

# Hands in Outreach



Empowering girls  
and women in  
Nepal with access  
to education

Fall 2021



## From the Directors

With the global pandemic still a threat, the past year has been exhausting, especially for our girls, their mothers, our HIO staff and colleague teachers in Kathmandu. Through fear, uncertainty and hardship, all have coped with government-imposed lockdowns that took hold month after month. Students and teachers from kindergarten to college were expected to embrace and navigate on-line classes using inadequate mobile phones with scant connectivity. Our resilient mothers suffered job loss and food insecurity.

Providing access to education, keeping our girls safe, and engaging them in learning has required innovative programming shifts. We've discovered strength and new ways to organize services, with special vigilance toward addressing violence against women. If there's a silver lining to this health crisis, it may be that it forced us all to take a deep breath and focus on what's most important. Community, compassion and the well-being of our girls and their families.

Thanks to the Berkowitz Family Nutrition Program, we held three major relief efforts this year. A month's supply of basic food, masks and sanitary supplies was provided to over 200 families in need, encouraging a measure of security without causing dependence. This kindness enabled HIO mothers to redirect \$150 of their income to rent, loan repayments and clothing for their children.

Your family relief contributions allowed us to provide simple smart phones and data service to some girls who had difficulty accessing remote classes. Special thanks to our volunteer Intel tech team for their expert guidance about digital devices and internet safety. And to Adara, Friends of Nepal, Gendap and the Stone Family Foundation, all valued partners providing support for our programs. What a blessing!

Former HIO Board member, Maida McKenna, has engaged teachers at our Chandra Kala and Strong Roots learning Centers in a wonderful early English Language training program. Jingran Su, a Columbia University intern, leads workshops regularly, encouraging our teachers' critical thinking skills and deepening their understanding of social-emotional learning topics.



***Shahida is a dedicated learner who has been enrolled in our women's empowerment program since 2016.***

### ***On the Cover:***

***Shahida and her husband needed to be convinced to delay early marriage for their daughter, Heena. Ultimately, they realized that by pursuing a career in medicine, Heena would have the capacity to care for them financially in old age, relieving an enormous worry for this typical Nepali family.***

Building on our many successes, we'll soon implement a new three-year strategic plan focused on improving our family-centric social work and encouraging organizational sustainability. It's a roadmap to realize our vision - *when girls succeed, everyone benefits*. We'll engage our HIO graduates in decision-making and programming within the Nepal framework. As rising stars, these smart, young, Nepali women with confidence and voice represent the future of HIO, brilliantly assuming leadership roles and responsibilities.

The most significant obstacle our girls face is dropping out of school early because of child marriage and teen pregnancy. HIO's new mentorship project will challenge them to set achievable goals and seize opportunities for transforming their lives. We're also creating a dynamic *Coming of Age* program for our teen girls that will encourage their self-esteem, self-reliance, and a commitment to staying in school.

Educating our girls' mothers, the heads of their households, through our *Be Part of Her Dream (BPOHD)* program has the potential to change hundreds of lives. The COVID-19 crisis could have collapsed this wonderful women's empowerment program entirely. With heavy hearts, we lost a 27-year-old amazing BPOHD student to the darkness of domestic abuse.



***Mamata Rai Thulung, a social worker, and Sarah Tamang, a lawyer, were longtime sponsored students. We're so pleased that both are joining our Nepal staff to help guide HIO's future.***

Our dedicated Nepal staff and Ashima Sitaula's curriculum development expertise helped the program remain stable and vibrant, largely through remote learning. Against all odds, five HIO mothers have nearly completed high school. An astonishing accomplishment.

While our HIO girls and their families face ongoing challenges, we remain steadfast in our mission to guide them toward more fulfilling lives. We're especially pleased to welcome our six new board members, full of enthusiasm and valuable guidance for our programs moving forward.

Education is the key to our girls path out of poverty. We celebrate the small, everyday miracles that help our girls and their mothers achieve their goals. Their every success is our success. It's a bumpy road, but knowing you're the wind at their backs makes all the difference. Your continued care and support truly make everything possible.

