

SHELTER FOR GROWTH
Nepal
KENYON COLLEGE

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Section I

“Shelter for Growth” was designed to promote life and social skills among village students of Shree Bhagwati Higher Secondary School in Kavrepalanchok, Nepal, to ensure a supply of safe drinking water, and provide infrastructure to the school. With a main goal to deemphasize rote-learning in a rural government school, the project aimed to carry out workshops that promote creativity and confidence among students outside classrooms.

To augment funds from the Davis Projects for Peace grant, a bubble tea fundraising event was held during Kenyon’s annual housing lottery event in April, raising \$480. In addition, an online fundraising effort through the “gofundme” website helped raise approximately \$2,000 within two weeks. The total amount surpassed the initial fund-raising goal.

Upon arriving in Nepal in late May, I met a week-long political strike in the nation. This delayed project plans and rescheduled them for one week later than expected. However, by touching base with the village school administration through phone, the specifics of transporting construction materials from the nearby town of Banepa and hiring local contractor and laborers were laid out. When the strike ended, the purchase of large portable water filters, art supplies, books and other supporting materials were made in the capital city, Kathmandu. My departure from Kathmandu coincided with the arrival of construction workers and the delivery of construction materials in the village. A meeting was held with the faculty and administration staff at the school. We agreed that my first week would be set aside exclusively for supervising construction work and installing water filters, and the remaining two weeks would be dedicated to student workshops.

Fortunately, the roof construction went smoothly. This concrete roof on the second floor of a school building added 3,000 sq ft for six classrooms and prevented further damage and leakage in the first floor classrooms. The new classrooms will be used for a new bachelor’s level program in education. Nepal’s ministry of education requires an approval process to begin offering the bachelors’ program; however, we anticipate that this will be completed in time for the next academic calendar. At least 200 students from five village development committees in Kavre district who have successfully completed their study in grades 11 and 12 will benefit from this new infrastructure. Also during the construction phase, three large portable water filters were placed in a common area for students’ use and were operated immediately upon installation. Two school administration staffs have been trained for the maintenance of these filters.

After successful completion of the roof construction, the focus of the project shifted towards conducting student workshops. With 534 students enrolled in the school, we opted to narrow our reach to a more manageable group of grades 8, 9 and 10 – comprising 115 students in the age range of 14-17. This age group was best suited to carrying out the workshops because the likelihood of finding leaders capable of continuing these workshops for younger students in the future was higher for this group. Before starting workshops in art, dance, debate, essay writing, poetry and English spelling, a rough estimate of students’ confidence levels and capabilities was made by evaluating their classes. Across all three grades, it was observed that opportunities for student participation in classes ranged from little to

none and the few students who participated in class were largely boys sitting in one side of the class. When I taught some English classes, the one-way lecture mode of teaching complemented by rote-learning was reflected in students' lack of confidence.

According to students' preferences for various workshops, approximately 20 students were placed in each workshop by a lottery system. Because too many female students in these grades had selected the dance workshop as their top priority, many were forced to come out of their comfort zone and participate in more rigorous workshops such as debate and English spelling. Besides covering the core basics in each workshop session, a significant amount of time was spent on confidence-building exercises in small groups. During the final presentation, students in each workshop demonstrated their work in front of the entire school. Eighty-five percent of students who participated in various workshops gave a presentation, followed by an award ceremony that honored three students per workshop with medals and – most important – leadership assignments for sustaining these workshops in the future. Similarly, all the participants were recognized with certificates for their performances in the workshops. Faculty and staff who were present throughout these workshops and presentations have agreed to work together with the newly assigned students leaders to make these workshops accessible to the entire student body in the future.

“Shelter for Growth” is highly sustainable for the long term. With a new roof and additional space, students will benefit from an expanded educational program for years to come. The new water filters will ensure their long-term health, and the confidence-building, extracurricular skills – from dance to debate – will continue to be shared by student leaders and faculty. Finally, funds remaining from the project were placed in a fixed-deposit account; interest earned annually by this deposit will provide a need-based scholarship for one girl in grades 11 and 12 for two years. This was an unanticipated yet notable achievement of the project.

Section II

For me, peace is a state of personal contentment attainable only after one's basic needs are fulfilled and one has embarked on the journey of self-discovery. To this end, the addition of a convenient physical space and bachelor's level curriculum will save youths in this and neighboring villages precious time and money. The opportunity to easily enroll in a higher education degree will ameliorate their living standards by providing them with new entrepreneurial tools. As educated citizens play an integral role in promoting collaboration among community members, “Shelter for Growth” will be instrumental in promoting peaceful co-existence in a rural setting.

Participation in the active-learning workshops encouraged students to envision their potential, build confidence and pursue knowledge. These first steps towards self-discovery and attainment of inner peace will continue to inspire students to reflect on solutions that lead to peaceful community-building. Likewise, the establishment of a sustainable, need-based scholarship fund to educate one female student each year in the last two years of high school marks another important step towards balanced and peaceful rural development. Through generous endowment from Davis Projects for Peace, Shelter for Growth has helped Nepal's Kavrepalanchok village climb one step higher on the development ladder.

“At a personal level, ‘Shelter for Growth’ has confirmed to me that my long term career goal and inner peace both lie in the fields of international development and non-profit management. It has strengthened my belief that an easy access to education promotes creativity and active learning among youths which opens doors to entrepreneurship, fosters peaceful collaborations and brings development. Davis Projects for Peace has helped reaffirm my faith in the power of little things and small changes to make wider impacts at grass root levels.” – *Palista Kharel*



Local labor workers building the concrete roof for completing six new classrooms



First interaction session with students in Grade 8



Hangman was a fun way to help improve English vocabulary.