



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

New Community Project  
117 Nature Road  
Blue Ridge, VA 24064

**Opportunities knock!**

As NCP doesn't always have the funds to meet all our partners' requests, here are projects you or your group could support (any amount appreciated):

- Nepal: backpack, lunch box, water bottle and a pair of sandals for the Chepang girls (photo) – \$30 per girl, and now we're supporting 41 of them = \$1230 OR \$200 scholarships for any of the 14 Chepang graduating this spring from 5<sup>th</sup> grade – and needing support to stay in school to avoid early marriage
- South Sudan: women's/girls social center/safe space for meeting, friending, sharing, playing - \$5000
- Congo: computers for schoolgirls plus tables/chairs, trainer stipend, printer, projector, router, etc.: \$6760

**Give – till it helps!**

100 percent of contributions go to the programs

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*As the World Turns...*



“...turning the world upside down...”

Newsletter of the  
New Community Project

*Ideas that challenge us.  
Experiences that change us.  
A community that gives us hope.*

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**Backyard Fence—conversations about the new community**

This past fall, I worked with NCP as a part of my curriculum at Middlebury College. In school, connecting with the local community is not a high priority; however, I discovered during my time with NCP that you can learn just as much outside of the classroom as within.

My main role was to assist with NCP's Food Share Program in Starksboro, VT. I came in wide-eyed and ready for anything. During our drives to Trader Joe's to collect food that was otherwise bound for the landfill, Pete and I would have long conversations about anything and everything, from personal topics to local and national news and everything in between. All too often, I hear people say “that won't affect me” after hearing about a new piece of legislation or a government order. But for every topic we discussed, it could be directly tied back to our lives. Working with NCP taught me to turn and face these problems head-on, illuminating how the strength of a community can provide support for so many.

Every Sunday afternoon, people circle the local Baptist church waiting for their box of food from our Food Share program – food grown or rescued or gleaned from nearby farms. From a volunteering perspective, it was an anchor in my weekly schedule to make the drive to Starksboro and see these folks whom I otherwise would never cross paths with, all of whom were a joy to be around. I noticed that Food Share was also an anchor for others, both volunteers and customers, creating a strong sense of community.

I will carry my experiences (and my t-shirt!) from NCP forever, thankful to have found a new community, and grateful for what it has taught me at the local and global levels. Thank you!

- Sam McGarrahan

*New Community Project Advisory Board: Robbie Miller (chair), Taona Makunje, Steve Brady, Jerry O'Donnell, Libby Kreps, Kim McDowell, Linetta Alley, Hope Steele, Timothy McElwee, Alex Murphy*

*Newsletter printed on 100% post-consumer content, saving 1.5 trees & 35,000 gallons of water with this print run of 6702 pieces*

**Top of the World I**

Our year got off on a high note with our annual Learning Tour to Nepal. Not only did we have encounters with the Himalaya and a guar (!) in Chitwan National Park, but also engaging visits with trafficking survivors, the staff of Shakti Samuha, and the Chepang girls. More on page two.

**Top of the World II**

NCP has the opportunity to preserve a parcel of land in the cloud forest of the Ecuadorian Andes. Our goal is to extend an ecological corridor and create a wildlife refuge, while also serving as an example to surrounding communities that conservation and eco-tourism can be an alternative to more destructive activities. More info on page two.

**Top of the World III**

End-of-the-summer Learning Tours to Alaska and Yellowstone/Grand Tetons still have room for those enamored by towering peaks and expansive valleys below, populated by critters from moose, wolves and grizzlies to pikas. See page three for dates and details.

**NCP – on the farm and in the field**

Harrisonburg NCP's Jubilee Climate Farm will soon host this spring's crop of college students working on stream restoration, carbon capture, and food security for families, including for immigrant neighbors whose movement is restricted. This follows on our Fresh Veggies Series having provided food boxes to 450 households each week in 2025.

As part of our sheep silvopasture agroforestry system with Congolese families, we will plant over 500 trees this spring, providing habitat, fruit, medicine and carbon capture.

NCP affiliate GiveSolar has launched a national initiative to install 10,000 solar systems on Habitat for Humanity homes over five years.

Our Renew Rocktown program is working to save energy and save pollinators via energy efficiency programs and by distributing native grass and wildflower seeds.

Starksboro

Pete Antos-Ketcham reports that in 2025 our Food Share program rescued 73,380 pounds of food, received 6,626 pounds of gleaned food, and harvested over a ton of food from our Food Justice Garden. A grant from Ben and Jerry's and an Episcopal church purchased two refrigerator/freezers for use storing perishables. We also delivered a record amount of firewood from our woodbank this winter.

Three Middlebury College interns joined us over the fall and early winter. A staffer from Senator Peter Welch's office visited our gardens (and helped harvest carrots) to discuss NCP's programs and issues of food and energy impacting low-income rural Vermonters.

Blue Ridge

Since last fall, David Radcliff has led the Nepal Learning Tour; spoken in schools, colleges, congregations, conferences and retirement homes via Zoom and in person in IA, MN, PA, VA, CA, WA, KS, FL, VT, and MO; and taught an online class “Poverty in a World of Plenty” at Elizabethtown College.