*Namaste and warm wishes,*

*Ricky Bernstein*  
*Laura Hunt*



***Sixty HIO young women joined us on Zoom for our new college and career counseling initiative, Reach for the Stars.***



# The Threat of Child Marriage

by Alisa Del Tufo and Sofia Riva



***Sharmila and her little sister live in the Balkhu Slum with their mother Kumari, who was married and pregnant by age 14. Education will break a horrendous cycle of poverty for HIO's vulnerable adolescent girls.***

*According to UNICEF, child marriage – marriage before the age of 18 – is a human rights violation. Despite laws against it, the harmful practice remains widespread. Child marriage can lead to a lifetime of suffering. Girls who marry before they turn 18 are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic violence. Girls also experience many more maternal health complications and higher mortality rates as a result of early marriage.*

While child marriage is a global issue that spans faith traditions and socio-economic status, its impact in Nepal is profound. A problem local experts agree has been exacerbated during the global pandemic. Despite rarely enforced laws against this common practice, Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Dropping out of school to marry as teenagers, girls generally leave home to live with their husband's family. They become de facto domestic servants, resulting in a lifetime of deprivation.

In a culture where girls and women are valued less than boys and men, is it any wonder that child marriage of girls is a serious and widespread problem? Although there are isolated cases of boys being married at an early age, this issue has a much more serious impact on girls, given their second-class status. For girls, early marriage effectively ends their education. It causes financial dependence, domestic abuse, early and frequent pregnancies and serious negative health outcomes. Layered on top of gender inequality are the religious and cultural mores that sanction and even celebrate this treatment of young women.

Gender inequality creates a host of ills for Nepali girls and women. It often leads families to arrange their daughters' early marriages. Young women experience high rates of illness and death due to lack of prenatal and maternal health care. Girls are given fewer calories to eat while growing up so that boys can eat more. They have lower literacy rates, as their families do not value their education.

Women are sometimes killed by family members through domestic abuse and honor killings. They earn far less than males for doing the same work and must earn a living while caring for children and family. Women are prevented from entering certain professions and become pariahs if they do not marry or if they seek divorce.

Not only are girls impacted by gender inequality, but whole families can also experience the burden of this cultural norm. A girl's parents may be unaware of the consequences of decisions they make for their daughter. They may feel powerless to change, given the weight of history and social pressures, especially related to caste.

Low-income families in Nepal face many grim realities. Parents have little confidence that their daughters will serve them in old age as they expect sons to do. The dowry system traps families in long-lasting economic hardship. Girls are considered a burden and must be married off as soon as possible. The older the bride, the higher the dowry, making it more difficult for a family to delay. After a girl has been married off, it is shameful to her parents if she returns home.

For very poor families, a married-off daughter may appear to be a better option than having her at home. Younger wives are more desirable and considered to be more obedient. It's shameful and nearly impossible to marry off a girl who is sexually active. Social media has made this more of an issue, as boys and girls have new ways of connecting. Over the past decade, HIO has lost four girls to teen marriage. Four girls too many!

There's no quick fix for this pervasive problem. But through education, we can empower our girls and their families to develop new cultural practices and attitudes. Valuing girls' education and encouraging women's earning potential can provide benefits our girls' families don't easily see. Educated and empowered women, in fact, are more able to support their birth families as they age. As our girls gain the self-esteem to resist cultural norms, the narrative of their lives will shift to one of hope and potential.



*Domestic abuse is a shadow concern of great magnitude that lurks in the homes of many HIO families living in cramped quarters.*

Our 2022-24 strategic plan addresses many challenges our HIO girls and their mothers face.

*We aim to . . .*

- Establish and maintain strong connections with HIO families.
- Reaffirm the enormous value of staying in school.
- Help HIO mothers discourage their daughters from following their path of early marriage and pregnancy.
- Develop relationships with other NGO's that work to promote human rights for girls and women.
- Offer incentives for delaying marriage.
- Provide college and career workshops that encourage self-reliance

*Alisa Del Tufo is a Visiting Faculty member at Bennington College with a long career in advocating for women's rights.*

*Sofia Riva is a Columbia University Political Science and Human Rights graduate pursuing an advanced degree in International Law.*

# Gaining Voice

by Laura Hunt and Sarah Tamang

The strength and resiliency of our *Be Part of Her Dream (BPOHD)* women's empowerment program was put to the test. Through collaboration, hard work, patience and innovation, the mothers of our sponsored girls are gaining literacy skills while overcoming challenges of the pandemic.

Many mothers were reluctant to attend in-person *BPOHD* classes last winter. With COVID cases soaring, misinformation was rampant. They were so fearful of contracting the coronavirus. Dropping out would have been such an easy choice for the women to make.



