

## Babina Tuladhar

### *Working to End Human Trafficking*

*A young woman from Nepal comes to Minnesota and attends the College of St. Catherine. She reads an article in a local newspaper about human trafficking in Nepal. She is shocked to learn this takes place in her own country. One news article changes her life and inspires her to be passionate about working to end human trafficking.*



#### **From Protected Background to Teaching about Trafficking**

Babina Tuladhar was born in Nepal and lived with her parents and two siblings in the urban area where income and the standard of living are higher than in rural areas. She heard about “untouchables” who live in rural areas, but her parents shielded her from the issues of poverty and discrimination. Her sister attended the Saint Cloud State University in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. Babina followed suit and landed in Minnesota to pursue her education at the College of St. Catherine.

After reading the news article about Nepal, she began to learn about [human trafficking](#). Babina wanted students to learn about trafficking. She helped Sister Ann Redmond, CSJ, plan a symposium on human trafficking — bringing in several local experts working in the field of rescuing victims and holding traffickers accountable. Babina also went to high schools to speak to girls who were mostly minorities. The girls had no idea that human trafficking takes place in Minnesota and that victims are brought from developing countries like Nepal, India, and China to make the shoes we wear, to serve in restaurants, to clean hotels, and so on.

Benjamin’s Trust. Babina applied to be an intern and was accepted. “If I had been accepted by a larger organization working with human trafficking in the urban area of Nepal, I never would have discovered what happens in the rural area.”

The Esther Benjamin’s Trust is a non-profit organization funded by a British man with the goal to help the most marginalized women and children in Nepal. In Nepal, girls as young as four and five years-old work in the circus. The Esther Benjamin’s Trust rescues the girls and rehabilitates them, providing formal education and housing and support for at least two years.

The girls are caught in human trafficking for labor purposes. Their parents allow the girls to work for the circus because the traffickers promise to send money to the parents who desperately need money to support their families. Of course the traffickers take the girls and never send any money to the families. To address this root cause of trafficking for labor, The Esther Benjamin’s Trust makes small loans, called micro-financing, to families so that they can start businesses and earn some income.

#### **Internship with The Esther Benjamin’s Trust**

Babina obtained a fellowship to work with a non-governmental organization (NGO). The fellowship staff told her to “find an NGO you are passionate about.” Since she was passionate about human trafficking, Babina got in touch with The Emancipation Network and learned about The Esther



Babina (center, with necklace) surrounded with love from the girls that she has helped.

## Living with Trafficking Victims

Rescuing the girls is very risky, too risky for interns like Babina. Instead she participated in rehabilitating the girls. Babina lived with girls ages 7-19. She ate with them, slept in their dorms, played with them, and taught them English as a part of non-formal education. She organized the annual party that the organization holds for the media and taught the girls to dance and sing. She was impressed with their spirit of joy despite their worry about the future. Babina observed: "I looked like the girls, since I was Nepalese by birth, and tried to relate to them as one of them. I tried to give them hope. If I can go to school, then they can go to school. Working with them was very emotional because I wanted so much for them and knew they'd never have all I had."

The internship was her first employment. She said: "It was eye-opening to see that all people who work for non-profits are not emotionally or passionately involved; some employees work there just for the pay and do not invest their heart and passion in the work."

## Finishing Her Schooling

Babina worked in Nepal for six weeks and soon after her work she got ill and had to return immediately

to the United States for medical assistance. She took a semester off to recover from surgery and returned to the College of St. Catherine and graduated in May 2008.

## Working at Humphrey Institute

In August, Babina began working at the [Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs](#) at the University of Minnesota. She is the [Program Specialist](#) at the [International Fellowship Programs](#), where she assists the [Hubert Humphrey Fellows](#). These fellows are accomplished mid-career professionals from several developing nations and emerging democracies who come to the United States for a year of professional development and related academic study and cultural exchange.

Babina says, "I love the job at the Humphrey Institute, hearing stories of people from all parts of the world. The job is so versatile and hands-on. I have sorted bedsheets and furniture to get the apartments ready for the fellows who are here for nine



Babina (center, with in white) with young women with whom she lived with during her internship in Nepal.

months. I help them register for several conferences in the U.S., including the [Minnesota Human Trafficking Conference](#). At the office, we basically do anything to help them make the most of their learning experience in Minnesota."

## Future Goals Reflect Babina's Remarkable Spirit

Babina has two goals. She hopes to personally sponsor a girl at the school run by The Esther Benjamin's Trust, and she wants to raise funds for the trust. The government in Nepal does not provide funds to organizations like The Esther Benjamin's Trust. Such organizations depend on grass roots organizing in countries like the U.S., Canada, and Britain to help children in developing countries.

Babina's remarkable spirit and dedication are summed up in her words: "I felt unbeatable coming back from Nepal, even though I needed surgery. My strategy in life is to see the positive in everything. I have lots of faith n God."

**"One favorite quote, that is a remnant of my experience in Nepal, is:**

***'Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings,' written by Elie Wiesel in his book Night. I was reading it on my way to Nepal.***