

## **Til Bahadur Karki Nomination for CNN Hero**

**Tell us about your nominee and what is special about his/her work** (*A detailed, thoughtful entry is essential.*)

Til Bahadur Karki was born in a remote village in Nepal with serious congenital defects. Both his legs were twisted and deformed, and he had an extra finger or toe in each extremity. This was quite abnormal and brought grief and unhappiness to his family. The birth of a baby with such a handicap is believed to be inauspicious and a curse to the family. Therefore, they were socially shunned. Life in a remote village can be hard.

Til Bahadur, from an early age, felt deeply the humiliation of his parents, particularly his mother, due to his condition which was not their fault. He felt sorry for them and began to question why his existence with such a deformity brought such castigation and social ostracism. He wondered if his disability were his sin and if it was, why they were held responsible.

He decided to leave his home and strike out on his own. Multiple failed attempts to end his own life left him with no choice but to pan-handle in the streets to survive. Thus, began a deprived new life as a lonely, destitute, handicapped little boy living in rags and dirt, away from the love and care of his family at such a tender age. His life was desolate, and his prospects were bleak, facing only more suffering. Depressed and miserable, he decided to leave the village at the age of seven.

Hoping for a new beginning, he took a bus from his home district of Panchthar to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. There he began work as a restaurant dishwasher. Misery and suffering continued, cleaning dirty dishes in the cold Kathmandu winter and the lack of proper care caused his fingers to become numb and swollen. But this was the least of his problems. The castigation he had endured from his childhood continued here as people shunned him as a disabled, disfigured and dirty boy. Unable to bear this discrimination and humiliation he quit the job after three months, even more desolate.

While still working at the restaurant, one day a compassionate diner had advised him to visit The Nepal Center for Disabled Children. To his disappointment, instead of being welcomed he was not even permitted to enter the center. Disheartened, he went to Pashupatinath, the holiest Hindu shrine in Kathmandu, to console himself and pray for a better outcome. He had to continue to beg because of the lack of other options for a lonely disabled and illiterate boy and he decided to do so at this temple where alms giving is more equitable than elsewhere.

The value and virtue of charitable giving at temples is deeply ingrained in the minds of Hindus. The kindness and compassion engendered in the hearts of the pilgrims seeing Til Bahadur's disability resulted in far more donations than he absolutely needed. He began to save the excess donations after spending for his bare needs to survive on the street.

Not quite knowing himself what to do and distrustful of others with his savings, he kept them to himself, hidden in his rags. But good fortune continued to elude him. Suspecting his hoard,

street thugs and miscreants began to harass him and confiscated his money to spend on securing alcohol and drugs.

Dejected, Til Bahadur bitterly rued the endless difficulties that life brings. It was one thing to struggle through and suffer from his personal disability, it was another to find any justification for the ill treatment from fellow human beings for someone like him who had no one to care for and no one to care about. Such a pity, such indignation and agony!

Still only a child, he continued to suffer from his own deformity and would reflect on his life and cry. He withdrew from the world and misery overwhelmed him. He would see children of his age visit the temple with their parents, seemingly happy and full of life with no suffering. He pondered, walking along the holy river bank by the temple seeking answers to redeem himself.

He noticed people bringing deceased person for cremation to this holy site, a regular occurrence and began to wonder about life - where we come from and where we go when we die. Why is there strife and struggle to survive, and why are some like himself more helpless and hopeless. He began to think that if he found the answers to such questions, it might relieve him from distress, lighten his heart, make him content and ultimately give him peace.

Even with this renewed self-realization he had an immediate problem to be resolved. His savings needed to be secured from thugs and thieves who were a constant threat. He ultimately improvised a plan. Using a Khukuri (Nepali knife), he dug a pit some 5 feet deep under the trunk of a tree in the nearby forest. The savings were hidden in this pit, covered with dirt, leaves and stones, hopefully secure from anyone else.

Days, weeks, months and years passed without further incident but for Til Bahadur his challenges remained the same. He continued begging and securing his savings, and every now and then wondered how much money he might have already have saved so far.