*Samjhana found her home village on a map while learning about Nepal's geography.*

This scenario prompted our dedicated *BPOHD* teachers to problem-solve creatively. They organized women into small groups to meet in safe, open areas. They offered workshops to equip women with science-based information. Daily virtual lessons fostered connectedness when isolation was the norm.

Making lessons relevant to their ever-changing world encouraged women's regular attendance. Seeing challenges as opportunities enabled our teachers to develop skills that will benefit *BPOHD* students for years to come. The small group lessons and powerpoint presentations that arose out of necessity during the pandemic will forever be part of our teachers' toolkits.

Women were excited by the hands-on activities offered in our evolving *BPOHD* curriculum. While making soap during the International Women's Day celebration, Rabina Moktan immediately recognized how her newly learned skill could have long-term financial benefits for her family. On her way home, she stopped at a car wash and began making plans with the owner to sell him soap she would make. Rabina and four of her *BPOHD* sisters now make and sell soap as a source of family income.

In June, the women learned how to make a simple water filtration system using recycled plastic bottles, charcoal and stones. Access to clean water is a serious challenge in many HIO families' makeshift homes. The videos women created while making and using these useful tools are a beautiful example of their excitement for learning. What remarkable agency they're developing as problem-solvers themselves.

HIO mothers are  
rising to every  
challenge.

HIO's *Be Part of Dream* program is transforming the lives of a group of marginalized women who as children could only imagine going to school. Our girls' mothers have access to education, healthcare, and business counseling. They're becoming familiar with their legal rights, earning respect within their communities and have courage to make their own decisions. They've gained a measure of confidence and financial stability they could never have dreamed of. Most importantly, they feel empowered to move forward in their lives with a clear sense of dignity and hope. HIO is committed to helping this group of remarkable women continue gaining voice.



# In Loving Memory

by Laura Hunt and Palmo Tamang

Santoshi Shrestha was a promising young HIO mother on the verge of graduating from our *Be Part of Her Dream* program last March. Her family had been living in the Balkhu slum near the Strong Roots Learning Center. Having married as a teenager, she'd recently separated from her abusive husband and had filed for divorce. Separation is the most vulnerable time for any woman trying to escape a dangerous marriage.

A smart, courageous, and well-loved member of our HIO community, Santoshi was a true role model. She was working so hard to make a better life for herself and her son, who is sponsored by HIO's partner organization, Strong Roots NYC. She planned to enroll in a high school diploma course along with three of her *BPOHD* sisters. Santoshi's life was tragically cut short by her husband, who brutally murdered her after years of physical and emotional abuse.

Santoshi's death sent a shockwave through our close-knit HIO community. Never before had domestic violence risen to this alarming level for one of our families. The Strong Roots mothers and teachers have been especially heartbroken by the profound loss of Santoshi's loving, gentle spirit.

An HIO mother fallen victim to the *hidden pandemic* of domestic violence is a tragedy we must avoid. The horrors of school dropouts, child marriage, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence have dramatically increased in Nepal during the pandemic. The statistics become ever more chilling when they're represented in girls and women HIO serves.

Sadly, two of our sponsored girls dropped out of fifth grade at age 15 to marry during the pandemic. One is now six months pregnant. As child brides, both will follow in their mothers' footsteps. A lifetime of servitude to their in-laws and low-wage, menial jobs will be the result of unfortunate teenage choices encouraged by their mothers.

These stories strengthen HIO's resolve to solidify our *Coming of Age*, *Reach for the Stars* and *Be Part of Her Dream* programs. Keeping our girls and their mothers safe and thriving is HIO's responsibility and privilege.



***On International Women's Day, three days before Santoshi's needless death, she helped lead her BPOHD sisters in song and they learned to make liquid soap.***



## Our Learning Centers -



*Dr. Asmita Adhikari, OB/GYN, conducted health screenings for 30 of our girls' mothers. Follow-up care was organized to address acute issues that were revealed.*

*Once Nepal's lockdown was lifted, BPOHD classes were held outdoors. The mothers were so eager to resume learning with their HIO sisters.*



*Through our women's empowerment curriculum, Jasmine learned how to read medicine packets, enabling her to better care for her family's health needs.*

Through generous donor support, HIO fully funds two vibrant learning centers in inner-city Kathmandu, Chandra Kala and Strong Roots. These hubs of activity encourage a family-centric approach to our education programs and social work. They are true beacons of hope for some of the city's most marginalized people. HIO's learning centers enable us to care for the whole girl, increasing her chances of staying in school, avoiding early marriage or pregnancy and a lifetime of low-wage, menial jobs.



