



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

BRYCS Youth Conversations: Dipesh, a Bhutanese Teen

In January 2017, Dipesh shared his resettlement journey and experiences with BRYCS staff on what it's like to be an immigrant teen in the United States.

Family Background and Migration Story

I have a great family. They are always supportive of me and motivated to help others. We were a simple family, from southern Bhutan, but we grew up in the refugee camp in Nepal. We value and show utmost respect to others, ourselves, and the environment we live in. It is rooted into our moral values to be kind, helpful, and as generous as possible to other people and even to things that aren't living. The values and traditions we practice come forth from our religion. We consider ourselves to be Hindu, but we have changed somewhat of the religion to best fit our circumstances of being a refugee, in which we understand it's our responsibility to care, to look after, and create a future supporting one another. With these values we survived the ethnic cleansing by the Bhutanese government, and we lived through the horrific conditions of the refugee camp, with no hope, or home. Now we are here in the U.S. and we are very excited to have a life again.

My family was forced out of our home country of Bhutan for having a different religion, language, and being different. My family fled the country for safety leaving behind their home and life that they had that was of peace. They found themselves refuge in Nepal, and my older brother, myself, and young sister were all born there. After eleven and half years in the camp, we were in the process of being resettled. We didn't know where we would be going, but we knew that we had something to look forward to and it had to be better than the life we were living. During the process, the small hut we had burned to ashes with thousands of others, so we lived under a plastic tent with the water rushing around us, and monsoon rains and wind pulling us. In hopes to have a life, our family set our foot forward blindly to the U.S., the country of hopes and dreams, to the land of freedom, and a land that promised a future that we never saw before. We were resettled in Georgia and so our life finally began and the hold button was uplifted.

Life in the U.S.

The feeling of being different never really went away, especially with everyone around you looking at you differently. People looked at you because you are trying to speak a language you never had to use or for dressing differently. What I knew was, you showed respect and in response, got a response that made you question why you had to be born differently than the rest. But after time passed, I learned the value of being different and that it was not just me, but was happening to my parents at their work, to my neighbors and friends. I wish I knew discrimination existed, that being different was looked down upon. That skin color and accents made you the joke—a comedic relief for the community. I was shocked that bullying, segregation, and racial divide existed in the land of dreams. These are the things I learned and wish I knew in the transition.

However, it does not necessarily mean this is my life here with my family. I have grown beyond the nightmares, the nightmare of being different. Instead, I flipped the fear to help the ones around to be better, and grow as an individual. I had one place I called home and it was the refugee camp I grew up in, and it was nothing but a slum, a piece of land—part of nothing, until I got here with my family. And here our family is working to create a life. We are working to be part of the beautiful community that shines with generosity, and cherishes the differences of every individual despite race, religion, language, or the color of their skin.

Before coming here, I also wish I knew more of the culture, what I am expected to do, and how things flowed here in the U.S., especially with school and work. The hardest thing has been finding ways to be myself again. It has been difficult adjusting from the language to the simple motion of walking out of the house. But as hard as it is, it even harder to express who you are as an individual, your ideas, your thoughts, and your love to the ones around. Your joy and happiness feels constricted and feels as if there is always a barrier



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between you and the world and you always feel judged and this is the hardest part. To be myself has been the hardest after coming to the U.S.

The friends and organizations that were loving and interested and did not seem to notice the differences have been the biggest help. They always motivated me and protected me with their care, love, and with their efforts. I will not forget, and I will probably fill countless pages, but they all know who they are. Everyone around me are the best thing that happened to me and made me feel like I belonged. They have made my experience, as well as my family's, feel easier and gave hope that I can be safe and can have a life here.

Advice for Parents

It's worse than the refugee camp. No, I am kidding! But it can be very difficult especially at the beginning because your shields are not constructed yet for being different, and it will take time to get use to but you will need to look past and need to look for educational opportunities and way to stay together, as teenagers might get distant, because of their experiences. Parents should find ways to keep the fun in the family as you had in the camps and stay together to keep your dreams. If you show that you are strong and willing to take the life that is ahead, this land offers a great path.

