CAMP SISTERHOOD
STRENGTH, COMMUNITY AND LAUGHTER
IN POST-EARTHQUAKE NEPAL.

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AURA FREEDOM
INTERNATIONAL
A 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked Nepal on April 25, 2015, bringing the country to its knees. Then, on May 12, another one. In fact, the ground is still shaking.

Millions were displaced and hundreds of thousands made homeless.
VULNERABLE.

Women and girls became more vulnerable overnight and violence against them increased as a result.

For women, ‘relief’ means so much more than blankets and rice.

_Something_ needed to be done.
Quickly, Aura Freedom International and local partners Apeiron designed and launched a project to protect and uphold the dignity and security of Nepal’s displaced women and girls.
A TRAVELLING SHELTER.

The project?

A Female Friendly Space ("FFS") that has been serving thousands of women and their children in rural displacement camps since June 2015.

A roving women’s shelter, if you will.
HARD-TO-REACH.

Serving women in some of the most isolated camps.
CUSTOM MADE.

Designed for women, by women.

Shaped by visits to camps and conversations with families trying to pick up the pieces.

Managed by people who care and run by local staff on the ground, they themselves displaced.

Launched in the name of humanity and equality.
“What exactly happens in these Female Friendly Spaces?” is a common question.

Our favourite answer: Miracles.
DAILY MIRACLES.

Support, information-sharing, human rights awareness, literacy training, trauma counselling, reporting of violence, access to services, access to justice, empowerment workshops and 24-hour protection. That is what happens, mixed with a daily dose of laughter, dancing and joy.

Yes, there is laughter even here, amongst those who have lost it all.

You see, that is the miracle.
The shelters are packed every single day with women and their children.

In the camps, The Female Friendly Spaces have become a point of reference for countless women and girls and the local staff have been empowered by their new jobs. The men of the communities have also thanked the staff for being there.
THIRSTY.

For knowledge. For new skills. To make things and know things.

These women are intelligent and creative and want to contribute to their communities.

The FFS provides them with opportunities to do just that.
FIRSTS.

Many of the women in the shelters are learning things for the first time.

Whether it be writing their name, or learning that it is illegal for a man to rape his wife.

Everyday, the Female Friendly Spaces buzz with curiosity.
DISCOVERY.

“We never knew we had these rights. As women, we are told to endure abuse for the sake of everyone else. But, now I know there is another way.”
STORIES.

“I lost my daughter in the earthquake. Now, I must take care of my granddaughter, but I don’t have a lot of money.”

The trauma remains, but life moves on. After all, women are experts in pushing forward even after the worst tragedies, for the sake of family and community.
“Before you came, we were sitting in the corners of our tents, waiting for the day to end. Now, we have somewhere to go and things to do.”

The elder women of the camps visit our spaces everyday. Sometimes, they just listen. Other times, they get involved. Often, they share their wisdom.
NEVER TOO OLD.

Many of the elders were not schooled as children, and are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives.
CAMP LIFE.

Conditions are cramped, medical care is lacking, weather is volatile and food and fuel are scarce as a result of an ‘ unofficial’ blockade by India.
MULTI-TASKING.

The strength, determination and willingness of the women in the camp to better their circumstances leaves us breathless everyday.
The highest at risk for abuse and exploitation are girls.

Our Female Friendly Spaces provide girls with the educational programs and the tools they need to protect themselves. Some consider this bold…to speak about abuse and sexual violence so openly…but we simply see it as a matter of survival. No progress is made without upsetting the status quo.
Besides, it is every girl’s human right to be free from violence and have ownership of her own body, is it not?
BREAKING CYCLES.

Child marriage, abuse and oppression are a reality for many girls in the camps…but cycles can change.

Knowledge is power.
SISTERHOOD.

It’s what makes the project sustainable and powerful. Fostering sisterhood is just one of the ways we are challenging the stigma of gender-based violence. Acceptance is a new concept for many here, but it doesn’t take long to catch on.
WOMEN: THE BACKBONE.
EQUALITY. EMPOWERMENT. EDUCATION. JUSTICE.

AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL
WWW.AURAFREEDOM.ORG

Photos by Mandy Glinsbockel on assignment for Aura Freedom in Nepal.
FEMALE FRIENDLY SPACES - THE PROJECT:

The roving FFS designed by Aura Freedom International, with local partners, brings awareness to gender-based violence within the camp and beyond through a strong, yet sensitive IEC campaign that includes:

- human rights and gender-based violence awareness
- life-skill and literacy training
- empowering sports programs for adolescent girls
- creation and training of a GBV Watchgroup / Committee
- other activities specifically designed for women and girls in Nepal

The space also serves as a female-only protection shelter with 24-hour security and a referral agency with gender-trained staff who refer females of all ages to health, legal and other services available to them through our collaboration with local NGOs, Police and other government agencies. The FFS is a point of reference for the women and girls of the camp and sheds light on violence against women for both men and women alike.

Each Female Friendly Space employs a zero-tolerance policy in regards to gender-based violence with a strong focus on human rights and female empowerment. The FFS decreases the risk of gender-based violence in the camps and increases access to services for female survivors of violence. It also reduces the stigma associated with sexual violence by providing females with human rights awareness and support, and by providing the whole camp community with education. Providing women and girls with education and access to services empowers them to protect themselves. Educating communities reduces violence and brings awareness to different human rights abuses such as rape, child marriage and human trafficking.