

Raju, Nepal

Raju, 14, is from Surunga Village in the Jhapa district on the eastern side of Nepal that borders India. Raju's mom and dad are both farmers. He has two older brothers (22- and 19-years-old) and a 16-year-old sister, who all formerly attended school.

Raju ran away from home at age 9 because he feared his father's reaction to his attending a neighbor's wedding without his father's permission. Originally, Raju fled to Chandragadhi, the state capital of the Jhapa district, which is near his hometown. However, eventually, Raju went northwest and settled in Kathmandu, the capital city in central Nepal.



Raju, 14, Children's World Congress on Child Labor and Education, New Delhi, India, September 4-8, 2005

In order to survive in Kathmandu, Raju had to work. He accepted an offer from a government officer to do domestic work in his home in exchange for food and an education. For 4 years, he worked *10 hours a day, 7 days a week*, as a child domestic worker for *no* wages. He washed dishes and clothes, cleaned the bathroom, fetched water, and care for his boss's child and other persons from 5:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. (before school) and from 4:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. (after school). His boss gave Raju "heavy work" to do, but was "never pleased" with his work.

Additionally, Raju went to school for six hours during the day. He ate meals of "rice curry pulse" (dried beans and lentils) for both lunch at 4:00 p.m. and dinner at 9:00 p.m. Raju always ate in the kitchen – never in the dining room. He was only allowed to leave the house to attend school, and considered school time and bedtime his "breaks". Raju went to bed at 10:30 p.m. in a separate room especially for a "servant". He got about 6.5 hours of sleep each night.

Eventually, Raju escaped from the officer's home and came to the streets, where he learned from other kids to collect garbage, beg, clean motorcycles, and sing songs for money. He stayed and worked with a 17-year old drug-dealer who misused Raju's earnings, but he was able to earn a little money. About his street work, Raju said, "It is difficult for a child . . . and the work was very bad and also dangerous."

Through contact with a street friend, Raju learned about Voice of Children, a children's house in Lalitpur in Kathmandu Valley, 10 kilometers South of Kathmandu. Voice of Children is an independent social child rights-based non-governmental and nonprofit organization working for the welfare and enrichment of street children and their families. Activists from Voice of Children rescued Raju after he had been staying in the street for three years. Raju said that his life has been good since he stopped working.

During his 2-year stay at Voice of Children's home, Raju finished grades 5 and 6, while the educators worked to reunite him with his family. They visited Raju's family in their hometown, and Raju's family visited him in the children's home. Gradually his family shared their problems and feelings. The staff discovered that Raju's father was too controlling, frightening, and did not understand his children's feelings, and Raju used to work more at home than study. The staff described the importance of family for children and the proper childcare to be taken by the family for children's development. They modeled the responsibilities parents have towards their children and provided counseling in problem solving, motivational techniques, and family management skills.

In April, Raju was reintegrated into his family and began 8th grade in the local school in Jhapa District. Funding for his education was provided by Voice of Children. Both Raju and his parents are happy with this decision. His parents want him to attend school and to continue studying.

After high school, Raju would like to earn money and help street children because he does not think it is good for children to work. "I think I am struggling for a future life," he said. After finishing his studies, Raju would like to work at Voice of Children children's home or another similar organization as a "good social worker". He said that the best way to help child laborers is to provide education and professional training so that they may sustain themselves.