Shaping our Future
Integration from the Perspective of Bhutanese Young Adults in New Hampshire
The research team would like to express our appreciation for the 18 individuals who shared their time and stories so we can learn from them and create stronger communities.

Cover photograph by FieldWork Photos
The photographs in this report by Becky Field, FieldWork Photos, are part of a larger, ongoing project, called “We are Different - We are One” – a photographic series celebrating the lives of foreign-born residents of New Hampshire and showing the strength, diversity and vitality that “New Americans” bring to NH communities. Her project illustrates that, while we are different in many ways, we all have the same desires to have safe homes; jobs to support our families; a bright future for our children; and freedom to practice our religious and cultural traditions. She has given several talks and exhibits using her many photographs. Becky studies photography at the NH Institute of Art. For more information, contact her at FieldWorkPhotos@gmail.com.

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Introduction

Purpose and Overview

The goal of this research project is to generate a deeper understanding of the experiences that newcomers face in coming to and settling in New Hampshire. The project was designed and carried out by a five-member research team comprised of an American PhD Student and four Bhutanese co-researchers. Findings are expected to contribute to ongoing discussions regarding refugee and immigrant integration and produce useful knowledge that can be applied in New Hampshire to improve the lives of new arrivals and create more welcoming communities.

The researchers quickly learned that it was futile to ask about integration in the present without understanding the past. Integration is a dynamic process of identity formation that starts at birth. Therefore, this report is formatted to reflect the different stages of the interviewees' lives, including their original connections to Bhutan, spending up to twenty years in refugee camps in Nepal, moving to the U.S., and establishing themselves permanently in New Hampshire. “Life stories bring home the complexities of the sequences of cause and effect in human lives.”

An analysis of integration is woven throughout the report and its complexity builds to mirror the process that new arrivals experience as they prepare to move, arrive in, and adjust to New Hampshire. Although everything is new and different at first, the young adults quickly understand what their new society has to offer. They reflect on their old and new lives, and integrate the best of both worlds into new identities, offering a unique and rich intercultural perspective to their families and communities, shaping our future.

These are stories of hardship and hope. Some Bhutanese young adults and their families are still struggling to make ends meet in New Hampshire, while others are finding the life they hoped for. Each of us has something to learn from their stories. Integration is about taking in new information and experiences, developing a critical analysis of your world, reflecting on both the positives and the negatives, and taking action.

“I want to tell [people in New Hampshire] that the people who came here to settle from Bhutan are very much hard workers... It is not good for us to distinguish between one people to another one from another culture, if they just give love and affection to all of us, then we can all make a luxurious life.”
Participatory action research is “a process of collective, community-based investigation, education and action for structural and personal transformation.”

For many participants, this was the first time they told their story with the intention of sharing it with the public, and some found it beneficial:

"Thank you very much for taking this interview with me... I'm also grateful myself that I got as much time to express my feelings, opinions, as well as my struggle with you."

"Thank you for giving me this opportunity... I get a chance to learn different things, express my feelings. This type of interview will take us on a positive path on our life and when these interviews are published people will read [them] and then they will be able to know our life, how we were, and how we are going to be."

The Bhutanese community is the largest group of refugees resettled in New Hampshire in the past 5 years. Participants for this study were drawn from the population of Bhutanese young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty. This age range was chosen because Bhutanese young adults have a wide range of experiences upon arrival to the U.S. which may include entering high school, higher education, or the labor market upon arrival, caring for their younger siblings and elderly family members, contributing to the family earnings, or in many cases being the primary wage earner. It is likely that refugees of this age integrate into U.S. society in ways that are distinct from both older generations and those who arrive in the U.S. as children.

Research Design and Methodology

This project has a community-based participatory design and incorporates elements of participatory action research. The focus of the study, the interview questions, and the community engagement strategy were all developed collaboratively and represent the ideas and rich knowledge that exists within the Bhutanese community. In the United States and abroad, marginalized communities and communities of color have historically been exploited, harmed, and stigmatized by research. This project attempts the opposite:

"Meaningful collaboration between communities and researchers is characterized by early involvement of communities, power sharing, mutual respect, community benefit, and cultural sensitivity."

