



Annu Gaidhu

**Child and Youth Care
Student**

Student's philanthropy powered by yoga

Life is becoming more hopeful for some Tibetan refugee children in India, thanks to the passion, ingenuity and drive of fourth-year Child and Youth Care student Annu Gaidhu.

Last summer, as a means to fulfil her program's internship requirement, and to make a difference in her capacity as reigning Miss India Canada 2014, Gaidhu spent five weeks teaching English and yoga to children at the Dirru Monastery in northern India. Typically from Nepal or Tibet, these 90 young monks are either orphans or come from exiled families that have been religiously repressed. Often, without any source to pay for their cost of living,

education and medical care, sponsors must be found. Due to its limited resources, the monastery struggles to provide sufficient nutritious food, a clean living environment and safe places to play.

"These children have so little, but they have so much gratitude for what they do have, and they want to learn," Gaidhu says. "I wanted to figure out how to make sure they have access to basic necessities."

Upon returning, she established the nonprofit Healing Hearts Project to help the monastery undertake development projects related to food, shelter and recreation. What's innovative is the fundraising approach: Gaidhu, an avid yoga practitioner and instructor since 2010, teaches karmic

yoga classes, wherein all proceeds collected support monastery projects or individual monks. Donations can also be made via the organization's website, healingheartproject.com, and on their crowdfunding page.

Gaidhu's first target project was a playground, so the children would have a "constructive and safe place to just be kids." By last December she had raised \$3,000, which the monastery is now using to build a multipurpose basketball court. Future funds will be used for initiatives such as diversifying crops, managing waste, planting trees and repairing dilapidated dormitories.

"The community has more hope now," Gaidhu says. "They feel like their voices are being heard."

Photo: Mark Blinich