

“I LABORED HARD IN MY YOUNG DAYS. NOW I AM GOING TO SCHOOL AND STUDYING.”

When he was only five years old, Kumar suffered great loss: His father died suddenly and his mother abandoned him after the death. Orphaned and alone, Kumar went to live with his uncle, who did his best to provide him with some stability and security. But two years after his father’s death, Kumar’s tragedies were compounded when a corrupt brick kiln owner used a small debt incurred by a relative to illegally conscript seven-year-old Kumar into slavery at his kiln.

The brick kiln was a massive operation that churned out hundreds of hard clay bricks every day. Slaves – children, women and men – gathered water, sifted sand, molded bricks and hauled them in and out of the sun for the owner’s profit. **As other children his age were just beginning school, Kumar was initiated to a life of slavery.**

Kumar struggled alongside adults at the kiln, bewildered and scared by what he saw. All day, seven days a week, he carried heavy clay bricks back and forth in the kiln as they dried. Every moment was occupied. He woke early each morning to begin laboring at 6:30 a.m. and continued until the evening hours, his hands raw and his body exhausted from the strain of the brickwork.



Kumar

Kumar’s owner hurled abusive threats at him and the other laborers when he felt they were not working hard enough. “They tortured me so much,” he remembers. “We worked hard and suffered terribly.” Even when Kumar was sick, his owner beat him and dragged him to the kiln.


Though he was only a child, Kumar knew that his situation was wrong. “I wanted to study. I wanted my parents. I wanted to play. At times I would think of all those things,” he remembers.

Kumar was trapped. When another slave at the kiln had attempted to flee, the owner tracked him down and brought him back to the facility, publicly beating him as a warning to the others. There was no escape: “I did not think about freedom,” Kumar remembers. **But one day, everything changed for Kumar.**

IJM’s Bangalore office had discovered the slavery in the kiln and documented evidence of conditions there. Based on this evidence, IJM partnered with local government authorities and police to plan a raid of the facility to release the slaves.

The team arrived in the morning and entered the kiln. Each slave was asked to tell his or her story to a government official.

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Held as a slave, Kumar was forced to make bricks every day for the profit of his owner.

Word of the intervention quickly spread throughout the area to other kiln owners, many of whom also relied on the stolen labor of slaves. As a ripple of panic passed through the slave owners, a wave of hope came to Kumar and the other slaves: “When I heard that somebody is going to release me from here, I felt very happy,” he remembers.

While IJM provided support to the government officials documenting the crimes at the facility, owners of other kilns illegally using slave labor began to arrive on the scene, yelling threats at the workers testifying. But with boldness and courage, Kumar and the other slaves continued to speak the truth to the government official responsible for documenting the situation and certifying their status as emancipated slaves.

IJM staff ensured that Kumar and the others received official government documentation proving their status as former slaves and brought them to a safe location. After two years were stolen from his childhood, **Kumar was finally free.**



The steps away from the kiln are only the first in a long journey towards establishing a life of freedom – a journey that IJM takes alongside every slave freed. IJM aftercare staff stand with former slaves for years by ensuring that they receive the generous government assistance to which they are entitled, placing children in school and helping adults find employment, and providing regular trainings for former slaves on the basic skills they need to thrive as free citizens.

IJM continues to stand with Kumar, ensuring that he has the support he needs to live in freedom – and he joins thousands of other former slaves who have received vital assistance through IJM’s aftercare programs because of your support.



“Now I am going to school and studying. I want to become a police officer so that I can catch all the criminals, and at the same time, I can help and protect the good people of our village. I want to earn a good name from the society.” - *Kumar*

The next day, while IJM staff began to compile evidence to pursue the prosecution of the slave owner, IJM aftercare staff brought Kumar back to his native village. There, Kumar began a new life.

IJM helped Kumar enroll in school, where he quickly began to make up for lost time. After completing several grades at an accelerated pace in a school specifically for former child laborers, he is now continuing his studies in a mainstream school.

Kumar enjoys riding his bike and tending to the goats he was able to purchase through the special financial assistance the Indian government provides emancipated slaves. Today, Kumar’s life is one of hope.

IJM has brought freedom and long-term support to thousands of former slaves like Kumar. But many more are waiting for release.

Kumar’s life is now filled with freedom he could never have hoped for before. IJM can make rescue a reality.