Active steps were taken to ensure that the study maximized benefit to the community and minimized harm. All researchers participated on a voluntary basis and invested significant time in team building and co-learning. The team met 11 times before starting interviews. Team members participated in all stages of the process, including interviews, coding, and analysis. All researchers were trained and certified in ethics. Research plans were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Brandeis University. The research team protected participants’ confidentiality throughout the process by keeping data private, and removing names and other personal information. Plans were shared with the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire (BCNH), a community-based non-profit organization founded in 2010 to help New Americans achieve a better quality of life. The collaboration between the research team and BCNH was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding.
The stories told in this report are a compilation of 18 individual experiences and are represented as collective life patterns of a group of refugees who resettled in New Hampshire. Quotes from interviewees, in italics, are provided to illustrate the themes brought forth in the interviews and to represent the range of perspectives expressed by the respondents.

100% of respondents are either working (72%) or in school (61%). 33% are doing both.

Purposive sampling was used to identify Bhutanese young adults in Manchester and Concord, the two largest resettlement sites in the state. The goal of this sampling technique is to include a range of young adults from different families rather than to achieve a completely representative or random sample. The research team hosted 2 information sessions to introduce and explain the study to potentially interested young adults. The information sessions were advertised widely through a social media site and by phone, and approximately 30 people attended.

At the information sessions, members of the research team presented the goals of the study and distributed a project overview in English and Nepali. Most attendees had never participated in a research project before, and the sessions generated an interactive dialogue about the purpose of research and its potential benefits. Interested young adults followed up directly with the team.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted and audio recorded or documented with handwritten notes, with the full consent of participants. Due to support from the NH Charitable Foundation, participants received a gas card to thank them for their time and knowledge.

Interview questions focused on individual life stories and reflections on the collective experience of Bhutanese young adults. Each participant was also asked structured demographic questions, which assisted the team in identifying trends. Data were coded using Dedoose software and analyzed using both deductive codes that were developed beforehand by the team and inductive codes which emerged from the data.
Bhutan: Motherland

"My father was tortured every week, every Sunday, and they weren't allowed to speak Nepalese because that's not the state language of Bhutan."

"At the time I was five... I used to go around with my brother and friends... We used to play around the roads and in our neighborhood I saw some army people, they just came and looking for the young adults... We were trying to get back to our home and we were so afraid... we just hide ourselves and we ran out and we finally come to home. From that moment, it was like if any army comes, they will kill people - we used to get terrified by that."

"Government forces could come at any time in the night and take him [my father] to prison, he couldn't sleep at home... life was not easy."

80% of respondents were born in Bhutan, and of those, some had childhood memories. Others shared stories about their history that they had learned through school and from elders in their community. As young children in Bhutan, they went to school, played with friends, and spent time with their families. "I still remember going to temple with my grandfather... I still love that place." Many respondents lived in villages in rural areas with hills, forests, fields, and cattle. "Life was very good there." Most families worked the land, and many were entrepreneurs, trading and selling cash crops while maintaining sustainable livelihoods.

They also remember when things changed. In 1989, the Bhutanese government enacted a "one nation, one people" policy which required people to wear the national dress, speak the national language, and follow the state religion of Buddhism. This policy violated the human rights of individuals with diverse ethnic or religious backgrounds, including residents of Southern Bhutan, many of whom were of ethnic Nepali descent and practiced Hinduism. Peaceful protests were considered treason and the royal government imposed martial law. The children learned quickly that something was wrong when it began to affect their families and their lifestyle. Schools closed down, parents lost their government jobs, and many people were accused of participating in anti-government efforts. Family members, friends, and neighbors were tortured and killed by the Bhutanese army.

After some time, most families decided they "can't live like this anymore." Their parents "came to the conclusion that it was better to leave the country to save ourselves and our family, we may be killed at any time."

"I was taught history of Bhutan and how we became refugees in the school. A guy came there [to our village] and burned the orchard farm and then the Bhutanese government armies came and directed a gun at my father's head and said "you people either pay or leave this country."
Between 1990 and 1995, over 100,000 refugees fled Bhutan. They traveled by bus, in the back of trucks, and by foot, and sought refuge in one of 7 refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Everyone thought it was going to be temporary, but the young adults interviewed for this project spent between 13 and 20 years - the majority of their childhoods and youth - in refugee camps.

The conditions were "miserable," and "poor." Families lived in bamboo and thatch huts approximately the size of a small American living room. They had no electricity or running water, and the huts were susceptible to wind and rain. When it was dry, it was common for fires to sweep through the camp and families would lose the few possessions they had. When it rained, water would leak into the huts. Resources were extremely limited, "We had to wait for rations - rice, dal and limited foods. We had to struggle for food and water - there was not sufficient water." Many respondents shared the story of having to walk and wait in line daily with 100 families to get water from a water tap, and having to manage cooking, cleaning, and washing with that one bucket of water. The camp was crowded and unhygienic. Many adults suffered physical and mental health problems, especially those who had been tortured in Bhutan. There were few jobs for the adults, and some people felt helpless being entirely dependent on external aid.