*Shaina, lovingly sponsored by Elsa and Dave, attends her fourth grade on-line classes using an HIO laptop at Chandra Kala.*



# - Beacons of Hope



*With many thanks to Lizzie Aga Khan's support, children were taught COVID safety protocols.*



*Jingran conducts a training workshop with lead teachers, Manisha and Poonam, using the new Literacy for Peace curriculum designed by Sally and Maida, experts in early English language instruction.*

*Your gifts to HIO programs support...*

- Montessori-based early education for 100 marginalized children.
- Food relief for over 200 families in need.
- Long-distance training for 12 devoted learning center teachers.
- Medical check-ups for sponsored girls and their families.
- Academic tutoring, career counseling and psycho-social support.
- Self-esteem and reproductive health workshops for girls.
- Women's literacy and empowerment classes.



*A massive relief effort generously funded by Arthur and Lisa Berkowitz provided Sampana and her family a measure of hope and food security.*

# What a Life I Get to Live!

by Reshma Karki

Although I now work as an intern dentist in Kantipur Dental College and teaching hospital, my life's journey has been challenging since the beginning. I was raised by a single mother in Nepal's patriarchal society. When my friends' fathers picked them up from school, I wondered why my family was so much smaller than theirs. My own father abandoned us when I was just an infant. In extreme poverty, my mother and I faced the societal burden of having no male figure protecting us. My mother, a strong, independent woman, gave up her own dreams to help me reach mine.

At age nine, I was selected to study at Budhanilkantha School, the most elite boarding school in Kathmandu. What an honor. My tuition was fully funded by HIO. My mother and I moved from our remote mountain village to the big city. While I lived at school, my mother rented a modest one-room apartment nearby. For my last two years of high school, we moved to my uncle's house. It felt like a palace.



*After completing a five-year medical program in Kathmandu, Reshma Karki recently became a dentist through her Hands in Outreach scholarship.*

I hoped better days were coming, but soon his behavior changed dramatically. He came home drunk almost every day, banged on our doors and threw things. I was terrified and felt extremely small. I prayed every day for our safety. My grades dropped to just average.

I shared my concerns with Ricky and Ram. They'd become like father figures whose loving, kind nature simply cannot be put into words. We then decided I should travel to India for a general nursing program. I'd never been out of Nepal before and the trip was frightening. After all that, the Indian school didn't recognize my Nepal academic credits and wanted me to do more study.

Horried, I communicated with Ricky Abba. His email that day changed my life forever. He asked if I wanted to pursue a medical degree. Yes, I had always wanted to be a doctor, but never truly believed I could do it. I took a deep breath and returned to Kathmandu to repeat class 11 and 12 in pure science.

After completing the program, I faced more challenges. Thousands of students take the very tough medical school exam, competing for very few spots. On my first try, my scores weren't good enough. I was so discouraged. I knew I had to gather myself and work extra hard to reach my dream. Finally, I scored well enough for a spot! I chose dentistry and had three days to come up with a \$20,000 deposit, a small fortune. I panicked, but Ram assured me it was possible.

After five years of intense coursework and clinical practice, here I am, working as an intern dentist. How amazing! With grit and loving support, I have changed my life from an average student to a practicing doctor. From a remote village girl to an educated, skilled, and powerful woman. I am so grateful to HIO for the immense love, support and encouragement that helps me succeed. It's more than an organization. It's a home and a family. HIO has changed my life and continues to touch the lives of hundreds of young women, helping end the cycle of poverty through the wonderful gift of education. What an extraordinary life I get to live!



# Ready to Change the World

by Sarah Tamang

In 2017, I became a certified Nepali lawyer after studying law for five years at Nepal Law Campus, one the most dignified colleges in the country. I'm the first HIO girl to pass the Nepal bar exam. As I reflect, I realize my law school journey started from the day I learned how to read and write.

When I was a little girl, I always completed my homework before playing with friends. My dedication to my studies helped me earn top rank in my class. When I finished second grade, I suggested to Ram and Ricky that I skip a grade. Surprisingly, they accepted this crazy idea. Ricky Abba was especially enthusiastic. He believed in me and uplifted my faith and confidence all the way. Before long, I was again the topper in fifth grade.