The passage of time also brought gradual changes in his life. He began maturing into a young man who sought out the company of wiser men around the temple who read and interpreted religious scriptures. He listened to their words of wisdom on virtue, sacrifice and service, the impermanence of material things and life itself. Listening to their discourses provided some solace from his suffering, a new sense of comfort, and realization of a renewed meaning of life. Slowly, he began noticing his despondency ebbing and began coming to terms with the nature of reality, accepting things as they are in cases not beyond his control. A novel transformation began in this lonely man's attitude. He began to realize and accept life as it is, since there is no escape from it. He slowly accepted that it is better to face whatever adversity life brings. He finally started to feel relief in his mind, strength in his body and inner peace.

He began to think about his future and how it might unfold for him and what he should do to prepare for it. His renewed optimism gave him an urge to make his life better, but he lacked proper direction and guidance while the need for survival made him continue his begging. He began questioning whether survival was the only purpose in life for him.

He began to think of others like himself, particularly, children who have to survive like him. What would it mean to alleviate the despair and desolation of those who are deprived of a

normal life and try to brighten their future. However, doubts arose whether he could carry out this task. How could someone like him, all alone and without any guidance, support and experience - lacking so much have such big dreams and tackle a task that requires resources, a support system, knowledge and courage.

These realities however did not prevent him from thinking big. Perhaps it was the wisdom in the scriptures he heard from the priests or the random benevolent treatment by some devotees or the manifestation of oneness of all living beings. He always must have the desire to do good latent in him but for it to become paramount there had to be a catalyst. To turn one's life in a different direction, sometimes a simple event needs to happen and often an epiphany or a dream leads to this new journey.

Having spent nearly 25 years begging and now a swiftly aging adult, Til Bahadur awoke one night in the middle of a dream in which he saw the orphaned children who begged with him in the streets looking up to him like he was their father, encircling him as children often do around their parents - looking for treats, guidance, care and love. Deeply affected by this dream he had a strange feeling that he in fact was their father and it was his duty now to care for them. What if this dream were the call to a mission: to take care of these children so they would not have to struggle to survive like him. The dream was vivid and clear, and he realized he had his savings to carry out this mission. All he needed now was a plan. He could not sleep and remained awake all night excited and restless.

During the long years of begging for a living, Til Bahadur had become familiar with the area and the people who frequented it. One such person was a local police chief, Inspector Jaya Ram Sapkota with whom he had become a close acquaintance and the two men would exchange a few words occasionally when Til Bahadur greeted him with a 'Namaste', when the policeman made his rounds. Over time Sapkota became a confidant.

Determined to help the children, Til Bahadur went to the police station and met Mr. Sapkota. He shared his dream and also revealed the savings he had amassed over the years for the care and welfare of the local orphans. Mr. Sapkota was astounded both by hearing the plan and more so by the revelation that Til Bahadur wanted to finance it from the savings from begging. Til Bahadur also requested suggestions and recommendations on this dream.

Then he led the excited Sapkota and his associates to his trove, the hole beneath the trunk of a tree covered with leaves, stones, rocks and dirt, where he had hidden all his savings from years and years of begging. As Til Bahadur began uncovering the hole, the men from the station were in awe and disbelief with the amount of money they were seeing. Til Bahadur was exhilarated realizing now the purpose of his savings. As he dug the men noticed that he was breathing heavily, probably with both exertion and excitement.

They searched the pit collecting all the savings, put them in a sack and took it to the police station to count the money. After cleaning the dirt and grime they reported that the amount was NRS 5,51,000 (~\$5000). This is an enormous amount by Nepali standards, especially, collected by a beggar. Til Bahadur was overcome that he had amassed so much money and went into shock. He became unconscious and they rushed him to the hospital.

He returned to the police station a few days after the treatment. He reiterated his vision to use his savings to take care of the young orphans begging in that area and offer them the care that they were missing from their family. There he asked for advice from Sapkota and his staff.

Sensing his determination, the police inspector assisted Til Bahadur in renting a place nearby to begin this unprecedented journey for him and the orphan children. The first group were four boys ages of 5-7. Their new residence was moderately comfort but far better than the streets that they called home before. Thus, began the new phase of Til Bahadur's life journey. It was small in capacity but had a profound vision and hope for a better future for his orphans.

Next, Til Bahadur, helped by Inspector Sapkota, registered a non-profit social service organization called "Joint Disabled Unity Awaz Center" with the Government of Nepal. Its mission was to provide shelter, care and education for deprived and orphaned children. With his savings along with donations from others, he hoped to provide care for these children and educate them to become contributing members of society.