Despite these difficult conditions, life in the camps was full and multidimensional. Interviewees expressed and reflected on the complexities of growing up in challenging surroundings and also experiencing many happy moments. Many still miss aspects of their lives in Nepal.

"Wherever we live, we begin to love that place, so I love that place, the surroundings... it may be not a good life, it may be okay, but as the time pass we begin to live and we make a residency there, so I miss a lot there."

"The education system was very nice, it was an English environment... but 60 students in a class taught by a teacher... no proper books, whenever there was rainfall, all the rain used to enter into the class."

"We had to depend upon the assistance from the foreign agencies, foreign people. The only question in the mind of everyone was how long can we keep depending on such assistance? If they stop giving assistance, how will be our life?"
The children attended school on a regular basis and studied through grade 10 in the refugee camps. Many Bhutanese elders were well educated in Bhutan, and some were educated in India, so they managed the education system in the camps. After grade 10, many youth continued their education, paying for higher education outside the camps in Nepal. Most respondents found jobs - limited options for work included heavy manual work as general laborers, teachers in primary and middle schools, or private tutors. It was common for youth to work full-time to earn money to be able to continue their studies. Higher education was very expensive, and they faced discrimination in Nepal due to their status as Bhutanese refugees.

One respondent described living in the camp while attending school and working after High School. They did not have access to gas or electricity, so they cooked with firewood, which meant that breakfast took at least one hour to make. So he would skip breakfast each day, leave the house at 6:00 am, and ride his bike for 45 minutes with a group of friends to the nearest college in Nepal. He would go hungry each morning, but it was worth it to pursue his education. He did this for three years.

“It was a hard life. When I recall now those days, I think oh my god, how could we spend so many years in such a place.”

http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/nepal0903/2.htm

www.facebook.com/ResettledBhutanesein9Countries
Resettlement

"Maybe it will be difficult at first, but later on I will gain more knowledge about the country situation, and then I will be adjusted, so I was very happy."

In 2006, the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration approved 60,000 Bhutanese for third country resettlement in the U.S. Families had to apply for resettlement, and it was not an easy decision. Most elders still retained hope that they could be repatriated and return to Bhutan, and others hoped to settle in Nepal. The young adults found it hard to believe that they could move to the U.S. after having lived for so many years in the refugee camps. Their generation was clear, "I was so happy, I wanted to come here very soon." They knew that this was their chance at a better life and that there were stronger protections for human rights in the U.S. "I was optimistic, I don't know why." Without access to the Internet, young adults went to the library to learn what they could about the U.S. Many of them put their higher education on hold, forgoing opportunities to study in Nepal and India, and staying in the camps awaiting resettlement.

Their parents were not so clear. Many elders resisted the idea of resettlement, or were sad to leave that part of the world and give up the chance to return to Bhutan. They were scared of what life would be like, and rumors traveled around the camp about the U.S. Some people thought they would be kept in a room, wouldn't be able to leave, and would work like slaves for the Americans. It was hard to separate the rumors from the truth. Most of the elders could not speak English, and many thought they would have a miserable life in the U.S. Respondents felt that by and large, it was the persistence and optimism from the youth that changed their parents’ minds and set the resettlement process in motion. This was the beginning of a role reversal and adjustment process between young adults and their elders, which continues to this day.

It took one respondent two years to convince his parents that resettlement was the best option for his future. In 2008, he met with officials at the refugee camp to fill out his paperwork for the first time. His father was angry but he let him attend the interview with resettlement officials. However, when it came time, he wouldn't sign the papers. His father was determined to stay in Nepal, and did not understand how his son could leave them behind. Other family members showed support, explaining that if he went to the U.S. and became successful, that he would be in a better place to care for his parents. In 2009, he started the process again and finally on his third try, his father signed for him. He made the difficult decision to leave his family behind and pursue a better life. He told the resettlement official:

"Ok sir, now this is the third time for me. My father is going to give me sign, and I am ready to go. I told him like that, and I asked, is there any family member who likes to go with me? I asked like that."
Eventually, word traveled and people who were resettled first were able to tell those in the camps what life was really like in the U.S. "One by one, people changed their minds." Most families stayed together and were resettled as a group. Some young adults over age 18 were processed as single cases and arrived alone. The parents told their kids, "we will do this, it is for our kids. At least you will be happy there, you will have a life there."

