleTravel.com was established in 2001 and describes itself as "the first and largest business promoting and selling responsible and eco travel globally." It screens all of its suppliers to ensure that they are also working to meet ResponsibleTravel.com's ethical standards. In July 2013, ResponsibleTravel.com removed all orphanage voluntourism packages from its website; a move that has led other package tour providers to do the same. See <http://www.responsibletravel.com/>.

Where There Be Dragons

Where There Be Dragons is a United States-based experiential education organization offering summer and gap-year programs throughout the world, including Nepal. Its goal is to expose young adults to new cultures and ideas and offer experiences that help them grow both personally and intellectually. One component of these programs is learning service (see LearningService.info below), which recognizes the importance of learning about the context of the place in which one would like to work and developing the skills to be able to do this in a sustainable and meaningful way. It teaches young adults that the more they learn beforehand, the greater impact they will have in the long run, and throughout their lives. Programs in Nepal expose young people to a variety of communities, during which they have the opportunity to help work in agriculture or on other projects in rural contexts. See: <http://wheretherebedragons.com/>.

The Little Big Project

The Little Big Project is a program led by the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote and regulate voluntourism in a centralized and coordinated way. Potential voluntourists have to apply for limited placements in the program (thus ensuring that projects are based on the needs of communities, rather than creating projects simply to meet the demands voluntourists) and voluntourists are required to raise funds for these projects. Projects include marine conservation, community development and caring for rescued wildlife. See: <http://www.thelittlebigprojectthailand.com/>.

Government of Nepal and civil society

The problems surrounding orphanage voluntourism and the need for ethical voluntourism are relatively new in Nepal and efforts to address them are still embryonic. However, there are a number of positive signs that give hope that these efforts will increase.

Central Child Welfare Board

The Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) is the central coordinating body for child protection in Nepal. Working in close collaboration with NGN, it has shown a keen interest in the issue of orphanage voluntourism and ethical voluntourism. The CCWB included ethical voluntourism as an area for strategic development in 2014 and has shown interest in developing ethical guidelines for volunteers who may be interested in working in orphanages. However, before this can happen, the CCWB needs to work in close coordination with other government departments to get further clarity on the legal practicalities of tourists undertaking short-term volunteering work in Nepal. See: <http://www.ccwb.gov.np/>.

Alternative Care Working Group

The Alternative Care Working Group consists of a group of government and civil society agencies working in the field of alternative care in Nepal. The Alternative Care Working Group is chaired by the CCWB and includes UNICEF, Terre des hommes, Save the Children, Next Generation Nepal and The Himalayan Innovative Society. Orphanage voluntourism is a standing agenda item for the Alternative Care Working Group, and the Group has been successful in influencing diplomatic missions to amend their travel advice for foreign tourists visiting Nepal (see Box 6). The civil society members of the Alternative Care Working Group





Photograph credit: Next Generation Nepal/The Himalayan Innovative Society

A previously institutionalized girl reunified with her family through NGN's reintegration project. In this photograph the girl and her family are being monitored and supported by an NGN/THIS social worker.

are also actively involved in promoting family-based alternative care options for children separated from their families. For example, NGN and THIS run family reintegration programs for orphanage trafficked children¹ and Voice for Children runs foster care programs.

The Umbrella Foundation

The Umbrella Foundation is an Irish INGO based in Nepal running high-quality children's homes and a reintegration project, among other work. Traditionally, the organization has used fee-paying volunteers to work directly with the children in its homes, as well as to generate income to support its running costs. Its volunteer program already meets internationally recognized codes of good practice. However, due to increased awareness of the negative psychological effects volunteers can have on children living in institutional care, The Umbrella Foundation is revising its volunteer program to shift the focus of volunteering away from the children's homes and towards ethical volunteering to support staff and beneficiaries. Roles for ethical volunteers may include administrative office support; English language training for staff and beneficiaries; support for Nepali teachers in rural schools; and specific projects associated with the skills of individual volunteers. The Umbrella Foundation's initiative is testament to the fact that it is entirely possible to change existing volunteering practices to make them ethical. See: <http://umbrellanepal.org/>

¹ For more information about NGN and THIS's Reintegration Project and advice on how to run an effective reintegration project for displaced children, see NGN's publication: Lovera, J.; Punaks, M. 2014. *Reintegration guidelines for trafficked and displaced children living in institutions*. Kathmandu: NGN (forthcoming)