Advice for Teachers

There were a couple of friends, teachers, and organizations who helped me from my middle school to high school. They motivated me and helped me get involved in teams, clubs, and activities, which made it easier to learn and be part of something. I think the only advice I can give is to ask questions, and take an interest, an honest interest in a refugee, because it does go a long way for the kid. And it might change your mind—you could hear what you never expected because it's a life we have lived and we are trying to make it here and it's very difficult. Getting a little extension of help makes it easier, just offer more help, the best you can.

Advice for the Community

We come in peace, but for real, we are only looking for home, and life where we don't have to worry about our safety every second of our life...where we don't have to hold onto a piece of a plastic to have a roof for the night. We are looking for a future and to be part of something where we can finally promise a future without lying to the young ones. We are different, we value different things, we celebrate something different, we eat different, we look different, from clothing to our skin. We carry an accent, or might not understand the "quick" language because we never knew it existed and now we are learning to make it. Please be open and care, and make us feel like we are part of the community. Love the differences in one another— it's as much of a shock to you as it is to us to be sent off in hopes to have a home in a land that we know nothing about.

Advice for Immigrant Teens

Never forget to be yourself! Take things that might improve you and the ones around you, and don't forget the family values and experiences that helped shape who you are. You will be fine and come out stronger. Be friendly and open and try to share your experiences and it will connect you to the ones around you hopefully.

Future Goals

I am currently attending university, studying Physics and Astrophysics. I hope to graduate in a couple years and go to graduate school to pursue a PhD in Physics and hopefully become a Theoretical Physicist. Hopefully, I can make a difference in this ever changing world and show what is right in front of us, as a physicist and as an individual, to care for the lives of each and every individual, while appreciating the things that shape and allow for our existence.

Orange Mist

(short writing about the fire in the refugee camp)

Pitch black night, and tonight even the moon is too shy to show its face. Evening races away, as the night blurs and engulfs the camp in total darkness. As if it was the end, the bright lively, orange glow of the evening sun runs away at an instant. The flashes of striking orangey bright strikes to blind my eyes, as the warmth from the far back is getting to me, as I race away. I was told to run and get to safety and so I lead my five-year-old sister, three-year-old cousin, and my grandma out of the camp away with the fleeing hundreds. I wanted to stay but I knew I had to run, so in the path made by the flashes, I put the young ones' hands on to my sweaty hands and I pull with all into the abyss. Time pass and it passes; I am still running away for my brother, my dad, and my mom who I remember pointed me away from the hypnotizing warmth that was growing. Now I feel as if I have gone far, still moving, but in the far the warmth has reached me. It pulls me, and I turn, oh what did I see. There it goes, time frozen... the dark center of my life shrinks, to nothing. The blinding peel of the surface of the setting sun filled my reality, as it glowed along with thousands staring back at that moments, like flashes of glow from within, that lost everything at a spark of this orange glow, as I feel the warmth race down my face away...away, away from its spring.

Memory or Fear

(short writing about a moment after the fire in the refugee camp)

I remember, waking up to the flickering dances of the candle light. Or so I thought, because the light was not dancing but struggling to hold on the cotton against the cool monsoon wind. I can hear the panic rumble in with the thundering flash. As I stand myself to understand the situation from the damp ground. I can now really hear the plastic top, the so called roof crying for help. My dad holds on the long extending hands of the roof, as my mom tries to help the fading light that keeps us separate from darkness outside. A gust of water rushes into the containment. Against all forces, my blood blindly rushes, bouncing off of my skin as they make their way up, all the way up to my head. I can feel my cool failing heart, as it overheats sure in fear of losing my home, my family, my life as it becomes clear as the sporadic rumble of the sky tells us it is not stopping. The house still holds on for dear life as now my uncle, grandma, aunt, and my mom leaves the candle sitting. They all grab on to poles and strings to keep the containment from crumbling. And the night continued, I was afraid, I could feel the natural fight the unnatural of humans. But it was only a brief time a mere second in the continuous beating we received every sleepless night. I find a corner to hide so I may escape the cold rain that follows, as school is tomorrow and I zone off into the distant. This is the norm of living and my early memory.