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# Giving kids a go

## Som on mission to help

● ROZ PULLEY

FORMER child slave Som Tamang is determined to save Nepalese youngsters from his fate – rescuing them from construction sites, building them schools and providing them with a home.

The 25-year-old Cairns interpreter – who fled his Himalayan village at 10 in search of an education and better opportunities – now dedicates his life to helping others in the same situation.

The founder and president of humanitarian organisation Friends of Himalayan Children, Som has used his own savings and donations from others to buy land in his village, create a school and build six new classrooms for 85 students who would otherwise not get an education.

He has also built an 18-room hostel for primary school-aged orphans and other disadvantaged students, and bought another hostel to house 19 high school students in a different town.

Among those he has helped are his own brother and sister – with one now at university in Nepal and the other excelling in high school.

"I have not been to school after 10 years of age and that made me want to help others with the same problem I had – a stolen childhood."

Som said Himalayan children



ABOVE: Som Tamang is dedicated to providing education for children in Nepal.  
FROM TOP RIGHT: Som with classrooms he has built in his village; one of the students who will benefit from the new facilities; and Som handing out material to a class of students in Nepal.

Picture: MARC McCORMACK



were condemned to illiteracy, poverty and premature ageing.

"At 10, you work in the farm and chances are if I lived in the farm, when I'm 14 I would be married and I will have a child by 16. I'm a settled family man by 21 and an old man by 35. Your life is ended."

The fate for girls was worse, with most denied a basic education, discriminated against and vulnerable to abuse and trafficking.

Som fell into the trap of child slavery when he left his village for Kathmandu, working for a wealthy families who promised him an

education, but worked him so hard it was impossible. "I was looking after a family of seven, getting up at five in the morning, getting the kids ready, making their lunches, walking them to and from school. The housework was killing me and you had no time for homework.

"You'd get behind in your school work, get treated badly by teachers because you are not a good student and are looked down on at school because you are someone's slave. Life was very hard," he said.

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