ENGAGE

ENGAGE is a Nepali NGO promoting volunteering for Nepali citizens. Rather than foreign volunteers trying to solve Nepali problems, it encourages local solutions for local problems. This approach is ultimately more empowering and sustainable for Nepal. ENGAGE tries to create a cycle whereby people who are helped by volunteers will in turn become volunteers themselves, thus empowering entire communities. Prior to beginning a volunteering assignment, all volunteers must complete a training program where they learn about the thematic area they will be working in, as well as the theory, principles and value of volunteering. ENGAGE tries to foster a volunteer culture in Nepal through lectures and seminars on volunteerism. ENGAGE's approach is in alignment with the advice of many ethical voluntourism proponents, i.e., that volunteers can better serve the needs of their own communities than a community from which they are not a member. See: <http://www.engage.org.np/about/engage-people.php>.

Media

The media has taken an increased interest in voluntourism and orphanage voluntourism. This subject has been covered in television documentaries; by prominent publications such as the Guardian, the Huffington Post, the Independent, the Wall Street Journal, and more informal online news portals and blogs. Stories have been run about voluntourism in Nepal and other countries calling into question the idea that local populations are benefitting from these programs, as well as considering how tourists can volunteer ethically. This coverage serves to spread awareness of the issue. Some news articles and blog posts that are particularly relevant are:

- An article in **the Guardian** by Pete Pattison on the growing orphanage voluntourism industry in Nepal: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/may/27/nepal-bogus-orphan-trade-voluntourism>
- An article in **New Matilda** by Neesha Bremmer on profit-making orphanages and their links to voluntourism in Nepal: <https://newmatilda.com/2014/03/04/fake-orphanages-profit-western-volunteers>
- A blog post on the **Al Jazeera** website by Subina Shrestha on orphanage voluntourism and its links to child trafficking in Nepal: <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/asia/nepals-orphan-fighting-child-trafficking>
- A blog post on the **Al Jazeera America** website by Rafia Zakaria on the growing Western demand for altruistic vacations: <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/volunteer-tourismwhitevoluntouristsafrikaaidsorphans.html>
- A blog post on the **Al Jazeera America** website by Rafia Zakaria on how orphanage voluntourism reinforces structures of global inequality: <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/8/cambodia-orphanagetourismwatopotwesternvolunteerism.html>
- A blog post in **the Huffington Post** by Kerry Law on the pros and cons of volunteering during a gap year: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/kerry-law/the-gap-year-dilemma_b_3766765.html

- A blog post in **the Huffington Post** by Daniela Papi on why tourists and tour companies should say no to orphanage voluntourism: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniela-papi/cambodia-orphanages-b_2164385.html
- A blog post in **the Guardian** by Sam Blackledge in defense of voluntourism: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/25/in-defence-of-voluntourism1>
- A blog post on **Sharing for Good** by Simone Galimberti on the benefits of international volunteering in Nepal (this site has many other interesting articles about volunteering): <http://www.sharing4good.org/article/international-volunteering-nepal-such-bad-thing>
- A blog post on **PippaBiddle.com** by Pippa Biddle critiquing voluntourism; this post went viral and received over 2 million views: <http://pippabiddle.com/2014/02/18/the-problem-with-little-white-girls-and-boys/>

Campaigns

Several campaigns have been conducted and awareness raising tools used to increase awareness of the problems involved in volunteering in orphanages and to suggest alternatives. These campaigns and toolkits are the work of groups of individuals, representatives from the tourism industry, governments and civil society. A few of the most influential ones are showcased here.

ChildSafe Network

The ChildSafe Network campaign is run by an INGO called Friends International, which is based in Cambodia and supported by UNICEF. This INGO created the powerful image 'Children Are Not Tourist Attractions' for its website, Facebook page and for use in advertisements in the tourist areas of Cambodia (where orphanage voluntourism is



also a significant problem) and is running similar campaigns in Thailand and Laos. For some, this has become the gold standard in campaigning against orphanage voluntourism internationally. The ChildSafe Network has trained over 4,000 taxi drivers, business operators and members of the tourism industry whose role it is to advise tourists on ethical voluntourism. It also promotes '7 Tips for Travelers' related to practicing ethical tourism and has developed ChildSafe certified products that tourists can buy in the knowledge they are helping parents earn money to send their children to school, *without* them having to be sent away to orphanages. The ChildSafe Network is supported by the Cambodian Government and, through their joint efforts, Cambodia has witnessed a significant drop in the number of voluntourists visiting orphanages. The 'Children Are Not Tourist Attractions' campaign can be viewed at: <http://www.thinkchildsafe.org/thinkbeforevisiting/>.