Then, I produced a second, even more out-of-the-box idea. What if I were to change my school entirely? Before I could think too hard about it, I was transferred to LMV, a highly respected and innovative school, all the way across town. I attended school with my classmate, Manisha, who is now the lead teacher at Chandra Kala Learning Center.

Changing my school was a monumental turning point. At LMV, it felt like HIO had dropped me into outer space. There were so many new things to discover! I participated in debate contests and developed good writing skills. I produced and directed one act plays, an experience that helped me create short films, some of which have been screened at international film festivals. I began thinking about becoming a journalist.

It may seem I was successful in every step, but I also experienced setbacks that helped build my inner strength. My two sisters and I shared one large room with my parents. My father was an alcoholic, and it felt like there was a family war every day. I had no choice but to do my homework amidst the chaos. My loving mother was stoic and dealt with my father's condition until his recent passing.



***Sarah Tamang is our first HIO graduate to pass the Nepal Bar exam. A strong advocate for human rights, she is now an instrumental leader for our women's empowerment program.***

I woke at 4 a.m. to walk 40 minutes to catch a bus for LMV. I sometimes became angry at HIO for not placing me in a dorm near my school. Despite the hardship, I converted my challenges into opportunities. I earned straight A's and actively participated in many extracurricular activities.

When I applied to Nepal Law Campus, there were more than 1,300 applicants for 70 spots. I firmly believed that one spot belonged to me. For the bar exam, there were more than 5,000 applicants. I scored in the top one hundred, because I believed in myself and worked hard.

I am now proud to work in a fulfilling job as HIO's Program Coordinator, helping marginalized girls and women realize their basic human rights. I have plans to earn a PhD and aspire to be a professor and a U.N. diplomat someday.

Siddhartha Buddha has said, *appa dipa bhava*, meaning *be your own light*. With determination, perseverance, and loving support, I truly believe I have done this. I'm very grateful to Ram, Ricky, and all at HIO who have given me courage to pursue my dreams and share my light with others.

# With Heart and Hope

By Debora Kolwey

I've been part of HIO since 1992, when my husband, Neil, and I first traveled to Nepal. Upon returning to the U.S, I called my dear friend, Ricky, and said, *sign me up!*

I was thrilled to return to Nepal in 2018 for a sponsor trip. I longed to experience what Ram and Palmo did on a daily basis. I'll never forget the joy and wonder of meeting Sonam Dorji, my first sponsored child. It was such a privilege to listen to his life stories. I also saw Rinchon, a highly intelligent young Tibetan woman who completed nursing school in India. I fondly remember a letter she sent me long ago, encouraging my young daughter to never forget how fortunate she was to have family, parents and her home.

The whole sponsor trip was just wonderful, start to finish. Fascinating as the tourist outings were, visiting with girls and their families in their homes was an even more precious honor. Meeting Rashmi, the young girl I currently sponsor, was especially rewarding.

When I arrived for my first visit, the sandals and notebooks I'd purchased had already been delivered. Rashmi's mother, Dil Maya, sat quietly as Rashmi and I chatted. I wondered how odd this must feel, having an unfamiliar American woman enter her home with clothes and school supplies for her daughter.



*The light in Rashmi's eyes reflects our delight at meeting for the first time.*

I felt an immediate bond with Rashmi. She wasn't scared or uncomfortable. She demurely showed me her schoolwork, read aloud and shared her sketchbook. I've always been impressed with Rashmi's artwork and her ability to express herself richly in English. For a girl living in such a dimly lit dwelling, there's plenty of light shining from within.

Over the years, I've noticed customary sentiments in letters from HIO students. *Tashi Delek* (hello in Tibetan) and prayers for my family's good health, school reports and many thanks for my support. During the pandemic, however, I hear in Rashmi's letters a stronger

level of empathy. She shows genuine concern for my family and my well-being. She described her own experience with the pandemic in great detail.

One letter, in particular, beautifully demonstrates the power of HIO and Rashmi's loving character. Rashmi wrote that she was feeling scared "in her room," because her neighbor had died. She was home alone on the first day of online class. Each time she closed her eyes, Rashmi remembered the person's dead body. She explained that she now felt a bit better, and she understood that I may wonder why she'd tell me such a story. She said that sharing her feelings helped bring her a sense of relief. She signed her letter...

*I will pray for you and your family and I am also sending you lots of love and care from my side.*

I'm awestruck by Rashmi's ability to go inside and express powerfully and clearly in English!! In the midst of all that she and her family endure, her heart has space to care about others in such a sweet and true way.

