

Graduations, New Beginnings – and Life After Lockdown!



Olgapuri Children’s Village senior boys and girls pose for lighthearted group photos following the *tika* ceremony at NYF’s Tihar 2021 celebration. **These kids have grown up with NYF—and with each other, as a close-knit group of siblings and friends.** Each has a unique personality, as well as a personal story of heartbreak and loss during their developmental years. Watching them blossom into healthy, thriving young adults is a joy to everyone on the Olgapuri staff. Many of these kids have now graduated high school and are preparing to launch into life on their own, but they’ll always have their NYF family to encourage and strengthen them. At NYF, we are so grateful for the generous support and love that make these transformations possible.

Healthy childhood development requires a stable foundation at home: love, protection, attentive guidance, and appropriate food, clothes, and healthcare.

Too often, whether due to natural disasters, family circumstances, or other reasons, children find themselves without this crucial stability and safety. **At NYF, we’re determined to find these children and help them thrive.**

Our Shelter-focused programs—**Kinship Care** and **Olgapuri Children’s Village**—keep family-centered living at the heart of each decision made. Kids in our care are ensured safety and stability throughout their childhoods, loving attention and guidance, educational opportunities, nutritious food, regular health care, and more. And once a child is in our care, NYF **will never abandon them.**

NYF has been providing **Shelter** for Nepali children experiencing housing insecurity since 1992, when we opened J House, our Kathmandu boy's home. K House, a neighboring home for girls, opened in 1994. The children who joined us back in the early 1990s have grown into flourishing adults who remember their time with us with fondness and often return to visit. These young people are active participants in their communities, successful in their careers, and joyfully starting healthy families of their own.

Thank you for helping us give these opportunities to so many of Nepal's children!

Kinship Care

In Nepali cultures, family networks typically provide a safety net for family members in crisis, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, adult siblings, and others stepping in when children are left without parents.

Studies have shown that this is the ideal scenario for children in these situations. This approach, known in the research as "kinship care," is much better for children's healing and long-term wellbeing than being placed with strangers or in institutional care, provided these relatives can provide a stable, loving environment that meets the child's developmental needs.

But what happens when loving, willing, emotionally stable adults simply don't have the financial capacity to care for one or more additional children? What if the child has a special health need with high associated costs?

Too many of these families struggle with the thought that these children may be better off in an orphanage, where the quality of care varies sharply and may be quite damaging, but where they are confident the children will not starve. These are decisions no loving families should have to make.

That's where NYF's **Kinship Care** program comes in. This program supports loving, supportive extended families in caring for these children by providing small stipends to ensure these children are safe, well-fed, receiving necessary medical care, and most of all, attending school regularly. Our social



Mina*, 9, is a bubbly, joyful, creative kid—and a very gifted student. In the spring of 2022, she finished the 6th grade at her school in Bhaktapur District, way ahead of kids her own age.

When she was just a baby, Mina's father passed away. Soon, her mother found a new husband. Unfortunately, this new man wasn't interested in caring for another man's daughter.

Mina's mother left her in the care of her own father—Mina's grandfather. Mina hasn't seen much of her mother since.

Though the family didn't have much, they loved Mina deeply. She brings tremendous joy to their household. When NYF learned of Mina's case, our team realized right away that with a bit of financial support, this family was the absolute best place for little Mina to grow up.

They've been receiving a Kinship Care stipend for several years now. Every time our social workers check in, Mina's grandfather is ready with more stories of his granddaughter's love of dancing and her latest art projects!

workers keep in touch with each family, ensuring the needs of the children are being met and making any adjustments as needed.



When Sushma*, now 18, was 11 years old, the massive 7.8 magnitude Gorkha earthquake struck and changed her family's life forever.

Sushma had already lost her father in early childhood. When the earthquake hit her home in Bardiya District in 2015, Sushma's hard-working single mother suffered a serious spinal injury—and could no longer care for herself and her young child.