Orphanages Not the Solution

The Orphanages Not the Solution website is managed by a group of individuals in Cambodia and runs a similar campaign to the ChildSafe Network. The campaign can be viewed at: <http://orphanages.no/>.

Tourism Concern

Tourism Concern is a United Kingdom-based INGO that works in collaboration with the tourism industry to raise awareness amongst tourists about responsible travel and improve practices within the tourism industry itself. It aims to empower local communities through tourism, thus maximizing the positive aspects of tourism and mitigating any negative effects. Its website includes a wealth of information about the problems of orphanage voluntourism and advice on how to travel and volunteer ethically. It is currently running a petition to end the practice of orphanage voluntourism. Its website can be viewed at: <http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>.

LearningService.info

LearningService.info is a highly accessible and user-friendly website that helps tourists make ethical travel and volunteering decisions. Its underlying philosophy is 'learning-service', which is explained as follows: "We have to learn before we can help. If we don't research our options thoroughly, understand the context and culture of the communities we visit, and ensure that our skills and experience match the needs, volunteering can be wasteful, and at worst, cause a lot of harm." LearningService.info promotes a movement of 'learning', designed to better prepare young people who are about to travel abroad for the first time, as well as older travelers who wish to 'give back' through their time and skills. The website has some excellent short videos about different aspects of ethical travel and volunteering, including orphanage voluntourism (which it advises against). It also has a free downloadable publication called *Learning Service: Tips and Tricks for Learning Before Helping*. See: <http://learningservice.info/>.

Diplomatic missions

The diplomatic community in Nepal has played an active part in trying to spread awareness of the problems associated with orphanage voluntourism. In March 2013, the Swiss Embassy and Terre des hommes organized a diplomatic briefing to discuss the issue of orphanage voluntourism and how it may be affecting foreign tourists and children in Nepal.

NGN and Forget Me Not briefed the diplomatic community on these issues. As a result, at least four foreign governments have now changed their official travel advice to warn their citizens against volunteering in orphanages in Nepal. Links to the advice of these governments are:

- **British** travel advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/nepal/entry-requirements>
- **French** travel advice: <http://www.ambafrance-np.org/Orphanages-and-voluntourism-in>
- **Swiss** travel advice: <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/fr/home/travad/onthew.html>
- **United States of America** travel advice (under 'Local Laws and Special Circumstances'): <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/nepal.html>

Box 6 Full travel advice given by the Government of the United States of America

A number of Nepal-based volunteer organizations maintain websites offering volunteer opportunities. The Embassy has received reports that many – if not a majority – of such opportunities, especially those involving volunteering at orphanages or “children’s homes,” are not charities, but rather are profit making enterprises set up with the primary purpose of attracting donations from abroad and financial support from volunteers. Many of the children are not, in fact, orphans, and thus volunteering at such an organization indirectly contributes to child exploitation. An organization’s bona fides can be confirmed by contacting the Nepali Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB), attention Namuna Bhusal (tel. 977-9851139474 or e-mail namuna@ccwb.gov.np).

This chapter presents recommendations for making voluntourism ethical and is directed at the tourism industry, the Government of Nepal, development agencies and civil society, the media and academia, and diplomatic missions.

Tourism industry

The tourism industry has one of the most important roles to play in creating an ethical market place for tourists who wish to volunteer. NGN recommends the following:

- **End all orphanage voluntourism packages offered by tourism and volunteer agencies:** The only exceptions should be for appropriately-skilled and trained volunteers who can volunteer for long enough to ensure that their work is sustainable, provided the agency in which the volunteer wishes to volunteer in can ensure that the children have not been trafficked and are not being unnecessarily institutionalized. These requirements are not simple or easy to satisfy and, therefore, in practice, such placements would probably realistically only be offered by professional and long-term volunteering schemes such as Voluntary Service Overseas and Peace Corps.
- **Publish explicit warnings about orphanage voluntourism in guidebooks:** Tourist guidebooks such as the Lonely Planet and Rough Guide, as well as tourist websites and message boards, should include explicit warnings to tourists about the potential dangers of orphanage voluntourism.
- **Invest in promoting ethical voluntourism:** More investment should be made in developing and promoting ethical voluntourism services that do not harm host communities and ideally benefit them. We also encourage the development of more 'learning-service' projects.

