



An Open Letter from the Director

Executive Director Nejeed Kassam reflects on the development and future of End Poverty Now

It was the first time End Poverty Now met, now almost two years ago. There were six of us in a room at McGill University in Montreal, unsure of what to do or how to go about doing it. Despite our confusion, one thing remained unambiguously clear: we wanted to make a difference in alleviating poverty, both here in Canada and across the world. And from these humble beginnings, that's exactly what we're doing today.

Since you're reading this article, I know you care. I don't need to tell you that, according to many estimates, 1.2 billion people live each day in abject poverty. I don't need to tell you that poverty is a gross violation of human rights. I certainly don't need to tell you that poverty is an issue that we as global citizens simply cannot ignore. What I *am* here to tell you is that End Poverty Now is an organization committed to making tangible differences in the lives of the poor.

What are our goals? As a fully functioning non-governmental organization dedicated to the long-term struggle against global abject poverty, our goal is to make positive contributions to the global effort of poverty alleviation. And since that first meeting in a small McGill meeting room, we have grown significantly. In the last two years, I've watched as our dreams – as an organization and as individuals – have come to fruition.

What do we do? Today, End Poverty Now operates in three countries around the world. We have student scholarships and global internships – enabling students, the future leaders of our society, to have an opportunity to take their education beyond the classroom and gain first-hand development knowledge and experience. We release numerous multimedia publications, including this monthly newsletter. Sent to thousands of people across Canada, its articles provide our members with updated on what the organization is doing and on issues surrounding the global poverty alleviation struggle more broadly defined. Similarly, we publish an annual scholarly journal, titled *Means to an End*, which features academic work from professors and students alike on the issue of poverty and development. Our website (www.endpovertynow.ca) provides a more holistic and broad-based information portal, including working papers on poverty-related issues, selections of poverty in the news and organizational updates.

End Poverty Now is also working in the field. We provide students with local volunteer opportunities, giving them a chance to work with the poor in cities across Canada. Similarly, we have undertaken several grassroots projects, teaming up with community-based organizations on the ground for a more direct participation in poverty alleviation work.

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End Poverty Now: Looking Forward

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What new projects are coming up? This year, we've teamed up with the Rwanda Village Concept Project, enabling Rwandan widows to start local businesses through micro-grants. In Manali, India, we are working with a local orphanage (described on page 3) to better the lives of young girls through education. End Poverty Now has truly become a multi-faceted organization, working through direct service providers to make small but tangible differences in the lives of many living in poverty.

The next year is going to be one of unprecedented growth in our organization. End Poverty Now is getting bigger and better, opening chapters in high schools, universities, and cities all across the country. These chapters will work with the national headquarters in Montreal to bring many of the organization's functions to local communities. They will provide an incredible opportunity for people all across Canada to engage the issues and to get involved in the poverty struggle. Similarly, End Poverty Now is looking to expand our grassroots projects, establishing more projects both across Canada and around the world. Our educational mandate will also diversify with the launch of monthly Podcasts in November 2007, representing an exciting shift towards alternative media outlets. As EPN continues to grow, we aspire to fortify the collective actions which make such a difference in the

lives of those living in poverty.

It is truly my pleasure and deepest honour to be at the helm of End Poverty Now for the upcoming year, as we enter this exciting stage in our continued development. My work with the organization continues to give me a deep sense of happiness, reinforced by my pride in our work and the absolute love I have for my job. However, I can't overlook that the outstanding progress of our organization has come with the tremendous help of our hard-working volunteers. In fact, End Poverty Now is one of the few NGOs that operates on an entirely volunteer basis; we really could not exist without their dedication and passion.

I hope End Poverty Now has inspired you as much as it has me. I encourage everyone to take the time out of their lives to contribute in some capacity. Everyone truly can make a difference – I honestly believe that. EPN offers a multitude of opportunities for you to take tangible, positive action. Together, as a united humanity, I truly believe we can make poverty an issue of the past. I encourage you to join me in doing so.

In peace,
Nejeed Kassam
Executive Director and Founder of End Poverty Now

End Poverty Now kicks off its 2007-08 campaign:

Organization welcomes new members, screens amateur documentary film



McGill students John Matheson (left) and Andrew Mclaughlin (right) produced their documentary "Shine a Light" in March 2007.

On the evening of September 24th, the new executive of End Poverty Now hosted roughly 100 returning and prospective members to its first general meeting of the 2007-08 campaign. Gathering in a meeting room kindly donated by the local Presbyterian College, the Board of Directors rallied support for and fielded questions about EPN's upcoming projects. After frantically registering for various subcommittees and projects, the members were treated to a screening of "Shine a Light", a documentary film by two McGill University Students, John Matheson and Andrew Mclaughlin, which explores the face of homelessness in Montreal.

The next two national general meetings will take place at 6:30pm on October 29th and November 19th (both Mondays) at 3495 University St., Montreal. New members are always welcome! Alternatively, keep your eyes peeled to www.endpovertynow.ca for updates on local chapter meetings near you! Better still, if you are interested in starting up a chapter at your school or community please contact internal@endpovertynow.ca.