Sushma's maternal grandparents took the two into their home, grateful that their daughter and granddaughter had survived. But the family had never been well-off, and now, with Sushma and her mother dependent on them for survival, it was uncertain how they could make ends meet.

NYF learned about this family soon after the earthquake, when our Kinship Care program swelled to accommodate so many families in similar circumstances all over Nepal. Sushma's mother and grandparents were incredibly relieved to discover there was help for families like them, who wanted nothing more than to provide good opportunities to their child.

This year, Sushma completed the 12th grade! She focused her final years of high school on business management and is hoping to start college soon. NYF will stick with her, supporting her educational pursuits until Sushma is self-sufficient!

Sushma's family is so proud of all she's accomplished—and so are we!

Keeping a child within their social support network minimizes loss (so children who have lost parents have not lost their entire families, their friends, and their familiar environments as well) as well as maintaining emotional connections and stability. This solution is the least disruptive to a child's development. For this reason, NYF strives to keep children in Kinship Care wherever possible.

Between July 2021 and June 2022, **204** children (and their families!) were supported through Kinship Care—many of them siblings who may have been separated in institutional care.

Here are just a few of the Kinship Care families your loving support helped keep together this year!

Thank you for helping make this possible!



Olgapuri Children's Village

Sometimes, despite everyone's best intentions, extended family support is not possible for a child experiencing loss, neglect, housing insecurity, or other hardships. For these children, NYF built **Olgapuri Children's Village**.

Olgapuri is at the heart of NYF's programming, providing services in all four of our core mission areas: Education, Health, Shelter, and Freedom. The children here (approximately 80 at a time) come from diverse backgrounds, but each of them has experienced trauma, loss, and the absence of stable parental support. **At Olgapuri, NYF ensures that each child receives the holistic family-style care they need to grow into their dreams and realize their great individual potential.**

Once again, we are pleased to report that Olgapuri Children's Village was among the safest places in Nepal for young people living in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members and all children over age 5 are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and NYF leadership continues to monitor the evolving situation as restrictions shift and variants emerge.



The kids pictured on this page are just a few of the newest arrivals to Olgapuri. The youngest newcomer is only a year old and comes to us as part of a sibling group. We are so grateful to be able to care for children experiencing some of the toughest circumstances, providing a stable, loving home environment that honors the bonds between siblings and the necessity of close, nurturing attachments between developing children.

Olgapuri experienced a great deal of change during 2021 and early 2022 due to many high school graduates during the year (13 total!). Plus, three teenagers were able to return to their families due to improved circumstances at home.

Between July 2021 and June 2022, a total of 92 children called Olgapuri home (though never more than 80 at one time). It's been quite a whirlwind of launching and arriving!

Fourteen new kids arrived during this period, with more arriving during the last half of 2022.

NYF is cautious, in times when many students have graduated, to ensure the warm, stable Olgapuri culture remains in place. This care is crucial for maintaining the balanced, reliable



“family” atmosphere that is so foundational here, avoiding the upheaval that is unfortunately so common in children’s homes.

For this reason, we accept only a few new children each month (around 3 at the most), allowing them to adjust to Olgapuri, and allowing house parents to develop a personal rapport while their new “siblings” get to know them as individuals.

Education & Academic Performance

Though COVID is still a reality throughout the world and conditions may change quickly, the kids at Olgapuri have spent most of this time able to attend school in person. They’re doing very well!

Olgapuri’s young residents are enrolled at some of the best public and private schools in Nepal: Adarsha School, Phoenix School, and Ullens School. On Olgapuri campus, there are several additional extracurricular options the children may choose to enjoy: music lessons, self-defense classes, yoga, and meditation sessions. Most of the kids take part in at least one of these options, and our house parents think the activities are helping the kids concentrate better on their studies, too!