**Sheltered!**

Our fall *Shelter Me* campaign hoped to raise at least \$15,825 for NCP's Nepali partner Shakti Samuha to keep a key shelter open along the Indian border after an international donor abruptly cut funding. The shelter intercepts girls being trafficked and recuperates returnees.

We did it! Our network contributed over \$40,000! Of this, \$22,000 has been sent, with the remainder held as a backup plan in case another funder is not found by next fall.

**Gifts that keep on giving**

Over \$250,000 in 2026 grants from our Give a Girl a Chance and If a Tree Falls... funds have gone out to our international partners. For women, this included skills training, microloans, agricultural support; for girls, scholarships, hygienic items, school supplies; for earth care, reforestation and forest protection.

South Sudan: see above, plus a merry-go-round, dorm beds, and anti-domestic violence support

Congo: see above, plus food for students and funds for trauma healing

Rwanda: see above, plus oyster mushroom project, nursery school for Batwa girls, rented land to farm

Nepal: see above, plus health and nutritional aid for trafficking survivors, support of Chepang girls

Malawi: see above, plus bee hives, bicycles, and agroforestry efforts

Ecuador: funds to plant 3000 trees given to NCP by the Ministry of the Environment and for shamans Delio to patrol the forest and Franklin for his quest and an anti-plastic initiative

*“Hey Pete. It's Peter Welch, and I'm calling to check in and see how things are going in Starksboro. I so appreciate your work - it's a hard time for people who are on the edge, and especially with the president withholding SNAP funding during the shut-down. So thank you for everything you did. I'm glad the benefits are flowing again, but I know your work continues. Thanks, Pete.” (Voicemail from Vermont US senator Peter Welch last fall to NCP's Pete Antos-Ketcham in appreciation of NCP's work keeping people fed and warm.)*

As the World Turns is published by the New Community Project, a nonprofit organization. Contact NCP at: 117 Nature Road, Blue Ridge, VA 24064; 540-855-1199; dradcliffncp@yahoo.com; Website: www.newcommunityproject.info

## Justice – or Just Us

Seeking fairness for people everywhere

### Profiles in Courage – from 2026 Nepal Learning Tour

Ashmita Thokar was trafficked to India as a 12-year-old. She and her parents thought she was going for a “good job,” so she was shocked to find herself in a brothel. Soon thereafter, she had a daughter.

At 19, she fell ill and became worthless to the brothel owners. The other women pooled money to buy her a bus ticket back to Nepal, her by then six-year-old daughter pushing her wheelchair to the bus station.

They now live in a one-room home made of concrete. It has a leaky roof, which is a problem during the monsoon season, as they sleep on mattresses on the floor. Her only work is cleaning the house of her neighbor, for which she is paid in food – two meals a day.



Ashmita receives support from NCP for her health issues, and we provide her daughter, an aspiring artist, with school supplies.

After consulting with Shakti Samuha, our group collected money to patch

the roof, purchase cooking equipment and other household items, and beds to get them off the floor.

Sneha was one of the Chepong girls who visited our Learning Tour group in January (she is at far right). She is one of the older and more articulate girls, so she was one of the five girls chosen to respond to questions about their daily life.



Sneha’s parents have abandoned the family, and now they live with her aunt and uncle. They, however, have gone abroad to work, so she is head of the household.

She rises at five in the morning to wash her face and get ready for school. She has a two hour walk down a rough path, often attacked by monkeys en route. School is from 9 to 4; then from 4 to 5 she studies for exams. Getting home after dark, she then cooks and cleans, and finally is able to do homework from 10:30 to 11:00.

It was at this point that she broke down sobbing, as she told us that she couldn’t imagine where she would be without our support. In the coming year, NCP will be providing 41 Chepong girls with scholarships, school supplies, a food stipend and other needs (see page 4).

## Earth in the Balance

Caring for the earth—as if our lives depended on it

### California Dreaming / Ecological Corridor Scheming

NCP was given 5.5 acres of land in Stockton, CA, which we will be turning over to a Cambodian refugee organization. They plan to create affordable housing units and an agroforestry food system based on traditional Cambodian farming practices.



(NCP’s Tom Benevento and some of our Cambodian collaborators – in this case, two monks and a nun)

Tom Benevento is also representing NCP in a collaborative effort to support smallholder farmers from Central America up to California in building more climate resilient food systems based on traditional farming practices and ecological principles. This includes training sites in Oaxaca, Mexico for an Agro-ecological Corridor up the west coast. The Corridor will draw down carbon, restore biodiversity, and provide climate resilience.

### Into the Mist

Ecuador’s cloud forest is a lush, high-altitude ecosystem along the Andes, renowned as one of the world’s most biodiverse hotspots as well as a critical watershed. Located just 2-3 hours from Quito, this misty habitat features over 550 bird species, thousands of orchids, and unique wildlife like spectacled bears. Many species are endemic – only found here. And it has a much higher concentration of endangered species than the rainforest.