From 2008-2012, over 60,000 Bhutanese refugees were resettled in the U.S., with approximately 1800 resettled in the cities of Manchester, Concord, Laconia, and Nashua New Hampshire. Respondents who came directly to New Hampshire were resettled by the two refugee resettlement agencies in the state, Lutheran Social Services and International Institute of New England. Two respondents were resettled in other states and moved to New Hampshire to be with their families.

When asked about their initial resettlement in the U.S., most young adults were grateful for the support they received, and "satisfied."

"I can't complain. I really appreciate it, they do a good job, there is not any other thing that I can compare it with. I know some people are still struggling but I can't ask for any more."

Others had suggestions on how to improve the resettlement process, included in the recommendations section below. Everyone remembers the moment they arrived at the Manchester airport, and were welcomed by a case manager or family member. Their resettlement agency contacts and their family and community members played the critical role of helping them to navigate their first days in the U.S.

"After some months, after years, we were able to convince them [our parents] saying that they could learn English... and they are very happy now. I told them that they are allowed to follow their culture... and this makes them very happy."
"Here, we have a secure life... here, we at least can feel that when we are sleeping today we will be okay tomorrow."

Life in New Hampshire

Upon arrival in New Hampshire, many respondents felt like they were in a different world. Everyone commented on the facilities and the infrastructure, including the big buildings, highways, bridges, and educational and health facilities. "Here everywhere there are nice roads, in my country I didn't find such a road." Coming from a developing country, they reflected on how the U.S. was built, "How did this happen?"

"I never expected that I can just drive a car."

Some expected to find even bigger buildings and cities like they had seen on TV, and found that New Hampshire was surprisingly small and easy to navigate. Many liked the feel of living in small, safe, clean cities, and for the first time in their lives, they felt secure.

It was tough at first and the learning curve for young adults was steep. "I didn't think it was going to be so hard coming here." In the beginning some people felt lost, and felt that everything was "totally opposite... I didn't know how to open the door - the key turns the opposite way." But most young adults enjoyed having access to these new facilities and technologies. Reflecting back, adjusting to the environment turned out to be the easy part.

"Here it is high tech.. All I did was look in a microscope in biology class in Nepal with a queue of 50 people."

The new role the young adults assumed when they convinced their families to move to the U.S. continued upon arrival. They are the "ambassadors" for their families. They open the mail, field phone calls, arrange appointments, and help both their older relatives and their younger siblings. They are extremely busy:

"I think I never slept more than 6 hours."

Most assumed this role without question, not only because they were the ones who spoke English and learned the systems the fastest, but also because of a deep respect for their elders and their family orientation. Many respondents expressed a feeling that they are repaying their parents and that living in a tight-knit family is the best way.

"When we were young, our parents they changed our diapers, they clean us, they feed us, when we are not able to walk they catch our hand and teach us how to walk, how to speak... and then when we are 18 we start neglecting them. When we were small they take care of us, and when they grow old, when they cannot eat, when they cannot walk, when they cannot bathe by themselves... It is our responsibility to help them when they are old... This culture should be continued."
Although all respondents had learned English in Nepal, they were surprised and frustrated at how difficult it was to communicate here. Their British English sounded like another language to Americans, and they found it difficult to understand the American accent. It was tough on their self confidence and self esteem.

"I was always scared to go and speak in front of people but now here... I am doing community service... I'm proud of myself... I'm getting better day by day."

The young adults quickly became engaged in New Hampshire society. They attended English classes, High School (if under age 21), and went to work, often as the primary or sole wage earners in their families. They bought computers and cars, so they could drive to work and bring their family members to appointments.

Eager to work, they found it frustrating to wait 3, 6 and sometimes 8 months before finding a job. But with time and the assistance of case managers and their networks, they found work, primarily in difficult, entry-level, and often temporary, jobs. They were surprised at how difficult it was to support a family on entry-level wages.

56% of respondents said they do not currently have enough resources to cover their expenses, and only 17% feel they have enough resources to get ahead.

But they maintain hope that this situation is temporary, and many are willing to start over, to chart a new career path than the one they had started in Nepal.

"I used to feel, I was a teacher and now I am washing dirty dishes, I used to think - I am in training, I am going to be trained... I did the training for 6-7 months and then I was promoted... That is the greatest achievement."

Respondents unanimously expressed the belief that further education is necessary to get ahead in the U.S., and 61% are currently in school. Those who arrived here with a college degree found that only some credits transferred and their degree was recognized as an Associate's degree instead of a Bachelor's. This did not stop them from pursuing further education.