This spring, once again, **every Olgapuri child moved forward into the next grade** (with one unique situation, described on the next page). Three students sat for Nepal’s notorious “Iron Gate” exam, which every 10th grader must pass in order to move into 11th grade. **All three of our kids passed the test, and one even earned an A!** (Throughout Nepal, only about 50% of students pass this rigorous test each year.)

COVID-era academic testing scheduling has resulted in an unusual graduation schedule, but our students haven’t let that deter them. **In December 2021 we celebrated 13 graduations!**

One boy secured the highest score in his school, ending high school as valedictorian and moving directly into a bachelor’s degree program in Business at the Ace Institute of Management in Kathmandu. And a one girl achieved the same honor, completing high school as the valedictorian at a different school and moving on to pursue a Bachelor of Legislative Law degree!



NYF strives to give the Olgapuri kids a real family life experience—and sometimes, that means the parents get to dance!

House parents performed for the children during the Children’s Day celebration at Olgapuri this year. From left to right: Shreemaya Shrestha (Senior Girls), Pushpa Thapa (Junior Girls), Samana Amatya (Junior Boys), Dipak Raj Onta (Junior Boys), Bishnu Raj Rana (Junior Girls).



Pradeep*, 12, was born in Gorkha District, northwest of Kathmandu. When his parents died, his aunt took him in and did her best to care for him—but she was not able to care for Pradeep and ensure he was being educated, even with a Kinship Care stipend. When Nepal’s COVID lockdowns were lifted, Pradeep moved to Olgapuri. He arrived in December 2021 and NYF’s teams worked quickly to help him get settled in the Junior Boy’s House and at his new school.

After NYF spoke with Pradeep’s teachers in Gorkha District and performed some initial assessments, Pradeep was enrolled in the 4th grade at Phoenix School in Lalitpur, beginning midway through the school year.

When Pradeep’s grades began coming back, his house parents noticed that he seemed to be struggling a great deal with the material. This isn’t unusual for new arrivals to Olgapuri—in fact, it’s so common that it can be difficult to tell, at first, whether a child is struggling in school due to trauma or stress, knowledge level, or raw ability. Often, students who have just arrived at Olgapuri will experience a sharp dip in academic performance at first—followed quickly by a vast improvement as life becomes more stable and they can focus better on their schoolwork.

But that didn’t seem to be happening for Pradeep. Instead, he was coming home from school each day discouraged that he needed more help with his homework than everyone else.

After the first few months had passed, the Junior Boys’ house parents visited Phoenix School to meet with Pradeep’s teacher and discuss his progress. During this discussion, it became clear to everyone that based on his familiarity and unfamiliarity with different subjects, Pradeep should have been placed in the 3rd grade, not the 4th, when he first arrived. Given this realization, the team realized Pradeep had been performing quite admirably with advanced material!

How could such an error happen? Although he had always been enrolled in school when living with his aunt, Pradeep had never been able to attend his classes regularly for a full year. So although he was performing at a 4th grade level in some ways, he had also never been taught crucial foundational skills that 4th graders rely on to perform their work. No wonder Pradeep was so discouraged!

Pradeep’s house parents and the school decided to keep Pradeep in the same classroom for the remainder of the school year for the sake of social stability. But they would hold him back to attend the 4th grade again next year—*all the way through* this time!

During the remainder of this school year, Pradeep was reassured that it was no wonder he had been struggling, and that the adults around him were sorry for the error. He wasn’t required to take the big, standardized test for 4th graders. They would use this time, and the summer, to track down key foundational skills that Pradeep was missing—almost like an academic Scavenger Hunt!

Every time a new item was identified, Pradeep’s house parents and older Olgapuri “siblings” would help him learn and practice it. Pradeep was reassured by the help from his Olgapuri siblings. Most of them had experienced something similar, in one subject or another, and could tell him stories of how they had caught up to their peers—and so would he.

By the end of the summer, Pradeep was ready to start the 4th grade from the beginning. He’s still getting used to school, and still finding those missing pieces here and there—but his performance is improving all the time and he’s feeling much happier with school in general.

