

From Ohio to the Himalayas: Ursuline Students Forge Lifelong Bonds Through Service in Nepal with United Planet

Ursuline College partners with United Planet for a life-changing service-learning trip to Nepal, blending cultural immersion with meaningful volunteer work.

PEPPER PIKE, OH, UNITED STATES, April 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A group of 17 students and faculty members from Ursuline College recently returned from an unforgettable 12-day service-learning trip to Nepal, organized by global nonprofit [United Planet](#).

This immersive global journey offered participants a chance to deepen their understanding of Nepali culture while contributing meaningfully to the local communities they served.



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This marked Ursuline’s fifth visit to Nepal through United Planet’s global service-learning programs. The trip was centered around purposeful engagement and connection, and for many it was their first time experiencing Nepal’s beauty, culture, and resilience firsthand.

United Planet is a Boston-based nonprofit with a mission to build a more united and compassionate world through cross-cultural experiences and service. Through short- and long-term volunteering, gap years, group programs, and corporate partnerships, the organization connects people

across the globe through shared goals and mutual learning.

“Nepal was a powerful example of what makes United Planet’s work so meaningful,” said Mohammad Hijazi, Marketing and Communications Manager at United Planet who [joined the](#)

[trip](#). “We facilitate service-learning journeys that are not just about volunteering, but about growing into more empathetic, informed global citizens. The connections we make, through culture, service, and shared humanity, are transformational on every level.”

The group spent much of their time in the Kathmandu valley, volunteering with children at two different sites. The first site was a home and school for children whose mothers are currently incarcerated, many of whom would otherwise be without consistent care. The second was a care center that provides counseling and psychosocial support for survivors of child sexual abuse.

Ursuline students led a wide variety of trauma-informed activities rooted in art therapy, offering the children tools for emotional expression and healing through creativity. Activities included dance, meditation, drawing, coloring, bracelet making, and arts and crafts. A highlight of the final volunteering day was celebrating Holi, the beloved Nepali festival of colors, which brought pure joy and togetherness to the end of their service.

“Working with the children was life-changing,” Hijazi continued. “It’s incredibly powerful to step into a different cultural context and learn by doing. These kids have faced unimaginable challenges, and yet they welcomed us with trust, playfulness, and warmth. The beauty of service-learning is in that reciprocal exchange: you give, and you receive just as much, if not more.”

“If I see you, then that’s healing in itself, and you see me, and that’s healing for me,” said Dr. Katherine Jackson, Associate Professor at Ursuline College and faculty leader on the trip. “Our students and I get maybe more than we give. What we’re getting back is invaluable. And that’s the beauty of service-learning.”

Service-learning is a dynamic educational approach that combines structured volunteer work with reflection, cultural immersion, and academic learning. Unlike traditional volunteering, service-learning is rooted in reciprocity; participants learn from the communities they serve, and the experience often challenges their perspectives, builds empathy, and strengthens global awareness.



Art therapy was a central aspect of the team's engagement. Creative expression, especially in safe, supportive environments, can offer children a powerful outlet to process complex emotions, build trust, and foster self-esteem. The team carefully tailored each activity to the age and energy level of the children, ensuring that everyone had a chance to feel seen, heard, and uplifted.

"The culture, the people, the connection made at the sites — it's all been great," said Kaylynn, a graduate student at Ursuline College. "It was really special to make bonds with the kids. Those connections are for life. And everywhere you go in Nepal, you see little altars and feel this uplifting energy."

In addition to the service work, the trip included cultural excursions that enriched participants' understanding of Nepal's spiritual and historical depth. The journey began with a sunset walk in Kathmandu, followed by a hike to Champa Devi, and explorations through vibrant local markets. The group also visited sacred religious sites, including the Boudhanath stupa and Pashupatinath temple.

After the volunteering portion concluded, the group traveled to Chitwan National Park, a lush area of lowland forest and wildlife reserves. The retreat offered a moment of reflection and reconnection with nature. The group embarked on a canoe ride, spotting crocodiles from a cautious distance, and ventured into the jungle on safari, where they observed wild rhinos, sloth bears, langur monkeys, peacocks, and countless birds. A serene breakfast with elephants at sunrise capped off the retreat.

"There is something so special, magical, and spiritual about Nepal that it keeps bringing us back," said Melissa Holadek, a councilor at Ursuline College who has joined multiple service trips with Ursuline. "Each time we're here, we continue to learn and grow by embracing and immersing ourselves in the culture."

For the students of Ursuline College, this was more than just a study-abroad trip. It was a transformative experience that expanded their worldview, deepened their empathy, and inspired a greater sense of purpose and connection.

United Planet continues to support service-learning as a bridge between cultures and a catalyst for change, both in communities around the world and in the lives of the participants who serve.

If you or your institution are interested in creating your own customized service-learning journey, visit United Planet's [Faculty-Led Programs page](#) to learn more and start planning your own transformative experience.

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