Government of Nepal

Actions taken in relation to orphanage trafficking and orphanage voluntourism by the Government of Nepal need to *both* protect Nepali children *and* protect the Nepal economy and tourism industry, which is so important to Nepal. NGN recommends the following:

- **Consider legalizing and effectively regulating foreign volunteering:** Volunteering in Nepal is officially illegal, but widely practiced among tourists. Foreign volunteering could be made legal, but tightly regulated, by:
 - allowing foreigners to volunteer in Nepal on tourist visas, *but* introducing a paid volunteering registration scheme – similar to the Trekkers' Information Management System – to regulate, monitor and control where and how foreign volunteers work;
 - adopting CCWB guidelines for foreign orphanage volunteers, which *only* allow for a few professional, skilled, long-term volunteers in children's homes that meet the government standards; the guidelines could also advise on culturally appropriate behavior for foreign volunteers and would have to be registered under the registration scheme proposed above;
 - giving the CCWB, District Child Welfare Boards (DCWBs) and police the power to ban volunteers from children's homes if necessary, with punitive measures to enforce this, both for the foreign volunteer and the orphanage;
 - encouraging pay-to-volunteer schemes that involve the transfer of professional foreign skills to Nepali people (e.g., computer skills, fundraising skills, communication skills, English language skills);
 - encouraging voluntourism schemes and charitable projects that support children to stay with their families and build sustainable and thriving rural economies and education systems;
 - encouraging voluntourism schemes that do not risk harm to humans (e.g., volunteering with animals, environmental clean ups); and
 - encouraging voluntourism schemes that stress the need for the volunteer to learn about the socio-cultural context they are working in before trying to help.
- **Learn from other countries:** The Government of Nepal could learn from successful government-involved voluntourism projects in other countries such as the Little Big Project in Thailand and the ChildSafe Network in Cambodia.
- **Protect Nepali children by better enforcing Nepali laws and policies:** Enforce existing Nepali laws and policies to effectively monitor children's homes, prevent further displacement of children from their families, and reunify children with their families whenever possible to decrease the unnecessary institutionalization of children.

Development agencies and civil society

There are a number of ways that development agencies, INGOs and NGOs can spread awareness of the problems associated with orphanage voluntourism, and promote ethical voluntourism.

- **Commission research into orphanage trafficking and voluntourism:** Increase our knowledge about these issues in Nepal through further research (see recommendations for media and academia later in this chapter).
- **Conduct awareness raising campaigns for the general public:** Bigger and better awareness raising projects should be run for foreign voluntourists, warning them of the

dangers of orphanage voluntourism. The work of the ChildSafe Network in Cambodia (see Chapter 7) is a model for such work. Such projects could include:

- billboards (hoarding boards) at Tribhuvan International Airport
 - information distributed in tourist hotels and restaurants
 - talks and seminars
 - trained local 'champions' (such as taxi drivers, hotel managers and tourist guides) who can incorporate the message into their everyday work
 - use of websites and social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- **Conduct awareness raising campaigns for professional audiences:** Bigger and better awareness raising projects should be run for professional audiences, such as the Government of Nepal, donor agencies, diplomatic missions and the tourism industry itself. Briefings could be provided to stakeholders with tailored advice on how to change current practices, as well as financial or technical support to help achieve this; for example, small Nepali tourist agencies could receive training on how to re-orient their businesses towards ethical voluntourism.
 - **Scale-up family-based alternative care projects:** INGOs and NGOs should scale-up and scale-out successful family-based alternative care projects, such as foster care and reintegration. Only by doing this are viable alternatives available for institutionalized children. INGOs and NGOs should also scale-up and scale-out projects that build rural livelihoods and educational systems and, thus, keep children with their families, as well as projects that spread awareness of the dangers of trafficking and promote the importance of family preservation.
 - **Monitor institutions receiving funding:** Development agencies, INGOs and NGOs that fund children's homes and orphanages should monitor institutions carefully to ensure they are not involved in trafficking or unnecessary institutionalization. They should use their leverage to persuade institutions to invest in reintegrating and reunifying children in their care with their families. They should also consider funding organizations that are actively involved in running family-based alternative care projects, such as foster care and reintegration; projects that build rural livelihoods and educational systems and, thus, keep children with their families; and projects that spread awareness of the dangers of trafficking and promote the importance of family preservation.

