**The Details: Project & Purpose**

My project is defined by stories of the Tibetan people. I wanted to hear them, know them, and give them a voice, assuming Tibetans wanted to tell them. I wanted the people there to direct and guide me and my project, which they organically did. When they asked why I had come, I answered, "To talk to you all."

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**The Basics: People & Place**

Dharamsala is a village in the mountainous North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The area is home to His Holiness the Dalai Lama (HHDL), the Tibetan government in exile, and numerous Tibetan refugees.

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**The Action: Process & Participation**

I partnered with LHA Charitable Trust: Institute for Social Work & Education, which arranged a homestay with a Tibetan family and provided volunteer ESL opportunities. LHA is a grassroots NPO that provides a range of services to the Tibetan community in Dharamsala. Through encounters at LHA, I met many Tibetan refugees (monks, nuns, lay people), who introduced me to more, and so on. I joined many of them in their daily life activities and excursions, listening to their life story, thoughts on the Western presence in the area, perspectives on China, and the role of Tibetan Buddhism in their lives. I simply listened to them and enjoyed their company (and helped them practice English conversation). When asked what they wanted, they said for the world to know their story and to know "the Tibet situation."

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**The End: Perspective & Promise**

This project shed light on a community that feels forgotten by the rest of the world. It brought to light their every day lives and provided illumination on what is sustaining them and helping them cope. It evidenced the strength, hope, and resiliency of the human spirit and of a people dedicated to their leader and culture. It has altered and expanded my perspective, and it will hopefully do so for others, too. In terms of academic deliverables, this experience culminated in a very detailed, somewhat ethnographic account of my encounters and the various micro (e.g., intrapersonal factors, such as religious practice), mezzo (e.g., community organizations, services), and macro (e.g., Chinese-Tibet relations, Indian government, HHDL) factors affecting Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, India. In addition, it culminated in this poster.

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**Connections**

**Competencies**
- 4 – Engage diversity and difference in practice.
- 5 – Advance human rights and social and economic justice.
- 9 – Respond to contexts that shape practice.
- 10a – Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

**Coursework**
- Foundation: 500, 502, 513, 521, 560
- Specialized: IP with Adults, IP with Groups
- Other: Eval in SW; trauma, attachment mini-courses

**Career Carryovers**
- The primacy of cultural humility
- The value of physical presence and quality time with, genuine interest in, and intentional listening to target community
- The need to tell one’s story

**Lessons & Advice**
- Know the community prior
- Follow your gut
- Full immersion, not partial
- Be a ‘yes’ person
- Roll with all of the punches
- Allow for an organic, free-flowing experience rather than an overly structured one

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**The Acknowledgements: Partners & Pals**

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**Reflection**

There are a variety of services for receiving and resettling Tibetans escaping from China. There are schools for Tibetan children, monasteries for monks and nuns, and institutions for preserving and propagating Tibet’s language, culture, and (hi)story.

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**The Tibetan Refugees in Dharamsala, India:**

**A Mini-Ethnography**

John Mark Wiginton

University of Michigan School of Social Work

**Tashi Delek!!**