

If I could, I would create a platform now to help some of the most promising but underserved people in my community. In Dallas, only 25% of Bhutanese refugee students complete high school and move on to attend higher education. They drop out because they don't understand their assignments or have low scores on STAAR tests. They become discouraged at the time it takes to learn English and feel frustrated by a lack of success. They decide that graduation is not a goal that can be achieved. Working, even for low pay, is more attractive than a cycle of failure.

If I could, I would attack this problem with a mentorship program. The program would have group study sessions where high school students receive one-on-one tutoring with college students to learn English, complete homework, and explore colleges. Mentors would assist them in preparing for SAT/ACT exams, finishing college essays, and applying for financial aid and scholarships. We would encourage students entering 9th grade to start a reading routine and take advanced and honors level courses in high school. Eventually, we would move from being seen not as a program or a club, but a family to support one another through tough times and successes.

If I could, I would broaden my reach to ensure that the families of the students are healthy. My program would hold community healthcare sessions on topics like diabetes, hygiene, wellness, mental health, and nutrition. We would partner with refugee resettlement agencies to assist new arrivals in making appointments and understanding terms like "primary care physician" and "insurance". Eventually, I would work with charitable and non-governmental organizations to offer medical attention in refugee camps overseas. When I lived in Nepal our healthcare was almost non-existent, and I lost an older brother due to lack of medical treatment. Poor sanitation was a huge problem and led to my own diagnosis of tuberculosis. Medicine was unavailable, supplies were limited, and I was just a name on a long list of patients. I was given medication after several months but not fully cured; it wasn't until I came to America that I was able to overcome tuberculosis with proper care in a hospital. When western medicine is able to cure an illness, people in poverty should not suffer due to a lack of money or equipment. I do not want others to endure the same challenges and struggles my family has; I want my organization to provide light, hope, and healthy futures.

If I could, I would find the right words to motivate the younger generation. I would help refugee students like me to see that no matter what type of background they come from, they are capable and worth the effort. I would make sure defenseless children have medical care and no other family has to lose a child that could be saved. I want to help create a stronger, better, kinder world, and I can because that change starts with me.

-Sunita Pradhan