

## **A GENERATION FOR PEACE:**

### **Creating Opportunities for Nepali-Tibetan Youth Engagement**

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#### **CONTEXTUALIZING THE CONFLICT**

Since the Chinese government invaded Tibet in 1959, many Tibetans have fled across the treacherous Himalayas to take refuge in northern Nepal. While Tibetans were initially issued refugee certificates, a policy change in 1989 has forced most of the 20,000 Tibetans currently in Nepal to reside without legal documentation or basic civil rights. Already a disadvantaged and disempowered group, the Tibetan refugees have experienced increased hostility in recent years as China exerts pressure on Nepal through a deepening economic and political relationship. Social and political exclusion, crackdowns on protests and heightened barriers to obtaining legal status, jobs, or visas are merely a few of the repercussions an amplified Chinese influence has had upon Nepal's Tibetan policies. As disenfranchisement persists and locals express an unwillingness to accommodate, Nepali-Tibetan relations are tenser than ever before.

#### **PROJECT VISION**

Although the roots of the strained Tibetan-Nepali relation run deep, the tendency towards alienation has not yet been fully ingrained in the younger populations. For this reason, we believe that inspiring meaningful connections between children of the two groups through grassroots efforts is the most productive means of generating lasting peace. To facilitate these goals, our vision is to create an after-school extracurricular program in Nepal that serves both Tibetan and Nepali children. This program will consist of a multitude of activities -- including visual art, a variety of sports, drama and dance -- during which children of both groups will interact. Additionally, we will be offering traditional Tibetan and Nepali cooking classes to enhance intercultural appreciation and earthquake safety classes as a means of empowering both groups in the aftermath of a shared traumatic experience. As all of these activities play upon shared cultural mediums and experiences, and are not contingent upon a shared belief or linguistic system, we believe they will prove tremendously effective in bringing the estranged communities together. We aim to build a grassroots and self-sustaining program by training a local official to continue the peace program following our departure. Importantly, this program will contribute to the celebration and destigmatization of Tibetan culture, the creative development of its participants, and the enhancement of peace within the community as a whole.

#### **LOCAL PARTNERSHIP**

In order to actualize this vision, we will be partnering with the Dolma Foundation, a grassroots organization founded in 2003 to improve the quality of Nepal's social infrastructure. We plan on implementing our program at The Highland Boarding School -- one of the Dolma Foundation's primary impact investments -- which provides the financial and material resources necessary to ensure that underserved children receive a secondary education. Although the majority of 6th-9th grade students are Tibetan refugees, the school also serves Tamil Untouchables and those afflicted with Albinism. The school provides a well-rounded curriculum that celebrates and preserves Tibetan culture and language. Our program will get to the root of the problem as expressed by locals: The Highland Boarding School's headmaster described a great need for extracurricular programs, as currently a lack of funding and experienced staff has kept them from creating one of their own. As the well-respected Highland Boarding School is located in Dhunche, a predominantly Nepali town, we believe this to be the ideal location for a project aimed at improving intrapersonal relations. The Highland Boarding School has agreed to let us utilize the facilities necessary to implement our extracurricular program in order to form lasting friendships between its Tibetan students and Nepali students from the surrounding area.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION**

**Project Logistics:** The extracurricular program will run approximately four days a week for eight weeks, conducted in tandem with the extracurricular officer in training. Each weekday will consist of two specific hour-long programs. *Monday:* soccer and art, *Tuesday:* dance/play practice and chess, *Wednesday:* volleyball and safety training, *Friday:* game night and free time to further explore areas of personal interest. We have identified a professional who will teach the earthquake safety classes each week and two local women, one Nepali and one Tibetan, who will offer lessons on how to cook their respective traditional foods. With each activity, participants will be organized into integrated teams to facilitate opportunities for intercultural interactions, destigmatization and grassroots relationship building. As the Dolma Foundation has informed us that all of the students are proficient in English, we will be able to effectively communicate.

### **Project Timeline:**

*Phase 1: Raising Funds and awareness (Spring 2016)*

*Phase 2: Coordination (May 2016)* - Purchase supplies and coordinate with the Dolma Foundation.

*Phase 3: Project Implementation (June & July 2016)* - Conduct program at the Highland Boarding School.

*Phase 4: Special Events (June 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup>, June 25<sup>th</sup>, July 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup>, July 17<sup>th</sup>)* - Soccer tournament, art show, volleyball tournament and showcase of dances/skits (traditional Nepali and Tibetan meals will be served).

**Member Qualifications:** Our combined experience will allow for the effective and culturally sensitive implementation of our program. We all spent the summer of 2014 in the Annapurna Region of Nepal forming relationships and gaining insight into its various economic and socio-cultural issues. While in Nepal, Anna Kelly studied the preservation and restoration of 14th-century monastic Tibetan art and has a minor in fine arts. She conducted an internship with the de Young Museum of Art in San Francisco where she created art curriculum and taught 5-12 year olds. Lauren Schmidt has extensive experience working with forced migrant populations. Having facilitated community-building programs for South Sudanese refugees with the Red Cross Society, worked with Syrian refugees on improving asylum policies in Turkey, and investigated the consequences of outmigration for Tibetan refugees in Nepal, she understands the complexity of forced displacement and the sensitivity with which it must be approached. She also has 15 years of experience in performing arts and has taught numerous youth art, dance and activity camps. Finally, James Daudon founded and runs a Seattle-based sports and games camp for kids ages 7-12 that has provided day and overnight sessions since 2011. He has also studied the political role of local Village Development Committees in the Annapurna Region and conducted impact assessments for the Living Earth Institute in the Tarai Plains, experiences that have prepared him to communicate and collaborate with locals in this project.

**Prioritizing Safety:** Of paramount concern to our group is maintaining the safety and well-being of those involved. We have had numerous conversations with the Dolma Foundation and various local authorities on the subject and have been assured that the project's implementation will not endanger us, employees of the Foundation, nor the participants. As each of us has extensive experience traveling independently and conducting projects abroad (particularly within Nepal), we are familiar with the complications endemic to international travel. We will register our travel plans with the U.S. Department of State prior to departure and vigilantly monitor any security changes, responding proactively and responsibly to credible threats.

## **A SUSTAINED IMPACT**

We believe that the project's ultimate goal of peacefully bridging cultural gaps will only be achieved if it can persist beyond our stay. To achieve this, most of our resources will be utilized to purchase durable sport, art, dance and theater equipment which will provide students opportunities for fun, creativity and integration for many years to come. Any surplus financial resources will be given to the school to purchase any replacement materials needed to ensure that students continue to enjoy these activities beyond the summer of 2016. Furthermore, the training of the extracurricular officer will allow the Highland Boarding School to continue to build the program, as well as the integration and conflict-resolution capacity of the region. Both personally and professionally, we all share similar goals of pursuing international development work within this region. The cross-cultural interaction, language skills, and participation in the empowerment of marginalized minorities will provide invaluable experience as we continue to pursue these dreams.