Mining and its infrastructure and pollution is one of the main threats to these forests. Gold mining in particular is rampant in Ecuador, with associated impacts such as stream dredging and use of cyanide and mercury. And there’s the disruption and waste: it can take 60 tons of “overburden” to produce one ounce of gold.

With our purchase and preservation of a 25-acre parcel of cloud forest and outreach to the community, NCP is hoping to provide a small-but-spreading pocket of resistance to extractive industries and an example of another way of being in a wondrous place like this.



## Truth...or Dare!

What we don’t know *can* hurt us – especially in the long run. NCP doesn’t shy away from facing the truth about our world, challenging all of us to dare to act for something better. Thus, this Truth...or Dare! segment: *Artificial Intelligence*

**Truth:** AI – we need to control it or it will control us. AI has lots of issues related to everything from intellectual property to job losses to our own intellect and emotions being removed from the equation. But there are also big eco- and relational impacts. Here is a summary from an MIT study and other sources:

- By 2028, AI could be requiring as much energy as is used by 22% of US households.
- Over half of this energy is produced by coal and gas, as AI cannot afford interruptions in its power supply. And fossil fuels = climate change gases. OpenAI’s Stargate data center in Texas will emit 3.7 million tons of CO2 per year – as much as Iceland. A center in CA, with its strong environmental rules, will emit much less pollution than one in West Virginia, where coal is king.
- There is also a huge draw on fresh water to cool the data centers’ equipment – some facilities use millions of gallons per day.
- Of course we are part of the problem. The study revealed that making a five second AI video at 16 frames per second takes as much energy as running a microwave for an hour.

- AI is intrusive: “Conversational AI models are being practically shoved down our throats and it’s getting harder and harder to opt out,” notes Dr. Sasha Lucciani, an AI analyst.
- Along with eco-effects are the emotional and relational impacts: three-quarters of US teenagers have turned to AI for friendship at some point; in a decade, over half of us will be going there for advice, care, companionship. And AI algorithms magnify existing prejudices, further dividing our divided society.

### Truth: What to do?

- Don’t use AI for simple searches and tasks – other search engines can do the same thing with lots less energy. If you use an AI program, a smaller Language Model such as SmolLM is better – up to 150 times less energy per search!
- If a data center is being built in your area, educate yourself and your community about the impacts – then join or organize protests and petition campaigns.
- Seek the real: real conversations and real experiences, especially across lines that divide us by age, gender, geography, culture, vocation, and race; real encounters of nature done together – especially with children, as these are an antidote to screen dependence, since nothing engages like nature.
- Summary: connecting to the realness of nature, others and one’s own wisdom (thinking for yourself) not only sidelines AI but leads to a healthier and longer – as much as 7.5 years – life!

## Experiential Learning

Go. Meet. Learn. Grow. Be renewed. Change—yourself and your world.

Participants beware! Visiting our Sustainable Living Centers or going on a Learning Tour or inviting an NCP speaker to your school or congregation or club can lead to...*who knows where*....

### 2026 Learning Tours

South Sudan/Rwanda (May 11 – 21, 2026) Experience the culture, spirit, and resilience of the people of these East African countries. Visit girls and women and reforestation projects receiving NCP support. Visit Akagera National Park – lions, elephants, giraffe.

Ecuadorian Amazon: Deep Jungle (May 28 – June 3) Explore places deep in the rainforest guided by native shamans; see all manner of amazing plant and animal life (monkeys, sloths, pink dolphins!); learn about threats to the forest, including palm oil and petroleum; visit NCP preservation projects.

Borneo (June 11 – 19) Visit this biodiversity hotspot to experience its beauty and learn about palm oil impacts and other environmental issues. See NCP reforestation projects, including mangrove restoration. Snorkel coral reefs, hike in the rainforest, learn about sun bear conservation, see orangutans, hornbills and more.

Lybrook, NM (July 8 – 14) Work alongside Dinéh (Navajo) on community projects, visit a medicine woman, talk with and learn from local artisans. Explore the culture and current challenges facing the Dinéh, including hydraulic fracking; visit Chaco Culture NHP.

Denali/Kenai Fjords National Parks, Alaska (July 27 – August 4) Camp and hike in the Denali National Park; see bears, moose, caribou; volunteer at the sled dog kennels – and see Denali, the highest mountain in North America. End in Seward with a sea life experience and fast-retreating Exit Glacier.

Yellowstone/Grand Tetons National Parks (August 9 – 16) Visit two of the crown jewels of the National Park system. Explore these beautiful landscapes via camping, vehicle, and daily hikes. Waterfalls, thermal springs and geysers, bison, bears, elk, climate change impacts, wolves (if we’re lucky)!

Nepal (January 12 – 24, 2027) Travel to this beautiful but impoverished Himalayan country, hosted by NCP partner Shakti Samuha. Visit shelters for survivors from the sex trade as well as girls and women receiving NCP support. Trek to see the Annapurna Range. Meet the Chepong girls – and maybe a guar in Chitwan National Park!

