

Foundation transforms lives

By Katherine Kloc
 Daily Texan Staff

When Caroline Boudreaux first visited India in 2000, she was horrified. She had visited impoverished countries before but had never seen children so obviously neglected as some of the Indian children in the orphanage system.

"Not only did they not have parents, but they didn't have food, they didn't have good clothing and they were filthy — which doesn't have anything to do with money," Boudreaux said. "It's cheap to be clean, you just have to have someone who cares enough about you to clean you."

After returning to the U.S., Boudreaux quit her corporate job and committed herself to trying to improve the lives of these children. Boudreaux began The Miracle Foundation as an international adoption organization dedicated to finding American homes for Indian orphans but soon realized that more orphans would be helped if they remained in India.

"It took me about four years after meeting the orphans to figure out that it wasn't adoptions that we wanted to do, it was taking care of children in an excellent way that launches them out of the cycle of poverty," Boudreaux said. "You can help hundreds of thousands this way. With international adoptions, you may help twenty or thirty a year."

After a few years of trial and error, The Miracle Foundation began building its own orphanages. Unlike the corrupt orphanages Boudreaux said she encountered in 2000, her organization's orphanages were designed to empower each child to reach his or her full potential. The facilities were divided into individual family-style units, with each unit composed of one house-mother and 10 children of various ages.

Although the oldest child in The Miracle Foundation system is 14 years old, the group intends for the children to remain a part of their family after they leave the orphanage. As in any other family, the children are responsible for making something of their lives after high-school graduation.

"When you graduate from high school, your parents will say, 'You either need to get a job, go to vocational training, go to college, or you need to get married,'" Boudreaux said.



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Caroline Boudreaux is the founder of The Miracle Foundation, an international organization that strives to help orphans in India.

dreaux said. "So those are the four options for our children. The plan is to get them to college and to get them a job."

This year, 15 UT students associated with the University Catholic Center will spend spring break at two of The Miracle Foundation orphanages, where they will play and talk with the orphans.

For many of the students, it will be the first time they visit a Third World country.

"People keep asking me what I expect when I get there, and the most honest answer I can give is that I'm expecting the unexpected," said Ashley Hausteine, a Plan II

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and economics junior. "That's one of the things I'm looking forward to most about the trip — learning about their lifestyle and the hardships they have to endure and hopefully helping them as much as I can."

Ever since the trip was made official in October, the students have been raising money to cover its cost, estimated at \$3,000. Even with this high figure and constant fundraising efforts, the students said it should pay off in the end.

"I've had really good experiences [from past mission trips], which has contributed to the reason I want to go on this trip to India,"

Hausteine said. "You always go with the intention of helping others, but you come back realizing how much they've really helped you and touched your life."

Boudreaux said problems have developed throughout India with parents abandoning their children at orphanages in hopes that they will lead better lives. The Miracle Foundation created a "Lunch and Learn" program, in which children attend local schools and are provided with a uniform, books, two meals a day and an after-school program at the orphanage.

"There were a lot of occasions where the kids would come to class, but then around the harvest season, they wouldn't come

to school anymore because they would be out in the fields helping their parents," Boudreaux said. "That's when we decided that the parents had to make a pact with us. If they weren't committed to their kids' futures and educations, their kids couldn't be in our Lunch and Learn program. We're not there to feed their kids, we're there to educate them."

The Miracle Foundation offers many opportunities each year for volunteers to visit the orphanages.

To learn more about The Miracle Foundation and how to donate to this cause (and donate money to the UT spring break mission trip), go to the organization's Web site at www.miraclefoundation.org.