

Hands in Outreach

Empowering girls and women in
Nepal through access to education



Fall 2023

From the Directors

Laura Hunt & Ricky Bernstein

Sponsors and donors tell us that our HIO work is a bright light of goodness and hope in a very troubled world. Our inspiration is the astonishing gains our girls and their mothers are making through your kindness. Their achievements are made even more remarkable when we consider the overwhelming inequalities of caste, class and gender discrimination they are working so hard to overcome.

Building global community helps us instill a lasting sense of sisterhood and camaraderie which is such a vital part of our girls' success. Three mornings each week at 7 a.m. and 4:45 p.m. in Kathmandu, dozens of girls emerge on our Zoom screens, bright and eager to join Storytime sessions with Val, Jan, Laura G and Laura H. This spring, Ram coordinated a massive letter-writing effort, encouraging each and every girl to write a note to her sponsor. How delightful that so many sponsors have written back!

For many girls living on the edge, our Nepal staff become an extended family they can rely on and trust. We now employ twenty dedicated and compassionate Nepali social workers and teachers, half of whom were sponsored students themselves. Our senior directors, Mamata and Ram, are both HIO grads doing a superb job keeping our girls on track as they navigate the complexities of the Nepali educational system. As the new year began, we welcomed two new, key staff members who have increased our capacity to manage the 175 girls and young women you generously sponsor. Our new program managers, Chanda Shrestha and Sushila Chaurel, are organizing daily activities and advocating for our girls as though they've been with us for years.

Our *Be Part of Her Dream* (BPOHD) women's empowerment program is flourishing. More than 65 mothers, grandmothers and aunties are regularly attending classes. In May, we celebrated a BPOHD milestone, with fourteen women participating in a graduation ceremony after completing six years of study. We've added an exciting transitional year to the project called *On Her Way*. Our aim is to imbue a strong sense of self-reliance, independence and sisterhood in these brave women as they steadily move forward.

ON THE COVER:

Rinky Devi, a hard-working HIO mother, with Riya, the youngest of her three children.



DeeDee Morris, a freelance photographer from Canada, offered workshops to our college-age girls as part of her two week volunteer assignment from Photographers Without Borders.

Our young women in high school and college are pursuing goals their mothers never could have dreamed of achieving. Jyoti Kapali is attending the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh on full scholarship. She completed her first semester in an economics program with flying colors.

Ikshya Kafle began a five-year medical school course in Nepal and Sachina BK is now in dental school. Pabita Sunwar began a coveted nursing program at the Nepali Army hospital, also on full scholarship. Through our new *Reach for the Stars* program, our girls are now receiving relevant guidance and counseling beginning in the eighth grade to help them choose career pathways.



Sabita had perfect attendance in her women's empowerment classes and Shreya earned excellent marks in first grade. They're so proud to share their progress with Laura during a home visit.

Providing social services to augment our academic focus plays a significant role in our overall educational strategy. We're ever grateful for the unwavering support of Arthur and Lisa Berkowitz, whose generous gifts support our nutrition program. Twice each year we're able to bolster food security for over 250 families with staples that last for a month. Generous grants from the Comeau Family, Mary McIntosh, Lizzie Agha Khan and Jeff and Jessica Pearson help sustain our healthcare initiatives and the smooth operation of our two learning centers. Friends of Nepal generously funded our *Water for All* project, enabling us to install a rainwater collection system at our CK Learning Center and distribute water filters to 50 HIO families.

Your philanthropy has been astonishingly generous. As our endowment fund steadily grows, so do our prospects for healthy sustainability. Ultimately, this ensures a stable future for the kind of educational programming that transforms lives. Your trust in our good work, and your steadfast support, is slowly but surely allowing us to accomplish this lofty, but realistic goal. With your help, everything is possible!



Niwa wrote her first letter to her new sponsors Soam, Christina and Samara with the help of her older HIO sister, Ganga, who regularly writes to her loving sponsors, Vivian and Todd.

