

**The 2nd Place essay of The 3rd NCTA
Essay Contest 2003**

**The Truth Behind Malnutrition:
Implementing Change Through
Taekwondo**

“We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the foundation of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer ‘Tomorrow’. His name is ‘Today’.”

Gabriela Mistral, 1948

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The Problem

Every year, approximately 10.9 million children die. According to the World Health Organization, at least half of those deaths are related to malnutrition. "Malnutrition usually refers to a number of diseases, each with a specific cause related to one or more nutrients, for example protein, iodine, vitamin A or iron" (2). Protein-energy malnutrition (PEM), is considered the most lethal form of malnutrition. "PEM affects every fourth child worldwide" (3) while an additional 150 million (26.7%) are underweight and 182 million (32.5%) suffer from stunted growth due to improper diets (3).

The United Nations Youth Agenda cites five commonalities among worldwide youth (1).

Young people everywhere ...

Have aspirations and want to participate fully in the lives of their societies;
Are key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation; Should live under conditions that encourage their imagination, ideals, energy and vision to flourish to the benefit of their societies; Are confronted by a paradox: to seek to be integrated into the existing society or to serve as a force to transform it; Are also a social and demographic group at risk with an uncertain future, even though they represent society's greatest hope.

This definition demonstrates the importance of recognizing young people as integral parts of a worldwide society. Not only do children deserve to have their physical needs met through proper nutrition and medical care, they also deserve to live in an environment filled with supportive, challenging mentors who will foster their personal growth and success. Not all children have these

opportunities. When struggling to endure day-to-day life, it is no wonder starving children focus more on their physical needs than their mental, emotional and spiritual ones.

Social participation is a critically important component in adolescence. The United Nations addressed this issue by enacting International Youth Year in 1985 to discuss pertinent issues facing young people. According to the UN General Assembly, youth participation includes,

Economic participation, which relates to work and to development;
Political participation, which relates to decision-making processes and distribution of power; Social participation, which relates to community involvement and the peer group; Cultural participation, which relates to the arts, music, cultural values and expression.

Social participation in these categories is vital to the successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. Without mastery in these four areas, young people are not equipped with the skills they need to become successful citizens in the worldwide community.

The Solution

While the magnitude of malnutrition in international children is staggering, merely tossing statistics around does little to curb the fact that children who do not receive proper nutrition “suffer up to 160 days of illness each year” (2). The ramifications of malnutrition extend beyond the physical. The World Health Organization contends,

Malnutrition is frequently part of a vicious cycle that includes poverty and disease. These three factors are interlinked in such a way that each contributes to the presence and permanence of the others.

Socioeconomic and political changes that improve health and nutrition can break the cycle; as can specific nutrition and health interventions... Malnutrition in children is the consequence of a range of factors that are often related to poor food quality, insufficient food intake, and severe and repeated infectious diseases, or frequently some combinations of the three. These conditions, in turn, are closely linked to the overall standard of living and whether a population can meet its basic needs, such as access to food, housing and health care (2).

The most profound aspect of malnutrition is that despite numerous worldwide efforts,

The clinical management of moderate and severe protein-energy malnutrition in children remains ineffective in many parts of the world. Mortality rates of 30% are not uncommon; yet, with adequate management, these rates can be reduced to less than 5% (3).

These arguments allow for tremendous growth and change. According to these statements, there is hope that circumstances can change in order to improve *all* living conditions which affect the quality of children's lives.

The Strategic Plan

When the National Collegiate Taekwondo Association (NCTA) was formed in the 1970s, it sought to advance "Oriental combative sports/arts in the United States" (4). Through its successful endeavors to enhance the collegiate martial arts community, the NCTA promotes the sport of Taekwondo despite changing social values.

In the face of mounting commercialization, distortion, and misrepresentation of our ideals, we must make the public aware of the traditional values of this distinguished martial art. The National Collegiate Taekwondo Association will continue to promote, foster, and broaden our activities in colleges and universities by providing quality instruction and coaching for Taekwondo students (4).

One way the NCTA can expand its activities on college and university campuses is by giving back to the global community. Creating a division of the NCTA which focuses on the state of the world would make a tremendous impact not only on collegiate athletes, but the world as well. There are three components the NCTA could implement in order to achieve its goal of fundraising \$10-15,000 to feed starving children. Participating in these three areas of change will promote the five tenets of Taekwondo as well as make a positive difference in the sporting community and the world.

The first critical area the NCTA should address may seem obvious, but is arguably the quickest and easiest way to begin making a difference. By increasing competitor entrance fees, the additional money can be donated to an organization which works with malnourished children. Though many college students struggle financially, a small increase in the entrance fee will not generate a great deal of havoc on a single individual's budget. Coupled with the large number of competitors each year, the dollars will add up quickly. While inflation is always a factor in calculating economics, decreasing tournament costs so more of the competitors' dollars would be used toward charity rather than competition expenses is another step closer to the goal of feeding starving children.

A second area in which the NCTA can support change is on the college and university level. By providing training on the importance of active world citizenship and fundraising opportunities, each participating school and its athletes would have the chance to develop personal interest in the cause for

supporting malnourished children. Altering participation guidelines to include mandatory student fundraising in order to compete in NCTA Collegiate Nationals would result in student competitors who are not only devoted to the sport of Taekwondo, but also the NCTA's mission to broaden its presence on campuses nationwide. If all Collegiate Nationals competitors were required to attend a class on how to promote this goal on their own campuses, students would gain the intrinsic motivation to participate in service to the global community. The NCTA could sponsor a grant competition to motivate students to fundraise. The school which raises the most money per active student competitor in the club (to alleviate large clubs from dominating the competition) could be awarded a cash prize to buy new equipment or make facility upgrades. Or perhaps that money could be donated to an organization of the college or university's choice in their honor.

The third area focuses on the idea of experiential learning. In order for the importance of global citizenship to sink in, students need the opportunity to witness firsthand how their personal living conditions differ from those in other places. By sending a group of students to a designated location each year, they would develop a heart for serving the less fortunate and begin to understand the significance of their fundraising. While money is a critical factor in creating change, the chance to put in actual hours working *with* people will make an invaluable difference in the lives of those served and those serving. A good way to select student participants is through an essay contest similar to this one,

where students could write about how the impact of their personal participation in working to create global change has affected their lives.

The NCTA has developed a lofty goal. Raising such a large sum of money may seem out of reach, but with proper planning and implementation, fundraising \$10,-15,000 is completely within grasp. By making a few small ripples in the pool of collegiate Taekwondo, big waves will grow. The NCTA will be a trendsetter in the martial arts community, and the greater world community. Other sporting organizations will follow the NCTA's lead and perhaps someday, even Olympic competitors will participate in endeavoring to change the world. As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

References

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