

## Kenyon College | Palista Kharel '13

### “Shelter for Growth” – Nepal

**Background:** While they are highly motivated to learn, students in rural Kharelthok (in Nepal’s Kavrepalanchok district)—especially young women—face several significant blocks to achieving a healthy, well-rounded and advanced education that would lead them out of poverty. The country’s rural schools focus on rote learning and do not offer experiences designed to improve socialization and self-esteem. Drinking water conditions also remain poor in these village schools—with outbreaks of diarrhoea, cholera and other water borne diseases-- even though Nepal has the world’s second largest per capita water resources. Furthermore, access to higher secondary and bachelors’ level education facilities in rural areas is elusive. Moving to cities is financially difficult, particularly for students whose families survive through subsistence farming and especially for young women. This project focuses on promoting life and social skills among village students, ensuring a supply of safe drinking water, and providing infrastructure to a school for higher education. Poverty leads to crisis and desperation; education is a way out of poverty and toward peace.

**Present Situation:** Shree Bhagwati Higher Secondary School is located at my ancestral village, Kharelthok, in Kavrepalanchok district, 65 km from the capital, Kathmandu. The school was established in 1954 and currently has 534 students and 19 faculty and staff. Limited by the constraints of rote learning and training on *what* to think rather than *how* to think, the students lack extracurricular activities and creative learning opportunities that allow them to grow outside the classroom and develop leadership skills. In addition, most students as well as faculty and staff are prone to health risks and fall sick multiple times during an academic year due to the



lack of a drinking water filtration system. Currently, unfiltered water comes from the nearby river and is stored in aluminum pots for drinking. Likewise, the school needs funds to complete one of the buildings where they plan to run a Bachelor’s level program.<sup>1</sup> The construction of a two-storey building was

started in 2006 with assistance from the Indian government; however, construction work was interrupted in 2008 when funds dried up. As a result, the second floor has been without a roof for four years now. Despite the incomplete state of the building, students in the lower grades have continued to meet in rooms on the ground floor. Several years of monsoon rains have, however, damaged the ceiling and allowed water to leak into classrooms on the ground floor.

### Plan of Action

**Before Departure:** Organize a fundraising event at Kenyon for books and art supplies. Contact the principal of the school, Mr. Shiv Raj Naral, to hire a local contractor for the construction project.<sup>2</sup> Transportation arrangement for construction materials will be made through local support from Mr. Naral and board members of the school.

### Objectives

**Promote** life and social skills among village students through workshops in public speaking, drama, music and art. This initiation will create leaders among students to establish student-led clubs.

**Supply** clean drinking water facility to the school by presenting three portable Tata Swach water filters and three replacement filter bulbs to keep the filters in operation for three years.

**Provide** a roof for the school building to prevent further damage and leakage on the ground floor. The roofing will utilize 3000 sq. ft. of space on the top floor and create six classrooms.

<sup>1</sup> The village lacks higher education facilities due to unavailability of any other building to run the program.

<sup>2</sup> The construction workers are expected to be residents of the village and construction materials will be obtained from the nearest town Banepa, Dhulikhel.

***On Arrival:*** Arrive in Kathmandu in July. Purchase water filters and materials for activities such as books, pamphlets, essential audio/visual equipment, CDs, art supplies, props, etc. Travel to Kavrepalanchok district and spend three weeks in the village.

***At the School:*** I intend to hold two one-hour workshops each day in public speaking, art, music and drama. Students are in classes Sunday to Friday, so the workshops will be held outside of class time. I will also be available to answer their queries and provide any extra support outside of workshop hours during lunch breaks on weekdays and full time on Saturdays. Students will be invited to sign up for workshops of their interest. My experience in Intro to Theatre, Intro to Basic Musicianship, Community Choir and Intro to Asian Art will be conducive to running the workshops smoothly. In addition, I was an active member of Elocution group and Model UN which provided me with a public speaking platform. I believe these experiences will help me conduct these workshops at the beginner's level. I will also seek help from a Nepali friend who is an artist. She will accompany me to the village for the first few days of the art (sketching/painting) workshops. All workshops, which will emphasize critical thinking, will culminate in a final presentation day when students will demonstrate their works.

When not leading workshops, I will work with school officials to identify three sites that will be accessible to all for using the new water filters. I will teach students, faculty and staff on their usage and maintenance. In addition, working with Mr. Naral, we will begin construction work on the school roof. I will encourage students and residents to pitch in and give them a sense of ownership, helping the local workers in building the roof by sand sifting and mixing cement.

***Project Completion:*** To ensure the project's sustainability, I will recruit student volunteers to initiate student clubs and organizations related to the workshops. Ideally, at least four clubs will be formed before my departure. The success of the project will be assessed by looking at the quantity and quality of workshop participation, the completion of the roof (anticipated to take 3-4 weeks), and installation of water filters. I will ask the school administration to send regular updates on the condition of the building and the progress of the Bachelor's program. Upon return to Kenyon, I will share my Project for Peace during International Week through photos and video presentation. In the future, I hope to visit the school and monitor the progress of the student-led clubs and the drinking water facility, as well as to raise funds to return to the village with other ideas related to life and social skills development.

**Expected Outcomes and Challenges:** This project is intended to knit neatly together. The extracurricular workshops will boost self-esteem and encourage students to continue pursuing knowledge; the access to clean water will enable students to stay healthy and in school; the completion of the school building will provide the physical structure for students to continue their education into the undergraduate level. Taken together, the students and families of five Village Development Committees in Kavrepalanchok district will benefit. Bachelors' level graduates produced annually by this school will improve Nepal's higher education attendance rate. This investment in human capital will create leaders and entrepreneurs among students who will promote peace and development in a largely agrarian economy.

The project is expected to be complete in three weeks but a slight delay may occur due to monsoon rains. In that case, the project will run a little over the expected completion time without incurring extra labor and other costs. The allocated contingency fund can always be used under unexpected circumstances.

**About me:** I am a Li Po Chun United World College graduate from Nepal. I am currently a junior at Kenyon College majoring in Economics. I have worked with immigrant Nepalese children in Hong Kong as part of Poinsettia School Service. I have volunteered at an organization called Best Buddies for two years facilitating adults with mental disabilities. I have also travelled on a service trip to SOS Children's Village in Bangpoo, Thailand in March 2008, where I gained hands-on experience in organizing tutorials and interactive sessions for children. I feel a deep commitment to peace by promoting education and economic development.