As he embarked on his new mission, Til Bahadur felt inspired to meet the day to day needs of the center by telling his story to local people and businesses and raising funds. This audience was naturally curious to hear how a physically disabled person with no education, begging his entire life, could take care of the orphans. Hearing his remarkable story of courage and dedication, many were impressed and helped out, donating cash and in-kind. He used his savings to partially subsidize the costs. Meanwhile, he had the children admitted to a local school. Help to meet the daily needs began to materialize by leaps and bounds.

News about his initiative adopting orphans and his institution began to spread far and wide and he began receiving praise from various social agencies, institutions and leaders. Til Bahadur had by then hired an assistant to help him run the day-to-day operations of the center. Together they provided continued care of the children's welfare, education, health and happiness.

Expansion was in his plans too. In less than a year he added 9 more orphans under the age of 10 and moved to another rented facility with four rooms to accommodate 13 children, supporting them by himself and an assistant. But more resources were needed to support the 15 souls at this growing center and he approached local shops and donors for donations of food and money to keep the institution running. He understood that this care was by no means easy nor what average children might have received at home from their families. Yet, he hoped that one day these children would be self-supporting from the care and education provided them.

The center continued to grow and added more orphan children reaching 42 ranging in age from 3 to 15. But this also created a challenge because the center lacked the required living space as well as the resources to feed and supply all. He managed to find an old house and somehow adjust into it inside but luckily it had plenty of outside space for the children to play.

As luck would have it, this become a transitory phase. In April 2015, Nepal was stuck by a major earthquake of magnitude 7.8. Some ten thousand people lost their lives; large numbers of people were injured, and 600,000 village homes collapsed among the property ruined. The old building housing the center also succumbed to the powerful tremor. This was an unbelievable adversity of nature. With no money to rebuild a shelter needed urgently, he was at a loss on

how to keep all of them alive living under the open sky. It was difficult to turn to anyone for help as everybody else was also affected. Even during this stressful time, however, the center received some supplies from local people and relief assistance distributed by the government and non-government agencies.

Shortly after the earthquake, Til Bahadur began pleading with local people, businessmen, national activists and other social leaders to help build a new shelter. It was a hard task but seeing the plight of the little children living under dire conditions, some donors were convinced, and he received their donations. A major portion of the donations came from a notable social activist Ang Kami Sherpa. Other names worth mentioning were Ms. Shanta Kumari Tamang, Janisha Bhattraai and Manoj Sherchan.

A barracks type shelter of corrugated sheeting with 7 bed rooms, 1 dining area, 1 kitchen and 2 bathrooms was built. It took nearly six months to complete. They ecstatically moved into their new facility just before the Nepali national festival of Dashain in October 2015. Constructing this shelter to keep the children under a roof at this time of hardship while feeding them, making arrangements to admit them to schools, take care of their hygiene and health and most importantly keeping their spirits high and their hopes bright was the most astonishing feat from Til Bahadur given his upbringing, inexperience, illiteracy and the lack of committed supporting networks for advice and resources.

An ever-present challenge facing Til Bahadur during this mission and the security and happiness of the children he cared for was his own health and stamina. Having lived all his life in the streets, begging clad in rags without any proper medical attention his health was clearly deteriorating, and this resulted in him suffering from severe pain and has forced him to become bed-ridden from time to time. Despite all this he has been able to help so many orphans. The center he built despite his suffering is a testament to his courage, bravery, vision and determination. It was not for his own benefit but for the welfare of the 42 orphans who otherwise might have become burdens to society.

It is now a vital concern that this center become a more permanent institution and that some critical issues be addressed in time before the momentum Til Bahadur has accumulated so far is allowed to dissipate. His aspirations to keep the center up and running deserves to be brought to the attention of society where there surely are more resources than so far available to take care of these young orphans. He has a boundless faith in the love and compassion which resides in the hearts of others. He believes that these children and probably many more who need help can receive continuous support and care from this kindness and resultant generosity. As he continues to advocate for their cause, it is critical that we must be very proactive to spread the message of his mission far and wide with the goal to connect with the donors who could offer help to these helpless orphans.

The story of Til Bahadur also highlights the responsibility of a society and its members to those less favored by fortune. It is with this in mind that The Nepali American Center (NAC), a Chicago based Nepali social organization, has taken up this cause in earnest. NAC is committed to spread this story and advocate this cause to everyone. NAC members feel obligated not to leave those orphans neglected and also perhaps help more in need. NAC members and their

friends are fortunate to have access to resources and know many kind-hearted people. If approached, they would like to become part of this noble cause and contribute. NAC is making the following two commitments to advocate for the cause of the center.