Hands-on and Heartfelt

by Laura Hunt and Ricky Bernstein

Back in the 1980's, an altruistic group of artists established Hands in Outreach with the hope of alleviating poverty in Nepal. It was an ambitious goal and they weren't quite sure how to go about getting it done. They were unaware of cultural forces and the debilitating role that caste plays in limiting forward momentum for much of Nepal's population. Seeing ordinary Nepalis living in desperate situations tugged at their hearts. They believed that education was a big part of the answer, and they began matching sponsors with children attending school. Unlike other sponsorship organizations of the time, HIO intentionally set out to build direct, personal connections between sponsors and children. They wanted to build a global community.



Ram and the rest of our social work team criss-cross the city daily, monitoring the well-being of our girls and their families. Fostering direct, personal connections with the people we serve will always be what sets HIO apart.

In 2005, HIO narrowed our sponsorship program's focus to only girls, bringing our staff closer to issues of gender inequality ingrained in Nepal's culture. In 2010, we shifted to working primarily with girls in day schools, rather than boarding. This added a daily routine of home visits to our team's schedule. Slowly, but steadily, HIO's family-centric approach emerged. Our tiny social work team, Ram Adhikari and Tsering Yankey, felt compelled to help mothers and daughters cope with big social challenges in their homes like food insecurity, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Devastation from the 2015 earthquake created even greater demand for our social services, and we expanded our sponsorship roster by half.

Fast forward to today. Poverty and gender inequality still plague Nepal. Societal change moves at a snail's pace and there's always more work to be done. HIO is now underwriting the education of 175 girls and young women in K-college, teaching 70 of their illiterate mothers and offering free education to 100 profoundly poor preschoolers

who might otherwise become victims of the street. This caseload feels manageable. It's sustainable for our Nepali team, now twenty members strong. Our staff's personal experience lifting themselves from deep-rooted poverty helps them fully empathize and connect with our girls. Their work is hands-on and heartfelt.

That such a seemingly simple vision still defines HIO almost forty years later is miraculous. As with so many aspects of our ever shifting world, achieving such simplicity has become increasingly complex. The need for HIO's social work program has intensified over the years. Nepali government oversight of NGO's has become unscrupulous since the 2015 earthquakes. Modern technology, with its lightning speed communication, can be both a blessing and a curse in the hands of our vulnerable girls.

HIO social workers are like trusted family members in our sponsored girls' lives. They provide a sense of consistency and practicality that helps calm the chaos of living on the edge. With each day of home visits comes a new set of joys and worries.

A routine part of our weekly Zoom meetings with Nepal staff has become strategizing for red flags that have surfaced. A teenage girl is wetting her bed. Another's grades have dropped dramatically. A girl's father suddenly died, leaving her mother, uneducated and unskilled, as the main breadwinner of the family. Some HIO girls have been talking about suicide after an eighth grade classmate took her own life. Though our founders never dreamed of dealing with such issues thirty-eight years ago, they're very much the reality of our work today.

One day we received an urgent message from Mamata, our Director of Social Services. She told us that a quiet, eight-year-old girl had lied about going to school. Sajani had gone missing for several hours and her grandmother was frantic. Ram and Sajani's grandmother searched every inch of her neighborhood, finally discovering the little girl hanging out with a group of strangers near a bridge. Sajani gave little explanation for why she'd skipped school.

This wasn't the first time Sajani had run away. Considering her home life, it's easy to imagine why leaving may seem a good choice. As a baby, she'd been abandoned by her mother. Her father remarried and soon left Nepal in search of work. With the father out of the picture, Sajani's stepmother was spiteful and ignored the little girl. Her grandmother, though kind-hearted, had no capacity to serve as her parent. Our staff worried that such instability in a family is a perfect invitation for child trafficking.



HIO social workers are like trusted family members



Keeping our girls' eyes on the prize of graduating from high school with good marks is made ever more challenging by the temptations of screen time and limitations of poverty.

Mamata and Ram recommended that we place Sajani in boarding school, where several HIO girls receive excellent care. With the family's approval, she was transferred within a week. In the meantime, we contacted Sajani's sponsor, who expressed deep concern. She quickly sent a loving letter through e-mail to Sajani and asked her partner to pick up the extra cost of sponsoring a child in boarding school. What a gift that he said yes! Mamata now checks in with Sajani each week to make sure she's adjusting. She's so pleased that Sajani's transition to boarding school is going smoothly. In time, our team will arrange for Sajani to visit with her family so she can maintain those important bonds.