Note: It is sometimes suggested to NGN that a civil society agency could develop an independent accreditation system for children's homes and orphanages. Furthermore, it is even suggested that volunteers themselves could assess the orphanages on their ethical credentials. We do not agree with this idea for several reasons. First, it is the remit for the Government of Nepal – and in particular the CCWB and DCWBs – to accredit children's homes in Nepal. In fact, the CCWB already monitors and regulates children's homes, but it is in need of further financial and technical assistance to be able to do this effectively. Therefore, rather than establishing a parallel system of monitoring and regulation, which could undermine the Government of Nepal, NGN believes that additional investment should be made in supporting CCWB to undertake this role. Second, in the same way that most orphanage volunteers do not have the skills to work with vulnerable children, they do not have the skills to assess the ethical credentials of the orphanages providing these services. There are countless examples of orphanage voluntourists giving glowing reviews on blogs and websites of orphanages they have volunteered in, when such institutions have later

been shown to be corrupt and dangerous places for children. In this way, voluntourists rating orphanages could actually cause more harm than good. Finally, by rating the ethical credentials of orphanages as places to volunteer in suggests that it is ethically acceptable to volunteer in orphanages in principle, whereas NGN does not for the most part consider this to be the case, as will be discussed in the final chapter of this report.

Media and academia

It is important for international and Nepali media to continue spreading awareness of orphanage trafficking and its links to orphanage voluntourism, whilst at the same time increasing awareness of the ways tourists can practice ethical voluntourism. Academics and journalists can also increase their knowledge of these issues through further research. For example:

- **Conduct research into orphanage voluntourism:** There is a need for quantitative research into orphanage voluntourism to generate accurate data on the number and type of voluntourists working in orphanages in Nepal, including information about their length of stay, motivations, how much they pay for their experience, their socioeconomic-professional backgrounds, and so on.
- **Conduct research into the economics of orphanage trafficking:** There is a need to better understand the problem of orphanage trafficking and orphanage voluntourism from an economic and business perspective¹, including the size of the revenue generated by orphanage businesses, their profit margins, and the inner operational workings of such businesses.
- **Conduct research into the socio-cultural reasons behind orphanage trafficking:** There is a need for more anthropological research into the world of the traffickers, orphanage managers and source communities of trafficking victims to explore the full socio-cultural reasons why children are trafficked and exploited in Nepal.

Diplomatic missions

Diplomatic missions in Nepal have a role to play in advising tourists from their country on ethical and safe travel whilst they are in Nepal. Whilst the British, French, Swiss and United States governments have already changed their travel advice to tourists in this respect, other embassies could consider doing the same.

¹ The author and activist Siddharth Kara has used this approach to better understand sexual slavery and bonded labor in his acclaimed books: *Sex trafficking: Inside the business of modern slavery* (2009) and *Bonded labor: Tackling the system of slavery in South Asia* (2012).

In this chapter, NGN outlines its thoughts on what ethical voluntourism actually is for an individual who wishes to volunteer. We encourage and applaud all those who wish to donate their time and skills to help others in an ethical way that does not harm people. For any foreigner considering undertaking volunteering in Nepal, or any other developing country, NGN suggests the following.

Adopt a 'learning mindset'¹

Before an individual even begins searching for an ethical volunteering placement, NGN recommends that they adopt a 'learning mindset.' The concept of a learning mindset requires a potential volunteer to readjust their approach towards volunteering so that they recognize that they need to first *learn* from those they wish to *help*². Through this focus on learning, the volunteer is opened up to new perspectives and ideas through which they can understand the context of the problems local people are facing. By doing this, prospective volunteers will be better able to judge how appropriately they *can* or *cannot* provide assistance in such situations. It may be that there is something useful they can do to support local people, or it may transpire that they are not well placed to offer support after all, at least at this point in time. Even if the volunteer finds that they are not able to offer support, they should still recognize that the learning they receive may be used in other ways at later points in their lives to help people in need. For example, the learning may make them more open to different cultural perspectives, more sensitive to disadvantage and the suffering of others, or help them understand how actions in their own societies may affect those in other societies. In this way, the potential volunteer will be better able to help others when the opportunity arises, even if this happens at a later time.