Many respondents have quickly moved up in their brief time in New Hampshire by studying English, completing High School, attending training or going to college, all while working to support their families. They are also taking advantage of leadership opportunities and contributing back to their communities.
Compared to Nepal, the U.S. is "organized," "managed," and "systematic." Instead of finding these systems and rules restrictive, young adults feel they create an environment which allows for greater freedom and security. One respondent pointed out that these systems are one reason they feel safe here. Because of this, many young adults are eager to learn the rules.

"People like us who want to be safe, love those rules, want to follow those rules."

Respondents expressed that one of the greatest aspects of living in the U.S. is that people are able to practice different religions, customs, and traditions freely. In contrast to what many Bhutanese elders feared about coming here, "America is a free country." The majority of Bhutanese young adults identify as Hindu, and they also express a great openness and acceptance of all religions.

"The religions, they are the same because we worship a God and God is only one. We pray to the God and U.S. people also pray to the God."

"I have my religion inside my heart... I used to participate in other people's programs when I engage with Buddhist people - I used to pray with them. When I engaged with Christians in the church I prayed to Jesus."

Several respondents noted that they do not want to push their own beliefs on anyone else, and are grateful for the freedom to openly practice. They celebrate religious festivals and engage in rituals that are as much a part of their Bhutanese heritage as they are religious events.

"If we lose that, then why did we leave our country? That is what we didn't give up - they were forcing us to leave our tradition and follow the national tradition which is Buddhism... we love our traditions and still do."

Largely because of this, the young adults feel that the elders, who were so hesitant to come here, have changed their minds. Many are now satisfied.
"I was always isolated from everybody... an American friend came and stayed with me and asked me where I am from and he tried to learn something about me and even came to my house."

There are many definitions of integration. The following section illustrates a process that involves "the forming of relationships across people with multiple and overlapping identities."xiv This contrasts with other definitions that focus more on resources and economic mobility, or those that describe a linear process that can be achieved with assimilation to the dominant culture.xv

Creating a welcoming environment involves being a good neighbor and an active citizen. Facilitating integration is about being yourself, standing out, and creating moments that newcomers will never forget. Everyone has the chance to be someone whose name will never be forgotten.

These interpersonal exchanges accelerate integration and actively create strong communities.

Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative with a goal “to create a welcoming atmosphere – community by community – in which immigrants are more likely to integrate into the social fabric of their adopted hometowns.”xvi

Many respondents found people in New Hampshire to be very friendly. "Everyone talks with a smile." They noted that Bhutanese culture is less expressive, and it is less common to smile or say hi to strangers. "These people are very friendly, so I will try to copy their characteristics, so one day I will be as friendly as them, that was the first impression."

Aside from this overall impression, what made people feel welcomed were interpersonal, one-on-one interactions in which New Hampshire residents expressed interest in the young adults, treated them with respect, and made them feel like part of the community. These moments stood out to them and they could easily recall the exact situations in which someone went above and beyond to make them feel welcomed.

One respondent told the story of walking in the snow and catching a bus to Manchester Community College to learn about higher education options:

"I still remember the name of the admissions assistant who helped us a lot... I still remember their names."

"Teachers were incredibly welcoming. They pinpointed me when we were learning about Asia in geography class... I talked to them about India and Nepal."

"They [hospital staff] treated my Dad so well - we were never treated like that before... one of the nurses there, he was very good to me... he asked me about where you are from and I said we had been here for one month only, and he told us with a very smiling face, he welcomed us, and I will never forget that."
Feeling Unwelcome

In certain moments, people did not feel welcome in New Hampshire. Some experienced outright discrimination in school, during the job search process, at the workplace, and in the community.

"When I was in high school, there were so many different cultural people and religious people and there were African Americans, and we used to sit at the same table, and the table next to us [was] full of Americans, and when they saw different color people they would throw trash or something on your table so I felt that I was discriminated, and I felt bad at the time, it was unfair."

“I went out in my traditional dress to Market Basket and everybody looked at me like there is something wrong with me.. I didn't really care, I went with it, people just laughed at me, stared at me.”

"Back in school, I accidentally got a burger instead of chicken sandwich and then I didn't eat that. I said I don't like beef. Pointy people laughed at me once and I felt really bothered, so from then I decided not to say to anyone that I don't eat beef."