Kathmandu's grinding poverty is relentless. Our global community gives our HIO girls and women hope. With patience, persistence and passion, we're gradually empowering a new generation of girls in Nepal to make much-needed change.

Sajani's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

A Remarkable Hero

By Ram Adhikari

Though the actual distance is not far to travel, Uma's birth village is very difficult to reach. As with many rural areas in Nepal, there are few direct roads. After a ten-hour bus ride, a person is let off by a pathway and must walk for two days to reach her village. Uma's mother, Lal Maya, gave birth to six children with only two surviving, Uma and her older sister. Once the children were born, life became even tougher for Uma's parents, struggling to make a living as subsistence farmers. Her family moved many times in search of better farmland and to escape the bad karma they felt was following them. Each time they moved, Uma says, "life became more and more complicated and chaotic." With the sudden death of Uma's younger brother, life completely turned upside down again. After so many sad moments, Uma has few good memories to recall about her childhood.

With two girls remaining and no sons, Uma's father abandoned the family. Uma remembers that her mother didn't get sad or depressed through the tragedies. She just stood up and confronted the difficult times as a single mother and fought them one after another. Giving up on anything for Lal Maya was never a choice. "She faced her challenges," Uma says, "with her chin raised." Despite all the difficulties the family faced, Lal Maya was determined to provide her two girls with a better life. She was determined that Uma would get an education, an opportunity she never had as a young girl herself.

Uma had to draw from all her inner strength to be successful in her young life. When she was a nine year old third-grader in the village school, Uma's teacher told her about a special school called Budhanilkantha in Kathmandu. She encouraged Uma to apply for a scholarship. Uma couldn't imagine such a thing never having been out of her village. The school is located on the edge of Kathmandu next to mountains and countryside. The air is often clear and clean.

The Nepali government requires that 25% of the school's students are given full scholarships, and the school has to find its own scholarship funding. Each year, a rigorous exam is offered nationwide to eleven-year-old fifth-graders, and a handful of poor students are chosen to attend the school. HIO supports fifteen girls each year with scholarships.



Uma's mother, Lal Maya, is her inspiration.

Just to take the test, Uma walked five hours to reach the exam center. Finally the acceptance list appeared in the newspaper and Uma saw her name. This was the biggest achievement of Uma's life! She was selected for a scholarship at the most prestigious school in the country. Uma, her mother and sister celebrated with tears of happiness and then reality set in. The family had no extra money for Uma to take a bus to the school. She and her mother went with hope to ask the headmistress of her elementary school for help. Hope turned into reality when the headmistress paid for Uma's bus fare to reach the school.

Uma felt utterly lost on her first day of school. The large classrooms, abundant portions of food, and comfortable dormitories were completely different from her simple village life. Uma gradually adjusted to the new environment making new friends in her fourth-grade class. Still the most challenging part for her life was understanding English, the curriculum language for school classes. "Every single moment," she says, "was different for me."

In addition to Uma's excellent academic performance, she was a very successful athlete, winning medals in track and swimming. By the time she graduated from Budhanilkantha, she was very different from the Uma we knew in the beginning. She was full of knowledge, experience and self confidence, motivated to work hard and achieving academic success. She often communicated with her American HIO sponsor Susan Seestrom, who always cheered Uma onward.

After graduating from high school, Uma enrolled in a veterinary program in Nepal. She graduated and went to her mother's village to work for a local government agency. Her daily wage was low. Life continued to be hard for Uma, her mother and older sister. Lal Maya was still subsistence farming. The three women often



Working a full day, Uma, her mother and sister filled six 75-pound bags with rocks they had crushed by hand, earning one dollar per bag.

worked for a local builder breaking big river rocks into smaller ones to use for road construction.

Uma hardly had the chance to use her veterinary skills in the village. The pandemic made it even more challenging. It was then that Uma decided to leave the village and pursue a proper college degree in agricultural management. Her sponsor, Susan, readily agreed to once again support Uma's higher education goals. Uma is now in her second year of a four-year program and doing very well.