*Longtime sponsor Debora Kolwey is a pilates instructor in Boulder, CO.*

The joys of  
sponsorship.



# The Tale of HIO Storytime

by Jan MacLeod and Val Stori

Once upon a time there was a terrible global pandemic where school children all over the world were in lockdown and learning from home. Sadly, restrictive conditions for months on end kept in-person classes a distant memory for our HIO girls in Kathmandu. With the Delta variant surging, outdated mobile phones and spotty internet access, this challenging learning situation became even more heart wrenching.

Last November, HIO's Education Committee was inspired to lift our younger girls' spirits by engaging them in a virtual Storytime. A wonderful group of volunteers breathed life into the idea, and it's flourished ever since. For 45 minutes each week, girls learning in our partner schools, Bijeswori, LMV and Loyalty, escape into other worlds on ZOOM, exercising their imaginations and building community with their HIO sisters and teachers.

Dragons, fearless female pilots, and resourceful African grandmothers are some of the fabulous characters they've met in storybooks we share on screen. We introduce different genres and favorite authors — Nepali folktales, Leo Lionni, and titles that focus on social-emotional learning — always on the lookout for culturally appropriate stories with strong girls and women as main characters. Meeting clever, brave females in books encourages our girls' own self-confidence.



*Yanu accesses on-line learning using a borrowed HIO laptop.*

## Chalak, Chalak Ketu (Clever, Clever Girl)



*Namrata and Ritu can't wait for weekly Storytime, beautifully coordinated by new HIO board member, Val Stori. Jan MacLeod, a retired schoolteacher, enjoys connecting with her sponsored girl, Indira, while Norden Tamang, an HIO graduate, translates.*

All HIO girls are taught in English. It's the global language of commerce and a key skill needed to escape the grip of poverty. Through Storytime, our girls gain comfort with English, listening to native speakers and practicing speaking the language themselves. With big smiles and giggles, they recite poetry, try out new vocabulary, and discuss story elements and themes. They're encouraged to believe in themselves, work hard, and realize that big dreams are within their reach no matter what challenges they may face. Our wonderful Nepali translators encourage the girls' deep comprehension and critical thinking skills.

With noses pressed to their mobile phones in rapt attention, the girls' wide eyes and sweet voices exude their excitement and enthusiasm. Imagine us all reflecting on the pandemic a decade from now. What better memories to build than connecting with HIO friends from afar and learning that small miracles are every bit worth wishing for.

# Higher Education Dreamers



*Now in her second year of medical school, Pooja Lamsal is so grateful to Beth and Jack Isler for sponsoring her education. Pooja plans to follow in Jack's footsteps, inspired by his 40-year career as an eye surgeon.*

## The Rudi Dundas Fund

The Rudi Dundas Higher Education Fund was established in 2020 through the immense generosity and clear vision of Yangchen Lama. In the late 1980's, Yangchen and her family trekked to the city from their small village in the Himalayas. Their tiny home had no electricity or running water.

Rudi's HIO sponsorship encouraged Yangchen to attend school for the first time as a nine-year old in Kathmandu. Yangchen is now a highly successful businesswoman who graciously gives back to others. Without her initial access to education, she may have become one of the forgotten statistics of poor women in Nepal.

We're deeply grateful to Yangchen, her family and her dear friends for establishing the Rudi Dundas Fund. Their kindness empowers our HIO girls to truly reach for the stars for many years to come.



## The Nettie and Bob Isler Fund

With high hopes of increasing the number of healthcare practitioners for our girls, their families and the Nepali people, we've established a wonderful fund to provide scholarships for HIO young women pursuing careers in healthcare-related fields. Jack and Beth Isler have generously donated \$25,000 to start the fund in loving honor of Jack's 96-year-old mother, Nettie, and his late father, Bob.

With great determination and Bob's encouragement, Nettie graduated from college at age 41. She then earned a PhD and became a tenured professor and practicing clinical psychologist. Bob had a longtime career as a dentist.

The impact of the fund goes so far beyond benefitting just one promising young woman. It has the potential to affect thousands of ordinary human lives as our rising HIO stars carry forward a profound commitment to others throughout their medical careers.