Even better: he has made wonderful new friends who are willing to help him succeed, and he knows his house parents are truly paying attention to his needs and his wellness. Here at Olgapuri, even when things are tough, Pradeep knows he is part of a loving family he can depend on.

As always, Olgapuri house parents continue to provide loving guidance to each child and remain in close contact with schools and instructors to ensure the best learning outcomes for these children. Trauma and instability can be devastating to a child’s ability to learn effectively and master new concepts and skills. **We are so proud that here at Olgapuri, our young students have the tools and support they need to achieve in their journeys as learners.**

As Olgapuri children approach their late teens, they are provided with guidance concerning continuing education, career paths, and other opportunities. The vast majority choose to continue into college, and these students are moved automatically into NYF’s Scholarship Program for the duration of their studies, with all housing and tuition costs covered. A few graduates prefer to pursue a skilled trade, and these students are supported as well, through NYF’s Vocational Education & Career Counseling program.

No matter their chosen path, NYF is committed to supporting each Olgapuri child until they have achieved self-sufficiency.

Health & Psychological Support

Ensuring healthy growth and development is a major focus at Olgapuri, whether for children experiencing routine bumps, bruises, and the sniffles, or for those with special health care needs. Fresh, balanced meals are prepared on-site with the support of NYF’s team of nutritionists (supplemented with delicious organic milk, eggs, and vegetables from the Olgapuri farm!). House parents encourage regular exercise and support age-appropriate hygiene habits.

A pediatrician visits Olgapuri once a month for check-ups and dental care. **The Olgapuri children as a group are in excellent health.**



In winter 2021, an Olgapuri staff member gathers fresh tomatoes from the greenhouses installed here last year. These greenhouses allow for greater yields from the Olgapuri farm year-round—which in turn means more fresh produce for the children living here on campus. The farm provides learning opportunities to children interested in understanding agriculture, and it also helps NYF save on food costs—contributing to a culture of sustainability from top to bottom.

Olgapuri has been among the safest places in Nepal for children during the COVID-19 pandemic. We made it nearly two years without a single case among the children! Unfortunately, early in 2022, 4 children and 2 staff were infected with COVID (likely due to in-person schooling). During the early summer, another 3 kids caught the virus. These individuals, whose symptoms were all mild, were isolated from the others and cared for by our Nutritional Rehabilitation Home nursing team, and **all recovered quickly.**

As of August 2022, all Olgapuri children aged 5 and up have been vaccinated against COVID-19.



At another greenhouse, dark leafy greens are ready to be harvested. These greens are rich in essential vitamins and minerals, helping ensure strong development for the kids in our care.

At NYF, we try not to linger too long on the traumas the kids we serve have experienced. But a crucial part of a healthy childhood—and an important part of safe shelter—is an environment that supports the expression and processing of life’s most difficult experiences. Towards that end, **Ankur Counseling Center has continued providing excellent individual counseling, group counseling, and other care**, including group workshops on age-appropriate issues like stress management, appropriate boundaries, and more.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this care continued over the internet, and was augmented with additional support to help the children deal in an age-appropriate manner with the anxieties of living through this once-in-a-lifetime event. **Sessions are now occurring in person once more.**

Ankur has also provided care for Olgapuri staff members, including regular advice on responding lovingly and appropriately to any behavioral issues that may arise due to a child’s history of experiencing loss, betrayal, or abuse. Creating a stable bond of trust *early* is crucial to helping children develop into healthy adults—and this requires a unique blend of empathy, compassion, and firm boundaries that flex appropriately as a child ages. Ankur’s support allows our house parents to cope with their own inevitable frustrations and disappointments while ensuring that each child receives the loving, patient parenting he or she needs to become his or her best self.



