



PHOTO & CAPTION

Runaway Boy Becomes Soccer Star



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

***"I just want to play football!"
says Raju Thappa.***

The headline on the sports page of a New Delhi newspaper tells the story: two of eleven points scored by the national team for teenagers were made by Raju Thappa. Raju carries that article in his pocket.

Born in Nepal, Raju was brought by a trafficker to earn money for his family as a domestic worker. When he was out one day buying vegetables for his employers, the 10-year-old got lost and was picked up by the police and became a resident of Salaam Baalak Trust.

Raju's story is not unlike that of other runaway children rescued by the USAID-supported organization and placed at one of its four shelters. Established in 1988, Salaam Baalak Trust houses runaways and children in need, offering them food, security, medical treatment and the chance for an education.

After four years there, Raju is doing well at school. He recently started learning English, and his grades are fine. But Raju's true love is soccer. One day while playing as part of Salaam Baalak Trust's recreation program, he was spotted and picked up by the national team. Now the pride of his home and the organization, Raju is a shining example of Salaam Baalak Trust's goal to create an environment that enables street and working children to achieve success in mainstream society.