First, NAC is committed to sharing this story within its community members and others requesting them to help in any way possible. NAC will encourage members and friends, when they travel to Nepal, to visit the center and meet with Til Bahadur and the orphans. Such visits should help the center get the moral support it needs and also inspire the visitors to participate after getting an opportunity to meet and interact with the children and their caregivers.

Secondly, NAC intends to propagate the message of the mission of Til Bahadur, highlighting the vulnerability of the center and our concern for its sustainability. We are particularly concerned about Til Bahadur's health. He spent most of his life in the streets with no proper medical care and no shelter under adverse conditions. With these things in mind, NAC is earnestly requesting CNN to help the center by recognizing Til Bahadur and publicizing his good work. CNN could broadcast his story to the rest of the world. We believe good hearted people around the world should hear about him and have an opportunity to show their appreciation.

NAC is very concerned that the fate of the center receives the proper attention and support. Leaving orphans neglected is not an acceptable option and we should ensure that Til Bahadur's vision is not somehow squandered through neglect or lack of exposure. NAC is actively communicating this message to all its community members and friends and requesting their assistance. It is also why NAC is asking CNN to kindly consider the story of Til Bahadur by recognizing him for the CNN Hero of the Year 2018. CNN recognition would bring the story to millions and exponentially increases the chances of survival of his center and might even be a helping hand for the many more children he aspires to care for. Let not the bright light of the work initiated by an unexpected, crippled, child beggar be snuffed out from lack of publicity and exposure. Please help Til Bahadur!

### **Accomplishments and Impact: How is his/her work making a difference?**

No one can dispute that raising a child requires concerted efforts over a long time and the parents have to pay total attention during this period. The interest of others and the sense of social responsibility are only secondary factors, their love is what enables them to raise children no matter what the response from their child or what a child will eventually become in the future.

On the other hand, everybody knows that it is uncommon to raise anyone else's child without any adoptive ties. This is generally true in every society. In what he is doing Til Bahadur stands out as someone unique. He faced unbelievable difficulties and neglect by society and survived as a beggar. Surmounting the adversity, he still felt a sense of duty towards the most neglected and uncared ones. And he found the resources and summoned the courage and skills to found and run the center.

He set an example by something never imagined nor done before how even a disabled person with both undeveloped and disabled legs who had begged for 25 years could turn his life around to care for deprived children and benefit society. He made us believe in the power of the indomitable human soul and displayed true altruism. His achievement is a remarkable example of social service at its very best.

His achievement has brought a positive ripple effect into the Nepalese populace and society. Interest and donations have increased and already, there has been some success. Til Bahadur began his new journey with four orphans. Over the course of a 10-year period this number has reached to 42, ranging from age 3 - 16. These children now do not have to spread their arms begging for food, clothing and health any more. They attend schools, pass their time with other children of their age and learn to succeed and stand on their own in society.

Few can do better than Til Bahadur to treat these children like his own, never too tired to extend his arms to them. He is driven by the thought that there are others to whom he has yet to reach out and he is committed to his mission of accommodating many and he possibly can. His unimaginable grace and benevolence in spite of the conditions, his personal challenges and the lukewarm interest in social obligation of many public organizations is indeed an inspiring example to us all.

The one and the only thing in the mind of Til Bahadur is total welfare and safety of these children until they can stand on their own. Anyone can witness this personally by visiting the Joint Disabled Unity Awaz Center in Gokarneshwor near Kathmandu Nepal.

## **Are there any links you want to share?**

There are many youtube links and other media describing the life and work of Til Bahadur. Almost all of them are in Nepali. Some are given below as reference. NAC will be glad to translate these videos from Nepali to English if necessary.

A documentary “Athot – meaning “Determination” depicting his journey is prepared by ... for his life and his noble work:

[http://curvetube.com/Athot\\_film\\_Nepali/QxgyxY7ref0.video](http://curvetube.com/Athot_film_Nepali/QxgyxY7ref0.video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05auGS-ogPw>

Some links depicting life of Til Bahadur

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAJRLmAp7MY&feature=youtu.be>

<http://magazinenepalnp.blogspot.com/2016/12/til-bahadur-karki-thanks-to-helping.html>

Link showing Til Bahadur talking with prominent social workers and media:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2oVpTNMKdM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C20v81GBFbs>

Some additional links:

<http://sankhuwa.com/suman-sanga-til-bahadur-karki-amshu-dangol/>

<https://alternativeeconomics.co/tubeline/view/beScpynRFqQ>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/tilbahadur.karki.3>

In addition to some of these internet links, there are many news items and stories published in Nepalese media newspapers and journals. None of them are available in word format to present here. We can submit it in pdf and jpg formats when needed.