A group of junior boys play Sorry! on a rainy afternoon. Kids at Olgapuri have access to Western board games as well as traditional Nepali games, sports, and other pastimes. As in any family, care is taken to help each child develop good sportsmanship skills.

Recreation & Culture

House parents have continued making great efforts to provide enrichment activities for the Olgapuri kids and to make festivals fun, meaningful, and memorable.

Each year, Olgapuri holds a farewell celebration for outgoing children and a welcome party for newcomers. A joint birthday party is held each spring. Every fall, Olgapuri Day commemorates the day the village first opened its doors. Nepali holidays are honored, including Dashain, Tihar, Yomari Purnima, Holi, and more. Occasionally, these celebrations are held jointly with other local children's homes, to deepen the sense of community.

Usually, many Olgapuri children visit extended family for Dashain and Tihar, two of Nepal's biggest festivals, each occurring in the fall. Unfortunately, this was again impossible in fall 2021—so NYF arranged many activities for these celebrations and enjoyed feasts with traditional delicacies, ensuring moments for celebration, even in strange times.



Welcome to Olgapuri! In the early months of 2022, the Olgapuri family threw a special welcome party for new siblings! Each child is given flowers, specially-prepared sweets, and *tika* on their foreheads—a traditional Nepali blessing from one's elders. No one comes to Olgapuri without having experienced some form of trauma, loss, and neglect. Many have had parents who were unable to provide the personal attention and validation every kid needs to thrive. That's why it's so important to introduce these kids to Olgapuri with celebration, warmth, and assurances that here, **they are family**.



Olgapuri kids perform the Deusi-Bhailo in the crisp autumn air on Olgapuri campus in 2020 (2021's event was so fun, no one remembered to snap photos!). Other children dance nearby, performing in unison. The kids couldn't bear to miss the fun of this annual celebration, so they broadcast it on Facebook live for neighbors and other children's homes to enjoy!

At Tihar in early November 2021, the Olgapuri Children's Club, run by the kids themselves, organized a virtual "Deusi-Bhailo" event to broadcast through Facebook live. Deusi-Bhailo is a beloved Tihar activity practiced in Nepal and some parts of India.

Groups of children travel from house to house, dancing and singing two special songs: *Bhailo* sung by girls, and *Deusi* sung by boys. After the performance, those in each house give snacks, sweets, and money to the children, and the kids give blessings for prosperity in the coming year.

Note: Dashain and Tihar 2022 occurred after this reporting period, but you'll be delighted to hear that this festival season was a tremendous success! COVID-19 conditions were safe enough for kids to travel to visit their extended families, parties were held on Olgapuri campus, and the annual Deusi-Bhailo fun occurred out in the community! For more, including gorgeous photos and videos take by house parents, visit our blog post at <https://www.nepalyouthfoundation.org/festival-season-2022/>!

Kids look forward to these performances all year, and adults in Nepal look back fondly on the memories of singing and dancing with friends, enjoying sweets, and collecting a bit of spending money. It is not uncommon to see adults also performing Deusi-Bhailo at Tihar, usually while fundraising for a good cause.

The Olgapuri Children's Club used their virtual Deusi-Bhailo to raise money for their club activities—and they raised the equivalent of \$600! Since then, they've organized a few other fundraising events, including an arts and crafts fair and a musical performance by the kids taking music classes.



At Dashain (in mid-October 2021), elders use special *jamara* shoots grown in darkness to share blessings of prosperity. These blessings are bestowed upon the younger generation as part of the long celebrations of this family-focused festival. At Olgapuri, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dashain is a time of family fun and close connection between generations—full of gift-giving, loving moments of laughter, and joyful memories.



Earlier this year, the junior kids went on a field trip to the zoo—so much fun, after 18 months in lockdown!

And recreation isn't just for special occasions!

During the first half of 2022, the kids have been able to organize events with other local children's homes, sharing the fun and connection more widely—and they've enjoyed going on field trips beyond the Olgapuri campus as well. Field trips include hiking trails, picnics, and even visits to the zoo.