The learning mindset requires us to make some intellectual shifts in our default thinking. It

1 NGN would like to thank Claire Bennett for her advice on this approach. The idea of a 'learning mindset' is explored in more depth in a forthcoming book of which Bennett is one of the co-authors. For more information see: <http://learningservice.info/book/>.

2 See the following article for more information about this concept: Bennett, C.; Papi, D. 2014. 'From service learning to learning service.' *Stanford Social Innovation Review* [online], April 8, 2014. Available at: http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/from_service_learning_to_learning_service (accessed June 6, 2014)

requires us to recognize that ethical voluntourism is as much about benefiting the volunteer to make them a better person, so that they are better placed to help others. It also requires us to accept that learning may ultimately be more selfless and beneficial to everyone concerned in the long-term, rather than rushing in to help without understanding the context or having the skills to do so and, thus, potentially causing harm. In short, if an individual approaches a volunteer placement with a learning mindset they are less likely to cause harm to local communities, and more likely to benefit themselves and others.

This approach is summed up well by Daniela Papi, one of its leading proponents:

I really believe in the Mahayana Buddhism saying describing the vajra, which my colleague Claire Bennett often recites: 'Action without learning is ignorance, learning without action is selfishness'. I'd love to see the image of volunteer travel shift away from people jumping off a plane saying 'I'm here to help you!' to saying 'I'm here to learn from you how I can be of help, now, or in the future'.³

Research ethical voluntourism options thoroughly

Choosing an ethical volunteering placement is not easy and requires research and thoughtfulness. If an individual is serious about wanting to help people less fortunate than themselves, then this stage in the process is essential. If a potential voluntourist does not do this, they may end up volunteering for a project that causes considerable harm to local communities, even though the harm may not be immediately apparent. This is a very real and serious risk, and nobody wants this on their conscience. A good way to begin researching is to visit some of the websites and advice we have suggested earlier in this report. Here they are again:

- **Tourism Concern:** <http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>
- **LearningService.info:** <http://learningservice.info/>
- **The ChildSafe Network:** <http://www.thinkchildsafe.org/thinkbeforevisiting/>
- **Orphanages Not the Solution:** <http://orphanages.no/>
- **British travel advice:** <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/nepal/entry-requirements>
- **French travel advice:** <http://www.ambafrance-np.org/Orphanages-and-voluntourism-in>
- **Swiss travel advice:** <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/fr/home/travad/onthew.html>
- **United States of America travel advice:** (under 'Local Laws and Special Circumstances'): <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/nepal.html>

Consider the suitability of your skills

Potential voluntourists should consider their own skill set and how this can be best utilized for the benefit of a community. For example, if a person has skills in developing websites in their own country, then they may be able to support NGOs in Nepal to develop their own website. Being a website designer does not mean that a person is suddenly qualified to be able to care for traumatized trafficked children in an orphanage.

³ Papi, D. 2014. 'Is "Voluntourism" Itself Being Exploited?' *The Huffington Post* [online], April 29, 2014. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniela-papi/is-voluntourism-itself-be_b_5197390.html (accessed June 6, 2014)

Consider the sustainability of the project

Potential voluntourists should consider the long-term sustainable impact of their volunteer placement in Nepal, which means:

- avoiding voluntourism placements that prevent a local person from doing the same job, as this defeats the point of volunteering;
- considering how they can use their skills to train local people so that after they leave the local person can become the 'change-maker' in their own community, removing the need for a volunteer in the future;
- considering whether or not, or to what extent, their activities can make a long-term impact, rather than a short-term impact (for example, if a group of foreigners dig a well in a village without any local people being involved, then the local people may not feel ownership of the well and when it degrades or becomes broken, nobody locally will know how to repair it; but if local people are involved in the well's construction from the outset, they may feel more ownership of it and are more likely to understand how to fix it after the foreigners have gone); and
- in relation to children, supporting projects that: (i) encourage children to remain with their own families, rather than being made to leave or stay away from their families and communities; (ii) help poor and rural communities grow into economically thriving places where people want to stay and have prosperous lives; (iii) help poor and rural communities improve their livelihoods and educational systems, so children do not need to leave their families and community to seek an education elsewhere.