## Reaching for the Stars

*Sujata Tamang earned a coveted spot as a first-year law student, ranking in the top 10% of applicants. Sashmita Raut works diligently as a second-year dental school student. Scholarships from the Rudi Dundas Fund encourage their every continued success.*



# Reach for the Stars

by Ricky Bernstein and Laura Hunt

Pandemic or not, our HIO sponsored girls have only one chance to use the power of education to lift themselves from the grip of deep-rooted poverty. We must boldly look past the COVID fallout, keeping the bright spark of their futures alive. Three inspiring HIO graduates, Sarah Tamang, Reshma Karki, and Mamata Rai, are tirelessly working to develop our new mentorship initiative, *Reach For The Stars*, encouraging our older girls to keep sight of their dreams.

College and career counseling as we know it in the U.S. is all but non-existent in Nepal. There are few professional women in girls' lives to serve as role models. Young women simply don't have the tools necessary to determine a college and career path. Many of our high school girls coast along with little thought about their career opportunities. Coming from illiterate households, our girls need structured guidance and support to decisively shift this narrative.

Our *Reach for the Stars* pilot event was designed by a vibrant team from Nepal and the U.S. through several collaborative planning meetings. It was intended to be a two-day in-person workshop for 60 HIO adolescent girls. Persistent lockdown conditions forced us to shift the event to ZOOM.

Archana Thapa, Vice President of Sano Sansar, our sister organization in Nepal, was the keynote speaker. A highly-respected author and strong advocate for women's rights, Archana shared personal stories that challenged our girls to consider the benefits of pursuing education and postponing marriage.



Creating  
a remarkable  
sisterhood



*Ashima Sitaula, who comes from a family of educators and is earning a PhD in curriculum development, was our brilliant host for the first Reach for the Stars event. What an inspiration!*

The entire program was conducted in Nepali. Twelve HIO graduates facilitated breakout rooms that HIO Board members, Lani Peterson, Neera BK and Sarah Kooshian expertly designed. What a gift for our girls to share their ideas and opinions so openly. In Nepali culture, female voices are typically silenced from birth.

The event was met with rave reviews from our girls, program facilitators, and HIO staff. Shristi Tamang, who just finished tenth grade and hopes to become a chemical engineer, reflected...

*The most crucial lessons I learned from the program were to dream high and believe in myself.  
Life doesn't always go according to plan.  
Never let others' opinions affect you.  
Be positive and be radiant.*

HIO's most valuable asset is the young women who have graduated from our program. Many have gone on to successful careers in business, science, and medicine. A wonderful HIO sisterhood has emerged that is eager to give back. With access to education and such a wonderfully supportive network, the sky's the limit for our next generation of HIO girls.

## **Board Members**

### **Co-Executive Directors**

Ricky Bernstein  
Laura Hunt

Neera BK, Alice Brewer,  
Alisa Del Tufo, Jack Isler,  
Laura Gladding, Simmie Kerman,  
Sarah Kooshian, Lani Peterson,  
Subash Poudel, Ginnie Roeglin,  
Carolyn Schmitz, Val Stori,  
Kate Turner

### **Nepal Co-Directors**

Ram Gopal Adhikari  
Palmo Dawa Tamang

### **HIO Nepal Staff**

Kanchan Adhikari  
Bhim Kumari Darji  
Lata Rai  
Mamata Rai Thulung  
Sarah Tamang

When girls and women  
succeed, everyone benefits



*Aruna gained vital access to on-line  
classes with loving support from her  
sponsors Patty and Larry.*

## **Special HIO Advisors**

Catherine Miller  
**Board Governance**

Lori Seegers  
**Legal Counsel**

James Lee, MD  
**Endocrinologist**

Elizabeth Bengtson, MD  
**Oncologist**

Mike Callahan, MD  
**Emergency Medicine**

Josh Jaffe, MD  
**OB/GYN**

Will Dixon, MD  
**Family Medicine**

Breck Arnzen  
**Strategic Planning**

## **Education Consultants**

Tracy Tyson, Kelly Case,  
Maida McKenna, Sofia Riva,  
Joyce Catsimpiris, Jingran Su,  
Sally Farneth, Ashima Sitaula

## Help sustain the HIO program

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$50</b> Reusable menstrual kits for five teenage girls  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$150</b> Mobile phone to access remote learning                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$75</b> Three new pressure cookers for families in need | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$250</b> Underwrite a teacher training workshop                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$100</b> Uniform & books for one HIO girl               | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>\$500</b> Support HIO girls attending college and graduate school |

To Donate by Credit Card, go to: [www.handsinoutreach.org](http://www.handsinoutreach.org)

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