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GIVING BACK

## Keep a child warm for the holidays with The Miracle Foundation

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BY SHELLEY SEALE

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**B**aby, it's cold outside and children need warm clothes!

This holiday season, The Miracle Foundation is raising funds to provide 100 orphaned children in India with much needed winter clothing. With the cost of a coat, sweater, scarf, hat and mittens at \$25 per child, their goal is \$2,500. The nonprofit also offers a Gifts That Matter catalog, where you can purchase items such as school bags, vaccinations and even field trips for the children, in a recipient's name, for Christmas, Hanukkah, birthdays or "just because." Talk about a sustainable gift that really makes an impact!

For more than ten years, The Miracle Foundation has been providing Indian children who are orphaned, on the street or without parents who can care for them with a loving home, nutritious food, quality education, medical care and that most important of things: love. The care of adults who believe in them, the feeling that they are special. A childhood — something that far too many of these orphaned and street children in India go without, growing up far too soon in order to simply survive.

The Miracle Foundation was born on Mother's Day 2000, when Austinite Caroline Boudreaux was visiting India for the first time on a round-the-world trip with her friend Chris Monheim. Caroline was a burned-out television advertising sales executive, and the two women had taken a sabbatical to travel the world for a year. Over a map and a bottle of wine, Caroline and Chris took turns adding countries to their itinerary.

Chris wanted to go to India; she had been sponsoring a boy there through Christian Children's Fund and wanted to meet him. "I was pretty sure this kid didn't even exist," Caroline says. But Chris was adamant, and so several months into the journey they found themselves in the remote village of the boy, Manus. He was, in fact, real and had every letter and small gift Chris had ever sent him.

what they would find when they arrived. 100 barefoot, filthy, smiling children ran up and surrounded the car, greeting the visitors and reaching for their hands.

"I was completely overwhelmed," Caroline recalls. It turned out that the kids were those who had been taken in by Mr. Sahoo and his wife over the years, kids who were found abandoned, living on the streets; whose parents had died or were simply too poor to feed them. The Sahoo family provided a meager home for these hundred children, taking them into their own family and trying to care for them. But they barely had enough themselves, and the children were eating only rice.

When one little girl named Sibani found her way into Caroline's lap, the world changed. She sang the toddler a lullaby and then went to put her to bed after Sibani had fallen asleep. But what Caroline found in the girls' dorm room chilled her. "There were no beds," she says. "Only wooden slats, like a picnic table, with no mattresses or blankets. Putting that baby down there, hearing her bones knock against the wood, broke me."

Caroline returned to Austin and started the non-profit Miracle Foundation. A few years later I read her story, sponsored a child and was on my own journey to India with a volunteer group that Caroline took. I was hooked,



Courtesy of The Miracle Foundation

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on both the mission and the children, going back five times since and even ending up [writing a book](#) about the experience.

Though The Miracle Foundation was still a fledgling organization back then, it has grown tremendously and today supports more than 600 children throughout India. It has also garnered support and donations from many high-profile Austinites including Nav Sooch and Turk Pipkin, and the most recent volunteer trip included a group from [Whole Planet Foundation](#), the nonprofit arm of Whole Foods Market.

Kelly Stevens, a Whole Foods Market Team Member, was one of the volunteers on that October 2011 trip that built a playground, among other things. "The playground we built is an awesome assortment of swings, a slide, badminton court and teeter totter born from hard work, dirt and buckets of sweat with my fellow teammates, to whom I also grew very close," Kelly says.

"Each night we ate amazing meals together and talking about the day, exhausted and sinking into deep sleep each night, proud of the day's accomplishments. I didn't know what to expect from this experience. But I knew I would bring all the energy and love I had — and a bag of goodies purchased with money I had raised for the kids. What I didn't realize was what these beautiful kids wanted most from me was to just be."

Kelly was most affected by one teenage girl who would walk to the school bus with her each day. On the third day, the girl took Kelly by the hand, looked into her eyes and said, "Sistah, I love you."

"Something all at once small and huge just like this happened daily," Kelly says. "Some moment that would cut through every barrier and touch me to my deepest core."

This holiday season, The Miracle Foundation invites you to share your warmth by making a donation at their "[Baby, It's Cold Outside](#)" campaign. Or, visit the website to purchase another item from the [Gifts That Matter](#) catalog. You'll feel all warm and fuzzy knowing that you've helped keep a child nice and toasty!

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For more information about The Miracle Foundation, visit their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#). And stay tuned this month for a follow-up story on the [Whole Planet Foundation](#), to read more about their volunteer trip to India!

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