Choosing a volunteer placement

Before finally choosing a volunteer placement, potential voluntourists should ask probing questions to the volunteer or tourist agency they are arranging the placement through. If the agency cannot satisfactorily answer questions about the safety of the children, sustainability and local empowerment, as discussed above, then these agencies may be more oriented towards profit than social change. Voluntourists would be advised to avoid these sorts of agencies, which will increase the market demand for ethical and socially-oriented voluntourism and learning-service companies. NGN strongly recommends people read the helpful toolkit, *Learning Service: Tips and Tricks for Learning Before Helping*, on the Learning Service website to support them with this (see www.learningservice.info).

Keep Pippa Biddle's advice in mind

The advice for potential voluntourists can perhaps best be summed up by Pippa Biddle in her blog post, *The Problem With Little White Girls (and Boys): Why I Stopped Being a Voluntourist*⁴:

Before you sign up for a volunteer trip anywhere in the world this summer, consider whether you possess the skill set necessary for that trip to be successful. If yes, awesome. If not, it might be a good idea to reconsider your trip. Sadly, taking part in international aid where you aren't particularly helpful is not benign. It's detrimental. It slows down positive growth and perpetuates the "white savior" complex that, for hundreds

4 Biddle, P. 2014. *The problem with little white girls (and boys)*.

of years, has haunted both the countries we are trying to 'save' and our (more recently) own psyches. Be smart about traveling and strive to be informed and culturally aware. It's only through an understanding of the problems communities are facing, and the continued development of skills within that community, that long-term solutions will be created.

Be an ethical tourist

If a person is unable to find an ethical voluntourism placement, or if it all just seems too complicated to research and organize, then NGN would simply advise to enjoy being an ethical tourist. Ethical tourism means spending money on services and goods that support local people and the local economy. It involves putting some time aside to talk with local people and learn about their lives and interests. Equally, it involves the foreigner talking with local people and sharing information about their own lives and interests. If appropriate, and if a local person requests it, the tourist could help the local person with English language skills or other small tasks, for example, by helping them write an English-language brochure for their small business. Most of all, an ethical tourist recognizes that they, and the local person with whom they are engaging, both have equal amounts of valuable knowledge to contribute to each other. Through this honest and sincere cultural transaction, both parties will benefit, and so will society more broadly.

Avoid orphanage voluntourism (in the majority of cases)

Orphanage voluntourism creates long-term attachment problems and psychological disorders for children, denies them of their right to grow up in family-based care setting, leaves them at risk of physical and sexual abuse, and fuels a corrupt profit-making trafficking industry. Orphanage voluntourism is not an ethical option in the vast majority of cases. It is only suitable for a very few skilled volunteers and, even then, there are only a few orphanages in Nepal at which NGN would consider it ethical to volunteer at. In the vast majority of cases, NGN does not endorse orphanage voluntourism. NGN advises that the *only* people suitable to volunteer in orphanages and children's homes are: (i) those with appropriate professional skills (such as child-care qualifications, social work, child psychology, or similarly related skills); and (ii) those who can volunteer for long enough to have a meaningful and sustainable benefit for the children and staff. These are the standards which most developed countries would expect from people wishing to volunteer with vulnerable children, and there is no reason why these standards should be any different for Nepal.

If a person is considering volunteering in an orphanage in Nepal, they should first ask themselves a few soul-searching questions:

- Do I have the professional skills and training to work directly with vulnerable children?
- Will I be able to volunteer for long enough to benefit the orphanage and its staff?
- Will the work I do be sustainable after I leave?

If a person does *not* meet these standards then they should volunteer somewhere else where their skills will be more suitable and beneficial to the local community. If a person *does* meet these standards and decides they are suitable to volunteer in an orphanage, then they

should investigate the orphanage as best as possible, if necessary by fielding questions through the agency arranging their placement, including:

- Can the orphanage prove that the children are genuine orphans and have not been separated from living family members?
- If the children are not genuine orphans, is there a good reason for their stay in the orphanage and, importantly, is the orphanage actively involved in reconnecting the children with their families and keeping them connected with their families?
- Does the orphanage have a child protection policy that is actively being implemented?

If the orphanage or volunteer agency cannot satisfactorily answer these questions then the volunteer should steer well clear.

Potential ethical orphanage volunteers travelling to Nepal – who meet the above standards – would be strongly advised to check that an orphanage meets the Government of Nepal's legal standards of operation (up to 90% of orphanages do not). This can be done by contacting: Namuna Bhusal at the Central Child Welfare Board on +977 9851139474 or namuna@ccwb.gov.np.