There were also subtle moments when respondents felt they may have been treated unfairly, but they could not be sure whether it was due to discrimination or whether it was a misunderstanding or just general unfair treatment. One respondent was ripped off by a tow truck company, another failed his driver’s license test without feeling like he had made a mistake, and several told stories about frustrating job interviews in which they felt like they were not given a chance. As newcomers to the U.S., everyday interactions were already disorienting. Having experienced discrimination at other moments, in each of these cases, it was unclear and confusing to these young adults to try to decipher whether the source of the problem was bias, or not. These experiences, or microaggressions, are common to people of color in the U.S. and the stress and anxiety associated with microaggressions can have long lasting effects on an individual’s self confidence and well-being. These moments weighed on the young adults and affected their self esteem and hope for their communities.

"It may not be that I was treated unfairly, but I thought that I was treated unfairly."

Overall, young adults described these moments as isolated incidents and most felt they were not representative of New Hampshire society. In one case, a respondent experienced discrimination on the job initially, but persisted and remained open. Over time, the coworkers adjusted and the situation improved:

"Slowly they [my coworkers] understand me, I talk to them, they came to me, now they are friendly... Before I felt great discrimination, but now it is okay... I was able to push all those challenges back and forward my self."

In this example, integration is not the newcomer’s responsibility. It was the co-workers who changed. This is an example of integration as: “a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, cohesive communities.” Some respondents were surprised to encounter discrimination and unfair treatment in the U.S. “Here, everybody is educated and therefore it is harder to understand.” Many respondents found that these incidents strengthened their resolve to advance themselves and create a better society.

"I really feel welcomed here in New Hampshire. There are some people who practice unhuman beliefs, but we ignore them because there are so many people here in this community who want to know about us, who sometimes even come to our house and bring some Nepalese tea, so we ignore the evils and care about the goodness."
"Culture is a frame of reference consisting of learned patterns of behavior, values, assumptions, and meaning, which are shared to varying degrees of interest, importance and awareness with members of a group... Culture gives a sense of belonging, a frame of reference through which to look at and makes sense of the world."

**Culture**

Respondents offered astute observations about American culture, including individualistic attitudes and behaviors.

"Most of the people are good - not such a narrow mind, but there are still some people who believe that this world is very small and you have to look out for yourself."

Many young adults do not know their neighbors. “I don’t know who lives next to me - back in Nepal it wasn’t like that, we used to cooperate.” Despite their desire to get to know Americans, they have found it challenging. "I feel an uneasiness to go to their house." At its worst, this is interpreted as Americans’ hesitancy to help others.

“If you have a guest that comes one day, you have to welcome them in the home very nicely. Here it is not possible to be a guest in a stranger’s house."

The American pace of life, housing arrangements, and tendency for teenagers to leave home at age 18 all lead to a far more isolating life than in Bhutanese culture. Overwhelmingly, the thing that respondents miss most about Nepal is their friends. The positive side of living in a crowded environment was that people were rarely alone, and they played, worked, and studied in tight-knit groups. Because they are now busy with school, work, and home, some respondents’ lives now match the U.S.’ individualistic culture.

“We used to get together all the time with my friends and all families, relatives, but here it hard because they are in work, or they are kind of like busy with something."

The young adults’ extended family networks have also changed. Although nuclear families are resettled together, respondents told of close family members who are now spread across the United States and even in other countries. For some, it is hard to believe that young adults in America choose to leave home and that the elderly are often left on their own.

“Our parents they love us so much, and why to leave the parents after being grown up, why shouldn’t we stay together in a family, and help them."

Many respondents commented on the high rate of divorce in the U.S. and the difficulties they have observed in American nuclear families, "every child needs love from both of their parents."

The young adults hope that their generation can avoid some of the social problems they have witnessed in the U.S. by following their religion, respecting their elders, and maintaining an appropriate level of respect between children and parents.
"Culture, and the people who are part of it, interact, so that culture is not static. Culture is the response of a group of human beings to the valid and particular needs of its members. It, therefore, has an inherent logic and an essential balance between positive and negative dimensions."xxi

Respondents identified ways in which power relations were slowly shifting in their community. Women have more independence and responsibility outside of the home in New Hampshire, and many are working. This also means that men are taking on more responsibility inside the home. While most respondents felt this was more of a generational change than a cultural one, one male respondent was surprised to witness the extent of this independence - he did not like to see women smoking in the U.S. “Girls are mothers who pass down the values and traditions to the children.”

"Everybody works in the kitchen, girls can go outside and work, [and there is] equal opportunity for females."

Respondents also noted the ways in which the younger generation was changing. They fear that kids will lose touch with their culture and religion and will get involved with drugs, or otherwise get in trouble as a result of their newfound independence. Other power shifts are viewed as positive. In constrast to Bhutanese culture, Americans have a less hierarchical society.

