

Cultivating Youth's Peace-Building Skills: The Karsh Mentorship Initiative

A partnership between schools in Kathmandu, Nepal and Duke University, USA

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Funding Report 2019

Believing that all Nepali students deserve to build the future of their nation, the Karsh Mentorship Initiative set out to partner with Nepali schools to implement empowering programming that would cultivate the next generation of Nepali leaders. By intentionally creating space for students to discuss and act on their community's most pressing issues, greatest strengths, and unique potential, the initiative succeeded in expanding access to a global, experiential education.

Origins of the project:

Past iterations of the Karsh Mentorship Initiative have been the brain-child of a former Duke student who grew up being systematically denied educational opportunities as a result of her gender and membership in Nepal's "untouchable" *dalit* caste. As a result of deep investment in her leadership potential that cast aside the norms of gender and caste discrimination, this student persevered to become a model of the power of education - studying in the U.K. on a Pestalozzi International Foundation Scholarship and at Duke University on a Karsh International Scholarship.

In its current, expanded form, KMI sought to replicate the type of investment that propelled this student to educational and professional success.

Root cause of the problem:

In South Asia, a strong priority is placed on completing and placing well on standardized tests. This emphasis may arise from the reality that developing countries are under strong pressure to compete with their "developed" counterparts, especially in the field of education. Due to this priority, the Nepali education system is structured to promote the development of academic skills, and not the development of socio-emotional competencies. Further complicating this situation, the institutional system of education still lacks strength, being a relatively newly formed conglomerate. Some Nepali scholars have pointed to the fact that teacher training is not yet rigorously developed across the country, leading to shortages of qualified teachers that recognize the importance of developing the whole child. In addition, textbooks are often dated and reflect the emphasis on rote learning. When basic educational needs, such as qualified teachers, stable buildings, and universal literacy instruction are not met, it is difficult to focus on higher-order competencies like civic-engagement, leadership, and teamwork.

Choosing the host site:

The KMI leadership team had successfully led earlier versions of the project for four years with S.OS. Schools Nepal and CVM School Gatthaghar. This lasting relationship with the partner schools was the project's primary reason for choosing them as the host site.

In addition to these previous allies, the Davis funding helped secure another partnership: a school for older women who had previously been unable to complete their education due to gender discrimination. KMI invited these women to participate alongside younger students, creating a classroom environment where youth could learn from experience, and experience could learn from youth.

Experience of working in the host site:

Working with our host site was a lovely experience. Old friends were very welcoming and eager to learn and teach. As usual, our host site tried to accommodate our needs as best as they could. Moreover, all

the supplies we needed for our project were within quick and easy reach, the environment was safe, and we did not need to commute long distances.

Obstacles to full implementation of the project:

The lack of technology was a minor obstacle in the implementation of the project. We had hoped to have the students type a “blog post” for the new KMI website, however, due to a lack of computers at the school, the students were unable to make a blog post and instead wrote a journal entry. In addition, one of our team members became ill during the trip and was unable to perform her teaching duties for a week. This led to a shortage of teachers during that time period.

Communication challenges:

Our biggest challenge with communication came from a language barrier. We were able to easily communicate with the students and faculty at CVM school since they all spoke English. However, we had some trouble communicating with community members. Luckily, one of our members spoke Hindi, a language common in the region. This allowed for smoother communication with community members.

Our definition of peace:

We believe that peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice. In our project, we attempted to build an environment in which students did not just try to eliminate conflicts in their community, but to construct structures that encourage greater justice.

Our contributions to peace in the short- and long-term:

Over 50 Nepali students participated in the programming run by the Karsh Mentorship Initiative. Each student had not previously been part of a leadership experience like KMI, and nearly every student commented that they learned novel change-making skills alongside their peers. By creating space for these students to identify issues issues faced by their community and devise solutions to them, KMI helped educe their potential to promote unity, change, and subsequently, peace.

Project’s impact on its leading members:

First-time participants in the project realized that there exist various issues in other parts of the world that they might not have known about, as well as how those issues impact the lives of those facing them. Working with a high-school students made all mentors realize the profound impact of teachers on their students. Attempting to fill the role of “teacher” inspired us to become better versions of ourselves.

Other fundraising efforts:

Thanks to the generous funding received through the Davis Projects for Peace Foundation, the project was made possible without further fundraising efforts.

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*“Through our time in Nepal, I saw the beauty of free-spirited thinking through the imagination and determination of our young mentees. Their ambition and commitment inspired me to see the limitless possibilities in the world.”*

~ Samia Zaman

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KMI students place a litter box to remind community members about the harmful effects of littering.



A participant sketches a protest sign against gender discrimination in education.



A student films a video against governmental corruption, to be shown to their local and online community.