**Section I**

*Summary of Project Goals*

Our vision for the Davis Peace Project was to address strained relations between local Nepalis and Tibetan refugees living in Dhunche, Nepal through the creation of various extracurricular programs -including art, dance, chess, and sports - for children of both ethnic groups attending the Highland Boarding School (HBS). The goal of this effort was to use such activities as a means of inspiring meaningful connections between the Tibetan and Nepali students, ultimately contributing 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.

*Additional Fundraising*

Our group did not conduct additional fundraising. Our $10,000 grant from Davis Projects for Peace fully funded our project.

*Project Execution*

Upon arriving in Nepal, we coordinated with HBS’s partner organization, the Dolma Foundation, to purchase useful supplies for the school. As the vast majority of materials were attained rather inexpensively, expenditures remained well within the constraints of our budget. We then transported the materials to HBS where we confronted unforeseen difficulties that significantly changed the scope and aims of our program. A primary challenge was attempting to introduce an extracurricular program into HBS’s demanding academic schedule that runs from 6am to 9pm, Sunday through Friday. Our limited opportunities to conduct programs were further reduced by one week of our stay coinciding with national examinations. These time constraints made providing quality activities and instruction for 500 kids extremely challenging. Additionally, the high-altitude monsoon season weather of near-constant cloudy and rainy weather (instead of the expected brief heavy downpours of lower altitude regions) rendered many of the outdoor activities, including volleyball and soccer, difficult to conduct consistently. Additionally, despite our efforts, significant schedule changes were frequently not relayed to us by HBS administrators, making the realization of our program ideas difficult.

In response to these challenges, we adapted our program from its original weekday afternoon schedule to include longer programs on Friday afternoons and Saturdays and shorter activities during breaks around mealtimes. When weather permitted, we took larger groups on hikes or to an open area where badminton, volleyball and soccer could be enjoyed more freely. On rainy days, we taught the students how to play chess, card games, dance and draw. The children also collaborated on educational murals in the nursery classrooms. Furthermore, we commissioned a table tennis table completed near the end of our stay that was met with much enthusiasm by the students. We increased our involvement with the school by intermittently co-teaching in the classrooms including a lesson on the history, culture and geography of North America. Our program culminated in a final chess tournament, art show, dance performance, and talent show. We believe our program was successful in its being effective at using physical mediums to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, making activities enjoyable for all.

Critically, our Davis Peace Project operated in a surprisingly conflict-free context. Contrary to what we had gathered about the Langtang region and witnessed during previous trips to other areas of Nepal, we discovered relations amongst Tibetan and Nepalis – within both HBS and the larger Dhunche community - were observably positive and respectful. This unexpected reality prompted us to reconsider the orientation of the project, shifting from its original goal of alleviating ethnic tensions to strengthening relations amongst individuals.

*Project Beneficiaries*

HBS has approximately 530 students ranging from pre-primary to grade ten (ages 3-18). Around 130 of these 530 students are boarding students, with the remaining day students commuting to school. The day students are primarily from affluent Tamang families able to afford private school tuition while the boarding students are from less affluent villages close to the Tibetan border, and thus are largely ethnically Tibetan with 60 percent receiving tuition funding. We spent the most time with, and formed the closest relationships with, the boarding school kids, though the day students also benefitted from our Friday afternoon activities and time in the classrooms.

*Project Impact and Sustainability*

It became evident during our time at HBS that although the students were excited for the activities we brought to the school, they were more excited for participating in these activities with us specifically. This dynamic poses evident challenges for long-term sustainability, as our time in Dhunche was limited and hiring a Nepali to run the program does not address this difficulty.

Taking this dynamic into account, we expect out project to have long-term impact insofar as the students continue to use the materials and supplies we provided including chess and checker boards, volleyballs and nets, soccer balls, art supplies, badminton supplies, a ping pong table, and a new sound system. Furthermore, we are establishing a sustainability fund to assist with replacing and buying new supplies for these activities.

Perhaps a greater yet more intangible long-term impact is that our program opened the students to the possibility and value of developing themselves beyond the classroom to consider sports, arts, mind games, and dance an important part of their lives. It is difficult to say to what extent we achieved this during our short time, though we certainly increased general interest in and excitement for these pursuits. There is also potential for sustained impact based upon the relationship formed between ourselves and the HBS, as it is likely that we will return to the school at some point, and would recommend the school and our program to friends traveling to Nepal.

**Section II**

*Project Reflection*

We define peace as much more than its typical negative definition: a lack of violence. A truly peaceful society is not only devoid of violence, but allows all of its members to pursue their own aspirations, interests and sources of joy (without creating a threat to others’ ability to do the same). Peace, in our minds, is inherently connected to freedom. This freedom comes in the form of knowledge, exploration, lack of discrimination, and acceptance.

Given our definition of peace, we believe that our program contributed to peace through providing an opportunity for the economically and ethnically diverse student body of HBS to explore beyond their mandated academic curriculum. Through our program, students participated in many activities not commonly emphasized or valued in Nepal’s public education system, and expressed excitement at the opportunity to develop new skills and embrace creativity in ways that were unusual. Admittedly, the peaceful relationship between ethnic Tibetans and Nepalis in this region (which is great!) meant that our program was geared less towards the cessation of outright conflict and more towards personal development of students and inter-student relationships.

We also believe that the mere intersection between the Nepali students and us contributed to peace. Through conversation, friendship, and shared interests, students learned about the U.S. and our lives, and we in turn learned about theirs. We believe that the project also contributed to peace through minor improvement of collaboration between students; many more female students tried playing volleyball, and albino students (who are sometimes ostracized) participated in the activities. Through a few lessons that we taught to students in the classroom, they learned about North America and important topics including slavery, racism and diversity.

Although we learned the most from the challenges posed by the implementation of the project and the adaptability they prompted, this project changed the way that we think about education. We realized that in Nepal, the ultimate goal is to excel in lower grades (where merit is largely determined by memorization and exam scores) in order to go to university and get a well-paying job. The scarcity of these jobs puts a high premium on performing well. After witnessing this, we are very grateful that we were given the opportunity to pursue interests like art and sports, activities which are largely considered unimportant leisure activities in Nepal. We learned that it is a privilege to consider education something meant to develop a person holistically, rather than simply to pursue essential knowledge for academic and occupational pursuits. As a result, we are much more excited about helping children pursue the things that bring them joy and allow them expression, and we are thankful that we were able to work with children who are just discovering their passions and interests.

Personal Statement

“Our Davis Peace Project was a unique opportunity to encounter, join, and contribute to a tight-knit school community by sharing with them the activities we love most. Although logistical and cultural challenges forced us to adapt our project to on-the ground circumstances, we are proud that sports, games, and art enabled us to add joy to students’ days, close the cultural gap between us, and create meaningful and equal relationships both with and amongst students. We feel lucky to have met such open, enthusiastic, and generous kids, and hope to return to Highland Boarding School one day!”

-- James Daudon, Anna Kelly & Lauren Schmidt