“I like men to be responsible, not to be only bread winners, to be responsible for the house."  

"People in higher rank - in society - CEOs, managers - they are treated equally."

"Here I can talk to my boss with the way I am talking to my friends. I used to put my head down and eyes down to show respect. Here I can say hi, how are you? like this."

Finally, respondents have noticed American patterns of consumerism and although they like having access to new products and technologies, they prioritize meeting their basic needs and are wary of overusing resources and/or getting into debt.

"Why is she [co-worker] spending money on make-up at the mall and not on food? Food is a basic need. Basic goods should be prioritized over luxury."

"We use more resources in the world than other people do, than other countries. Somewhere I find that a lot of foods are wasted, and I think that food can feed the hungry people there, I have seen hungry people on the street... We get gas and electricity all the time [here], that surprised me in the beginning... I want to live with the minimum resources I can use and let that be used for other persons, make whatever you use very useful."
Information sharing through Bhutanese networks

Many respondents learned about New Hampshire from other Bhutanese families who had arrived before them. One respondent who was resettled alone lived next door to several other Bhutanese young adults, all of whom had jobs, and they shared a computer. He felt he received a lot of support from them, like he had "moved from one Nepal to another."

Young adults spread information through tight-knit family and community networks, which extend across the U.S.

"I have learned a little bit about this country and how the system works here, and also guiding my [younger] siblings... I taught my family members to drive by myself; I drive them to citizenship classes, and take them to relatives' homes so they don't feel isolated."

Others received information and support from the Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire (BCNH), a Bhutanese-led non-profit organization.

Teaching and Learning

Integration consists of both teaching and learning. "Every day, every time, every second was new. Every day is a new experience." Respondents told of exchanges with Americans, other Bhutanese community members, and family members. Information is key to the integration process. As newcomers take in and share information, they adjust to their new surroundings and culture, and re-shape their identities, while remaining true to themselves.

Learning from and teaching Americans is something that most respondents enjoy and look forward to doing more of in the future.

"Every day I think I am learning at least something new and I am really interested to learn. I am looking forward to hang out with more American friends, you know I have been missing so much fun outside... I am in school and I have been working, and I haven't been able to make a lot of American friends that are willing to go outside."

Just as newcomers adjust and constantly shape their identities, residents of New Hampshire have the opportunity to learn and re-shape the way they see the world, if they so choose.

"There is a great chance for me to express my culture to them. It is a great chance for me... I want to reflect my culture towards them, how is my culture, you know. But I don't want to compel them."

Most newcomers do not have that choice - integration is a matter of survival. However, respondents plan to achieve this without completely absorbing the American way.

"I will be a U.S. Citizen and I will be American, but then also I love my culture... I think that I will be a Nepali cultural woman more than an American woman.” I don't want to be an American woman, I just want to be my own cultural woman."

“I will live like an American but I will never consider myself an American because I was born in Nepal, raised, spent my childhood back there and there is like a big seal that's on me that reflects my identity and who I am, so that is never going to change. Even though I can totally fit in this community... in this new American culture, I would never say that I am American. The country is the mother... other countries are not the same as my motherland."
Shaping our Future

Citizenship

Because the young adults interviewed for this project were young children in Bhutan, and then classified as refugees in Nepal, this is the first time in their lives that they will gain citizenship of any country.

"It will be 2014 that I will be applying for citizenship. That will be my first citizenship - I was never a citizen of any country, so there is some kind of excitement going inside of me."

Citizenship, combined with the opportunity to utilize their skills, makes them confident they will make a difference.

"My society people, they can create a good history... they will be able to take part in each and every state's history."

"We don't only come with problems but we have some high skills, some entrepreneurs, so we can make a difference."

While some respondents thought they may feel "American" after receiving citizenship, others made sure to point out that they will remain distinctly themselves, whether or not they are technically "American." After all, one person pointed out, "Cow is cow, and buffalo is buffalo." But this does not mean that they are not fully invested in their lives and communities in New Hampshire. When asked what she was most proud of, one respondent shared, "I am most proud to come to America."

The young adults interviewed for this project are shaping our future as we speak. They are hopeful, ambitious, and moving forward. As they pursue their dreams, they are seeking opportunities to give back.

"I am able to dream about my future and expect what I will be 20 years from now. Back in Nepal I didn't have that kind of expectations. Now, if I give myself enough push, I can be something. There are many things out there that I can serve."

"In 10 years, I would be responsible within my family, and I would be a better leader, I would be a better person than I am now."

"I just want to be a productive citizen and help those in miserable conditions like we used to be before."