Follow the law

Finally, it is always important to research the current legal status of volunteering in specific countries, and the type of visa or permit required to enable a person to volunteer legally. In the case of Nepal, NGN recognizes that it is illegal to volunteer without a work permit issued by the Government. NGN is in no way encouraging or promoting foreign tourists to volunteer in Nepal illegally, however, in recognition of the fact that thousands of foreigners do choose to volunteer in Nepal of their own volition, we are offering the above advice in the hope that they will consider the ethical implications of doing this, in particular in relation to the potential harm they could cause to children. NGN accepts no responsibility for any individuals who choose to volunteer in Nepal or any other country.

10

A final word, and more about Next Generation Nepal

Conclusion

This report reviews the information that we know about orphanage trafficking in Nepal including how it began and how it works in the present day. The report look at the links between orphanage trafficking and the unnecessary institutionalization of children in Nepal, and the harm that this causes children, as well as Nepali society at large. The report shows how orphanage voluntourism helps fuel the trafficking and displacement of children from their families, and their unnecessary institutionalization in orphanages and children's homes. It analyzes the concept of voluntourism and considers how it has grown in popularity, the motives of voluntourists, and the ethics and legality of voluntourism in Nepal. Through this analysis, we present our view that voluntourism is driven by a range of altruistic and self interest-based motives, and that it has the potential to bring benefits to communities as well as cause considerable harm.

In this context, we have considered how stakeholders are endeavoring to spread awareness of unethical voluntourist practices to mitigate the negative effects of voluntourism and amplify the positive aspects. We have looked at the way stakeholders are effectively doing this by improving information and services to enable people to practice 'ethical voluntourism.' We have discussed what ethical voluntourism actually means, and made recommendations to all stakeholders on how to further develop ethical voluntourism. Most importantly, we have given practical advice to tourists who are interested in volunteering so that they will not undertake orphanage voluntourism (unless they are appropriately skilled) and, instead, help Nepal and society more broadly through ethical voluntourism. In doing this we believe that orphanage trafficking and the unnecessary institutionalization and abuse of children can be reduced.

More about Next Generation Nepal

Next Generation Nepal is a non-political, non-sectarian, non-governmental, non-profit, humanitarian organization based in the United States of America. It was established in 2006 to further child protection activities in Nepal, particularly in relation to children who have been displaced or trafficked into institutions. NGN was founded by Conor Grennan, author of the bestseller, *Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal*. NGN works in several ways: (i) we search for the families of displaced children and reunify them; (ii) we raise awareness of the links between orphanage voluntourism and orphanage trafficking; (iii) we provide scholarships and mentoring for a small group of ex-trafficked youth; and (iv) we advise and mentor others in our approach. NGN implements its projects through its local partner, The Himalayan Innovative Society. NGN also works closely with Government stakeholders, such as the CCWB and DCWBs, and with local NGOs, INGOs, embassies and tourists.

Requesting support from Next Generation Nepal

NGN is unable to lead on new cases involving child abuse or trafficking unless they are officially referred to us by the CCWB or a DCWB – this is why it is so important the CCWB or a DCWB is contacted in the first instance. NGN is a small organization tackling a huge problem in Nepal, and whilst we wish we could take on every case of orphanage trafficking that comes our way, sadly this is not always possible. However, with the limited resources we have, we will always try our best to offer advice and support where we can. Areas in which we may be able to offer advice include: working with the CCWB and DCWBs, orphanage rescues, family tracing, reconnection and reunification, and ethical orphanage voluntourism. Individuals requiring advice should email NGN in the first instance to explain what they need advice on and, in response, NGN will do one or more of the following:

- We may send you advice by email or provide you with guidance material to support your needs (we have a range of user-friendly guidance material).
- We may recommend a more appropriate organization or agency you can contact.
- We may offer you a technical advice meeting to discuss your concerns in more detail.

NGN can be contacted at: info@nextgenerationnepal.org; for more information about NGN please visit our website: www.nextgenerationnepal.org.

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<http://www.nextgenerationnepal.org>

<http://www.ccwb.gov.np/>

<http://www.thinkchildsafe.org/thinkbeforevisiting/>

<http://orphanages.no/>

<http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>

<http://learningservice.info/>

<http://www.responsibletravel.com/>

<http://wheretherebedragons.com/>

<http://www.thelittlebigprojectthailand.com/>

<http://umbrellanepal.org/>

<http://www.engage.org.np/about/engage-people.php>

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