Lal Maya's willpower has always helped Uma build her own strength and face adversity head on. She's determined to make a difference in the lives of her family, herself and farmers in Nepal. Uma heartily appreciates the support and encouragement she's received from Susan and the HIO Nepal staff over the years. We're confident that she'll achieve her dreams.



When we launched our Reach For the Stars career counseling campaign, Uma was chosen as a shining example of a remarkable HIO hero.

From Trekking To Quilting

By Catherine Miller

After a few hours sleep, I left the hotel in near darkness. I'd arrived at the Kathmandu Guest House at two in the morning after twenty-four hours en route from Boston. My mind and body were still in a bit of a fog. As I wandered along the narrow, dusty streets, I was struck by how different the place felt from when I'd last visited in 2000. Then, I'd experienced the beauty and splendor of the Himalayan peaks from the Kathmandu Valley. Now, the hustle and bustle of people, the din of motorized vehicles, and the choke of overhanging smog was overwhelming.

Walking to HIO's Chandra Kala Center (CK), I quickly learned the art of avoiding motor bikes as the city woke up. Every street corner looked the same. With no street signs, I meandered in circles. Hopelessly lost, I bumped into a friendly policeman who spoke no English, but amazingly knew Lata, the women's class teacher at CK. He called her and Lata quickly came to my rescue. She graciously guided me to CK where eleven women anxiously awaited my arrival. Over the next two weeks, I never lost my way to the CK Center for their 6:00 a.m. class again.



Jasmine and Tara were proud to make pillows that now decorate our HIO office.



Sital and Dhan Maya stitch patchwork squares their HIO sisters made into a community quilt.

A friend had connected me with Ricky before my first trip to Nepal. I've now been involved with HIO as a sponsor of several girls and as an advisor for over two decades. This time, I felt a deep desire to give back in a more personal way, especially to HIO mothers who support themselves as day laborers, earning very small wages. They become old before their time and the lack of formal education places them at a distinct disadvantage.

With a quilting project in mind, I'd hauled a large duffel with fifty pounds of colorful fabric and two pairs of scissors to Kathmandu. I knew that working with the women would be a very different experience. I didn't know them nor did they know me. I was a white woman coming to teach them about what, they must have wondered. The only word of Nepali I know is *Namaste*, hello and goodbye. The women understand some English, but not nearly enough to converse with me. What was I to do?



In their final class together, the women spontaneously wrapped Catherine in the quilt they'd made and danced around the room in celebration. A true moment of love and light.

I shared what I imagined we might accomplish together. The attentive mothers smiled politely, as Lata translated into Nepali. The language barrier began fading as bonds of friendship formed. Each woman would make a lap quilt for herself by making several nine patch squares and then stitching them together on a sewing machine. I sketched out patterns and used my hands to demonstrate. Without the rulers, cutting mats, sharp scissors and rotary cutters I usually use for quilting, we had to improvise. The women fashioned six-inch cardboard squares as templates and the fabric blocks and camaraderie began to flow. The class was a beehive of activity as the women measured, cut, ironed, stitched, chatted and laughed together.

As the fabric squares were ready to stitch together, we realized there was only one machine the mothers could manage, an old treadle. The industrial machine in the corner frightened the usually unflappable women with its complexity and speed. We decided on the spot to get another treadle, so Lata, Bhim and I headed into the busy city center. A few hours later, we arrived at CK crammed into a tiny

taxi with the new treadle in the front seat. We tumbled out and hauled the heavy machine up three flights of stairs. Within minutes, Sital, the CK caretaker and an experienced seamstress, was sewing up a storm. *Presto!*

Some of the women were so excited, they returned to the Center late in the day to continue their work. As the completed patchwork squares piled up, they decided to make one large, communal quilt, rather than individual ones. They learned how to join the large blocks together, make a backing, stuff it with batting and secure it with ties. They were so proud to sign their names on a small piece of fabric and then sew it to the back. I was so pleased to see them identifying as a community of quilters.