Although newcomers shoulder a large share of the burden for integration, it is up to all of us to shape our communities and New Hampshire's future. This project has shown that each of us, no matter what our background or how long we have lived here, has the opportunity to stand out and be remembered.

"I'm really thankful to this community that I am here and to the government also, I have met so many good people here in New Hampshire... I am still hoping that I will be able to give back to the community down the road."
Recommendations

Many respondents expressed satisfaction with the refugee resettlement process and gratitude for the opportunity to start a new life in New Hampshire. At the same time, young adults spoke from experience and from witnessing the challenges that others have faced, and offered insightful recommendations that may improve the process for others.

Not all respondents felt the same way - while some felt that increased support would facilitate integration and lead them to success more quickly, others felt strongly that they did not need or want any further support, after having to depend on external support in the refugee camps for so long and initially upon arrival in the U.S. "I always wanted to be on my own feet."

Some of these recommendations relate to the refugee resettlement process, others are relevant to all young adults, and yet others are for the wider New Hampshire community.

- Increase proper job training options for new arrivals
- Identify and build upon transferable skills. "If there is any program that can help them to make their skills useful here..."
- Assist adults to develop their skills and open their own businesses
- Ensure that both men and women receive driver’s education
- Provide more formal education options for youth who never went to school and are above age 21
- Waive the in-state tuition waiting period of 1 year for new arrivals seeking higher education
- Increase availability of SAT preparation classes
- Provide more English classes, especially in centers that are accessible by foot for adults who can't drive. “This would help them to get citizenship and a good job.”
- Offer bi-lingual citizenship classes and bi-lingual job readiness classes. “My father is 70 - he still has courage and strength for a job.”
- Keep families together throughout the resettlement process. “What happens for the people who don't have immediate family to help them?”
- Provide post-resettlement services for families that still require assistance. “After few months, you are on your own. We need to manage ourselves, if they would help more than that.”
- Increase affordable health care options for low-income adults
- Incorporate cultural awareness classes in schools for Americans and newcomers, especially for high school students transitioning to college and into jobs.
- Maintain perspective and don’t sweat the small stuff. "If people could understand the cultural difference and not get offended by small small things, that would make this world so much better."
- Get to know your neighbors. "The Bhutanese community is known for their honesty, their sincerity. The elders, they don't speak English it seems like they seem very ignorant to American society... but they have a good sense of humor!"
- Don't jump to conclusions if you witness a cultural gathering. "They should think deeply about what is going on, not just like they are doing a party or something like that... Bhutanese are really nice, they don't do something bad to hurt other people."
- Make time for family and other loved ones. "It's okay that they are so busy... but I still think it's very important to give time to their family and live their happy life."
- Don't lose sight of who you are through integration. “Don't forget our own tradition and culture.”
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About the Research Team

**Devika Bhandari** has lived in Concord, NH since April 2009. She completed her Bachelor’s Degree in Nepal in 2008, and has worked as a Community Health Worker, Medical Interpreter, and Facilitator in NH. She works with Bhutanese families, teaching health literacy classes, facilitating women's leadership sessions, conducting in-home health and hygiene visits, and helping them access and navigate the health care system.

**Shyam Gautam** has lived in Concord, NH since February 2010. He worked as a Program Coordinator and VISTA volunteer at the New England Farmworker’s Council, where he assisted unemployed and underemployed adult and youth farm workers. He completed High School in Nepal in 2008, focusing on mathematics and physics, and is pursuing an Associate’s Degree in Healthcare Management at Manchester Community College.

**Dixya Mishra** lived in Manchester, NH from December 2009 - June 2013, when she married and moved to Michigan. In NH, she was an Outreach Coordinator and Case Manager at the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success, where she worked with teenagers and adults. She completed her Bachelor’s Degree in Accounting in India in 2009, and became a Medical Interpreter in 2013.

**Bishnu Niroula** has lived in Manchester, NH since June 2008. He completed High School in 2009 and has worked as a VISTA volunteer with the New England Farmworker’s Council, where he developed programs and provided case management to out-of-school youth, and as a CAD Technician at Aerialogics. He studied part-time at Manchester Community College while working full-time and in September 2013 will be attending the University of Utah to study biomedical engineering.

**Jessica Santos** has lived in Manchester, NH since September 2006. Her work focuses on designing and implementing community projects in multicultural environments in the U.S. and abroad. She is a PhD Candidate in Social Policy at Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management, and her research interests include critical analysis of social issues, workforce development and diversity, social network analysis, and refugee and immigrant integration.