Displaced children in post-quake emergency

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DISPLACED children are still without permanent housing in Nepal's most isolated regions, months after devastating earthquakes destroyed homes and families.

Nepalese authorities are still finding abandoned, parentless and trafficked victims more than three months after two devastating earthquakes killed more than 8,800 people nationwide.

One provider in the Dhading District is giving emergency shelter to the most vulnerable displaced children in the remote and hilly region.

More will need emergency housing according to UK-based provider Our Sansar which built and operates the only transit home available in the capital Dhading Besi. "We know there are more children in isolated villages and trafficking has only increased since the quakes, so we are preparing to care for more children," Our Sansar director Julia Krepska said.

"We are looking to provide help for up to 100 children by the end of the year, if it is needed."

A state of emergency was lifted nation-wide last month but there were still many children, especially in the most isolated areas, in need of transitional homing."We need to work with authorities when we assess and take in children, but they only have a certain amount of resources as well and there are places we just haven't been able to get to," Krepska said.

According to Krepska children were sleeping in tents with police officers providing protection before Our Sansar was asked by authorities to start the project. "We are here where there were no others, so it's very important to be here," Krepska said. Working directly with authorities was important said Krepska, although some bureaucratic processes could take frustrating amounts of time, especially with stricter child-movement rules designed to combat trafficking, in the post-earthquake period. "It's a big deal, not many people are able to work directly with the Government – we've found the authorities really good - I think they genuinely want to help the kids, and we are lightening their burden also," Krepska said.

Staffing at the site includes a social worker and education officer to assess children's needs and ensure a transition to permanent housing is well structured. When Our Sansar staff take care of a child, they then work immediately to find a permanent living situation and any other necessities they may need.

This included tracking down family, finding permanent housing in an established children's home and recently, finding employment for a mother of four children who were not coping after the quake.

It is a transit home, which means children in desperate situations who have been found by local authorities are brought here to be rehomed. It is only a temporary situation for the children and Our Sansar is working very hard to find the families of those displaced, trafficked or affected during the post-earthquake period.

Our Sansar was able to provide the housing quickly through connections already established from 6 years of work in Nepal providing assistance to street children in Birgunj through establishing a children's home there, and education in other areas of Nepal by providing teacher training in local village schools.

CASE STUDY:

Lila's story

Lila was found abandoned next to a creek at just three-years-old, her belly distended from malnutrition in Nepal's Dahding Besi.

Now she bounds around a series of bamboo huts in a transit home provided by English-based charity Our Sansar, keeping staff busy with games, punctuated by her loud laugh and infectious smile. Local authorities told Our Sansar staff the girl was abandoned because her mother re-married and the new husband refused her child.

She appears unaware of her uncertain fate as she runs in between the grown-ups legs.

This is not to become her permanent home.

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Our Sansar provides a transit home for children of the entire district, which means when a child enters the care of staff they immediately begin working to find a permanent home.

"Ideally we want to place kids back with family, but this is not always possible, so we look for a legitimate care home or look at moving them to our own home in another district," Our Sansar director Julia Krepska said.

"We work to give the children whatever they need, sometimes its help with their family, like in the case of two children we have now, we are working to help their mum into employment so she is able to support them." It is the only provider delivering this work in the district and have received children from a number of backgrounds. This has included some who were taken by child traffickers and abandoned children like Lila.

"We couldn't really believe her story at first," Krepska said. "She is not really in our age range of what we provide for, but there was nowhere else for her to go, we are the only ones doing this here." As Lila watched the boys play cricket on the dirt helipad near the transit home, staff talked of how many more children like her are in isolated villages in the hills surrounding the valley town.

"We're expecting a lot more," Krepska said.

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