## Some photos of Til Bahadur and the center



Til Bahadur Karki



A glimpse of the center

Organization Til Bahadur founded for the welfare of the orphans



Group photo with visitors





Chicago resident Shrawan Shrestha at the center

Visitors handing over donation



Group photo with visitors





Children with visitors



Honorary consulate general of Nepal Mr. Marvin Brustin and Ms. Allison Brustin with Til Bahadur





Honorary consulate general of Nepal Mr. Marvin Brustin visited the center in 2018



A glimpse of activities from visitors

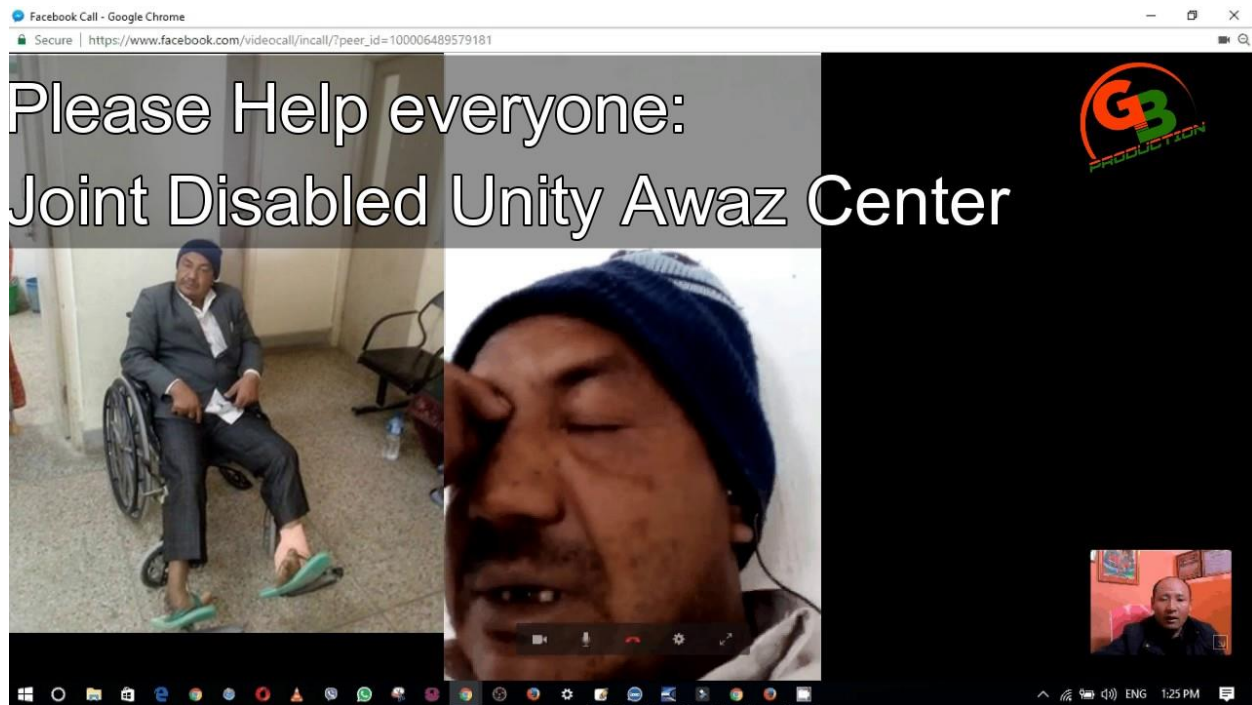


Admitted to hospital due to health condition





At a hospital due to health



A downtime with health



Til Bahadur recognized in the community



Children ready for school





Nepali American Center Nepali class students informed about Til Bahadur Karki



Til Bahadur with social workers in Mulpani Kathmandu



Chicago resident and a college student Pratikshya Pudasaini visited and donated the center





Nepali American Center Secretary Ankur Sharma and his wife Durgha with Til Bahadur at the center