Real Life on the Ground in India:

2007 EPN scholarship recipient reflects on her experiences working at a small orphanage in Himachal Pradesh

- FELICITY YEO -

The sun rises over the wild foothills of the Himalayas, bringing with it a new day to the villages scattered in the valleys and hillsides. Time here flows at a different rhythm; that of the growing wheat or the trot of a mule. The murmur of stirring villages eventually culminates as the lively bustle of activity. Children dressed for school in their blue uniforms dot the winding lanes, forming little processions as they make their way to school. The captivating beauty of the Himalayas and the charm of village communities evoke a sense of serenity and simplicity, while concealing the harsher realities of unseen pain. Amongst these unheard voices are the orphans and semi-orphaned, some of whom are provided shelter and schooling by the local government, while others forego their education to become wage earners in single parent families.

About RADHA

The Rural Association for Development and Helpful Assistance (RADHA) is a registered Indian NGO that, in addition to the children's home (discussed below), includes a women's cooperative and support services for unemployed and impoverished immigrants. Mrs. Sudershana, the founder, far from accepting the problems embedded in her society, has sought to address them through purposeful action. The NGO was born directly out of the dire need to respond to the problems of those who have so often approached her. Evidently, RADHA represents an important NGO which profoundly impacts its target community.



Mrs. Sudershana with her big happy family at RADHA

Since RADHA is an NGO that seeks to help to all those who need assistance, it is inherently engaged in a variety of activities. The bulk of the work is done by Mrs. Sudershana, who receives assistance from other locals whenever the need arises. That said, she has in the past sustained her work mostly through her own financial resources. Fortunately, new sources of funding appear to be forthcoming in the near future.

"When at last I left the children's home, it was heartening to know that these children have such a strong pillar of support, finally belonging to a place where they can be nurtured and loved. This feeling represents a stark contrast to the feeling I had after leaving a government orphanage, in which the children could only depend on one

About the RADHA Children's Home

The RADHA children's home is, as the name would suggest, more like a big family than an orphanage. It all began when Mrs. Sudershana, already a mother of two, took in a few destitute children and nurtured them as her own. As word spread, more orphans and vulnerable children were brought by their relatives to Mrs. Sudershana, who accepted them with open arms. At present, fifteen children between the ages of 2 and 17 years old receive shelter and care. Since the children had never attended school, Mrs. Sudershana began tutoring them in Math, Science, and Hindi. As of a few months ago, however, two teachers from local government schools have started tutoring the children in order to prepare them for an eventual entrance into the mainstream education system. Fortunately, sufficient funds have now been raised to send the children to private schools, where the teachers can more attentively assist these children in catching up to their peers.

Despite this positive news, financial resources are still very tight for this big family. Mrs. Sudershana meets the basic daily expenses for food, clothing and rent—150 Rupees total—by knitting five caps a day. In March 2006, with additional resources at hand, they were able move into proper accommodations by renting two rooms and a kitchen. Despite these improvements, the children continue to experience a lack of space, which limits their

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Indian Internship

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ability to enjoy the simple childhood games that other Himachali children do so freely. Responding to this need, the Himachal government is willing to donate a piece of land just outside Manali. Unfortunately, since Mrs. Sudershana's income goes primarily to sustaining the basic needs of the children, the funds needed to construct new housing are far beyond her means. The estimated cost of the construction work is £10,000, which we hope to raise as soon as possible.

On a personal note

Mrs. Sudershana's provision of a loving atmosphere for the children – as well as the familial support of which they have been at least partially deprived – resonates in my thoughts as an inspiring reminder of her vision. The importance she places on cultivating the enduring qualities of love, trust, hope, faith, resolve and cooperation is reflected by the children's exemplary character. When I left the children's home, it was heartening to know that these children have such a strong pillar of support, finally belonging to a place where they can be nurtured and loved. This feeling represents a stark contrast to the feeling I had after leaving a government orphanage, in which the children could only depend on one another for support and love, and were ultimately left to fend for themselves upon completion of high school.

During my time at the orphanage, I gave English lessons, carried out art activities and had several picnic excursions with the children. Through the time spent with them, I observed the extent of their affection, expressiveness, and jovial nature despite their bleak past. This reflects the strong resilience and optimism of these children, which truly shows when they are provided with such a nurturing environment.

The EPN MONTHLY is a newsletter produced by the members of the Publications Committee of *End Poverty Now*:

Chris Connolly, Nejeed Kassam, and Sara
Finkelstein

End Poverty Now is an organization that is dedicated to the long-term battle against abject poverty. Born out of the international Make Poverty History campaign, *End Poverty Now* represents a group of dedicated individuals, mainly students, who want to make a difference in the world through working to end abject poverty. For more information on how to get involved with *End Poverty Now*, email info@endpovertynow.ca.



Above: The children listen attentively during their classtime
Below: One of Mrs. Sudershana's many adorable children

The children constantly ask for homework, and love to draw above all else. They would often draw cards for Mrs. Sudershana, who they refer to as "Mummy." Each of them has their own talents, which they loved to put on show in front of the camera. Getting to know them has exposed me to the world of unending treasures harbored within each child. I hope they continue to be given the chances and support to make up for what they had lost and to develop the talents with which they have been blessed.