In the spring, the kids participated in the Sertsang Sports Meet, organized by another Kathmandu children's home, and some of our children won medals in various events!



Many of the kids on Olgapuri campus enjoy sports like basketball, soccer, and more. They really love the convenience of having so many peers close by who can form up into teams—even in lockdown! Some of the junior boys are practicing their soccer here in a lighthearted match while other kids watch.

Shelter-Focused Staff

Our global team is inspired by and grateful to our remarkable Kinship Care and Olgapuri Children’s Village staff members for the ways they have prioritized the health, safety, and emotional wellness of the children receiving care through NYF.



Academic Education Team, 2021. *Left to right:* Umesh Raj Regmi (Program Coordinator of Education & Youth Empowerment), **Ram Babu Rai, (Kinship Care Program Officer)**, Jitendra Thapa (Assistant Manager / College Scholarships), Reeta Mahat (Program Officer for Day School & Scholarships for Students with Disabilities)

Because **Kinship Care** is closely tied to each child’s education and is administered similarly to a scholarship, the program is managed by the same Kathmandu-based NYF team handling academic education. Ram Babu Rai (*above, in pink*) is the Kinship Care Program Officer. He helps receive and assess referrals from partnering groups in multiple regions of Nepal, identifying children and families in need of assistance. Each family’s story is unique, and Ram Babu is careful to ensure he understands the specific needs of each child—and that these needs are being met once NYF support begins. He is also tasked with making the occasional tough recommendation that a Kinship Care child be moved to Olgapuri Children’s Village, which is never taken lightly.

During the year, Ram Babu spends a great deal of time on the road, personally visiting the families supported by Kinship Care stipends. We are so grateful for his personal attention to each of these families, and his empathetic commitment to the wellness of each child in NYF's care.

Meanwhile, **Olgapuri Children's Village** is the success that it is because of the loving individuals pictured below—the four sets of house parents, the additional caregivers assisting in the junior houses, the cooks, grounds crew, and custodians, our program officer, and the driver tasked with providing transportation for field trips and more.



Olgapuri Children's Village Staff, taken late 2021. From left to right: Bishnu Raj Rana, Jr. Girls House Parent; Bhim Shrestha, Sr. Girls House Parent; Pushpa Thapa, Jr. Girls House Parent; Bimala Thakuri, Jr. Boys Caretaker; Saraswoti Sundas, Custodian; Govinda Rana Magar, Program Assistant; Tika Phagami, Jr. Girls Caretaker; Samana Amatya, Jr. Boys House Parent; Dipak Raj Onta, Jr. Boys House Parent; Pabitra Bhujel, Cook & Custodian; Shreemaya Shrestha, Sr. Girls House Parent; Hem Prasad Shrestha, House Parent; Binu Shrestha, Sr. Boys House Parent; Navin Kumar Timalisina, Program Officer; Sita Tamang, Cook & Custodian; Krishna Karki, Cook & Custodian; Khelmati Oli, Cook & Custodian; Ganesh Adhikari, Driver

Many of these experts spent the entire duration of the COVID-19 lockdown period enclosed within the campus walls alongside the children—even missing out on visiting their own relatives during this time. They took on tremendous workloads, managing distance learning for 80 children, providing on-campus entertainment, and maintaining a healthy, joyful, positive outlook during this time of uncertainty. We are truly in awe of their commitment to the children in NYF's care.

Dhanyabad!

Thank you for all you have done to make this incredible work possible.

The children we serve know that they are valued by generous donors—many of whom they will never meet. This remarkable knowledge becomes part of each life story. **Thank you for this transformative gift.** We look forward to sharing more in the years to come!



New Year's Eve 2021 offered an opportunity for the kids to enjoy outdoor cooking while waiting for midnight. With music playing and fires supervised by house parents, the night was great for chatting, laughing, and enjoying sweets. Who will make it to midnight?