

# Miracles! Happen ●

Caroline Boudreaux founded the Miracle Foundation so that unprivileged children in orphanages could get, apart from food, also clothes, shelter and a healthy environment to grow

| By RAHUL PAUL |



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Brought up in a normal middle class home in Louisiana, Caroline understood the value of education at a young age. She followed it up with a good college education and moved to Austin, Texas, to work for a TV station, and soon started her own. After a nine-year-long career, she decided to take a break from her corporate life. And, with her childhood friend, Chris, planned to tour the world for a year.

Chris insisted that one of the stops along the way had to be India; she had been sponsoring a young boy in Odisha through Child Fund and wanted to meet him. "In

January 2000, we set out on our global journey. By May, we had made our way to the small, rural village in Odisha, where Manus, Chris' sponsored child, lived. Chris was absolutely thrilled to meet Manus and see how her money had been helping him and his family. "I couldn't believe that he was real as I was a bit sceptical about all this. But it was all true, he was receiving food, clean water, primary education and electric power," says Caroline.

During their stay, it so happened that on Mother's Day, one of the social workers invited them to dinner. Caroline recounts the day, "After a tiring day at the village doing social work, we reached the man's

*ashram* that had around 110 malnourished and orphaned children. I had never really thought of orphan children, and there on Mother's Day, I was surrounded by them."

She narrates the rest with tears in her eyes, "There was a little girl, Shibani, who came and put her head on my knee. I picked her up and she hugged me so tight that I could actually sense how she felt about not having a mother. I sang her a lullaby and when I took her to tuck her into her bed, I was shocked to see the splintered wooden bed. Listening to the sound of her bones hitting the bed, I shattered. It's one thing to be poor, and another thing to not belong. That's the poverty I saw that day." At that very moment, the idea of Miracle Foundation inception in Caroline's head.

Miracle Foundation is an American NGO that's registered in India as well, which provides funds to Indian orphanages for their smooth functioning. Caroline was so motivated that she didn't even care about the most important thing that starting an NGO required—funding. She sold her TV station and used all her life savings for running the organisation for the first couple of years. "I wanted to make sure what I was doing was working, before I could ask someone for money. So, I self-funded it till 2004, but by then, I had spent all my money. One of my friends gave me the first donation of a 10,000 US dollars. The same year, I planned on expanding to other NGOs and orphanages, so I hosted my first real fund raiser, which was in a gym, where I invited my friends and family and showed them a slide show. They believed in me and gave the money," she shares.

Owing to her long and successful media career, Caroline was able to reach out to people through media and that's how regular donations started coming in. But, Caroline doesn't take the credit for that. Instead, she believes that people do want to make a difference. "It's just that they are not passionate enough to go all the way





and do something out of their comfort zone. So, they find someone who they think is passionate enough to do the required work and then support them," she reasons. Miracle Foundation also collaborates with a lot of NGOs, Clean Water and St Stevens Hospital for various operational purposes, like education and healthcare.

So, was it all smooth sailing thereon? She laughs, "Of course not. After money comes programming, and a very deep level of programming, because getting money is fine, but how to utilise it in the right way is the question. For that, you need to choose the right people," she asserts.

For that, Caroline has a three-phase model. When they decide to work with an NGO run orphanage, they take them through a period of assessment, and only after receiving active cooperation, do they decide to partner with them. "The first phase is Selection, where we look for orphanages who love their children. In this phase, two of our local volunteers stay in there and talk to the children, the staff and the community. Though we can't know for sure, but we do get an idea if they are willing to work for the betterment of their children. In the next phase, Incubation, we take our benchmark and start going in every

single month to do training and capacity building. Finally, when we see hopes of getting some positive results, we invest and work with them," she says.

Every NGO has its own method of working for the betterment of children. Though most of them go only till the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, Miracle Foundation extends beyond that. According to United Nations, every child born on this planet, irrespective of country, class, and creed, is entitled to some basic rights as a child. These 12 rights are ratified in 183 countries, with India ratifying it in 1994.

Caroline understands how important these rights are and has chosen to implement them. "We create impact indicators for each one of those 12 rights. For instance, let's take the health and nutrition indicator. When we decide to work with a particular orphanage, we take the height, weight and haemoglobin of every child, which gives us a benchmark of where they are today. Then, we invest in them and set a milestone in terms of steady growth in the measured parameters, which we help them in achieving as well," she explains.

These parameters are not easy to achieve, as proper guidance and work is required to have even the smallest of impact. So, social workers from Miracle

go every month to the partner homes to help with proper implementations. "We have committees for nutrition, healthcare and education set up inside our partner orphanages and through them, we monitor everything. Our volunteers teach and talk to these children and develop a bonding with them so that they can open up to them about their problems. We monitor by showing them pictures and asking what they are or aren't getting. We can read it in their eyes. Every four months, the accountants go and check the books, the education managers meet every quarter and then there is St Stevens Hospital, keeping a tab on the healthcare every quarter. Every orphanage needs to know where they stand in terms of meeting the rights and to be able to measure the impact on their children," she says.

So, how does it work if an NGO doesn't meet the criteria? She bluntly says, "We stop working with them. There was this one particular orphanage that was not working efficiently, so we gave them a three-month notice letter mentioning the problems, but they didn't comply. So, we had to leave them."

Now, Miracle is joining hands with the Maharashtra state government to work for state run NGOs. She says excitedly, "They want our model to be put in every state orphanage. Once we successfully cover one state, we can expand to others, particularly in Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, which require a lot of work. For now, I am looking for Indian citizens who care about their society to join us in our work. They can do volunteer work for an orphanage or make a monthly donation, any amount. It costs us Rs 6,000 per child a month to be able to meet the 12 rights, because this is not a feeding programme, this is how we would want our children to be raised, with love and care," she explains.

You can help Caroline in her noble deed by logging on to [www.miraclefoundationindia.in](http://www.miraclefoundationindia.in)