This was such a remarkable experience for me, and I believe for the women as well. We enjoyed each other and laughed a lot. I feel I've gained twelve sisters, and the goodbye was extremely difficult. Empowering these special women will help them achieve financial independence and be stronger role models for their daughters.

Catherine is a longtime HIO donor, sponsor and board governance advisor



Receiving a month's worth of food from HIO twice per year helps Rinky provide healthy meals for her family of five.

A Family's Belief

by Laura Hunt

Rinky lives in a 10' x 10' room nestled among steel roofed shacks in an alleyway piled high with colorful fabrics tied into bundles. When I first visited, her three children sat bright-eyed on a hard bed, the only piece of furniture. Archana, the oldest, moved aside and gestured for me to join them. I'd discovered on a visit to her school that she'd earned second position in her class. Rinky's family is from the lowest caste, known as untouchables. Hers is one of the very few intact families we serve, with a kind husband who contributes. Before Rinky graduated from our Be Part of Her Dream program, Lata Rai, a devoted HIO teacher, helped capture her story of resilience. Our only wish is that Rinky could have set her sights higher than continuing to work for low wages in a garment factory. Her family's belief in the power of education truly defines the essence of HIO.

My Journey Has Just Begun

by Rinky Devi

I was born in a remote village in the central Terai region near the border of India. My village had no good facilities at the time. There were no paved roads, no schools and no hospitals. I was too small to go to the next village for school. My parents were farmers. We didn't have much land so it was difficult to get food. At my mother's wedding, my granny gave her a buffalo as a dowry. I liked getting grass for it to eat. We used some of the milk at home and sold the rest in the village to earn money for food.

I have four siblings. I am the third child, and the second daughter.

My seven family members all lived in a small house with two rooms. Since my sister is older than me, she did all the house chores. In our society, people hold a belief that if a girl gets married before her menstruation, it will be good luck for the parents. So I got married at the age of eleven. My husband, Rabindra Ram, was twenty-one years old at the time and the oldest child in his family. When I was thirteen, I gave birth to my oldest daughter, Archana. Soon after, I had a son, Randip, and when I was seventeen, my youngest daughter was born.

My husband and I were both illiterate. Since there are no good schools in our village, we went to Kathmandu to get a good education for our children. We wanted to give them a positive future. My husband went to Kathmandu first. He started to work in a garment factory and then I got a job there too. We didn't earn much at first, so it was challenging for our family financially. My husband helped me learn to use the sewing machine, so I earned a little more money then.

I am the only woman working in the sewing department in that factory, which makes me proud. It is very difficult to sew pockets and zippers on the jackets. The fabric is so thin. Other women in the factory work in the packing and mending department. I work six days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. My husband and I each get \$23 per week. We use it to buy necessary things for our household and we save the rest. My in-laws live with my brother-in-law in the village. Not long ago we split a loan of \$4,500 with my brother-in-law to buy a dowry for my sister-in-law's wedding. I am helping my husband pay off the loan in monthly installments.

After my daughter Archana was chosen for HIO sponsorship, my dream to go to school in a uniform came true when I got to study in the *BPOHD* mother's class. After four years, I have learned so many things from the classes, not only letters and numbers.



Being able to write her name in both Nepali and English is among Rinky's proudest achievements from her BPOHD classes.

I have learned how to raise my children well and how to treat others. I understand more about health and nutritious food. I can use a measuring tape at my workplace and figure out the sizes of jackets. I have my own bank account with savings. I have met many friends like me who did not study at a young age. We share our joys and sorrows with each other. The most important thing is that I can now write my name in both English and Nepali.

I am lucky to have the husband that I do. He helps take care of all the family members and he is loving too. He is happy that I know how to read and write. Sometimes he even cooks while I do my *BPOHD* homework. Most women are not as lucky as me. The condition of our house is better now than it was when we first moved to Kathmandu. One time, my mother and sister came to the city for a medical treatment. When they arrived, I was getting ready to go to school wearing my crisp, blue *kurta salwar*. Both of them looked at me so amazed and proud. My mother said, "We could not send you to school when you were young, but now you have the opportunity to learn. Work hard and study well, dear daughter."



Rinky's daughter, Archana, is the first in her family to go to school. She earns outstanding marks as a fifth grader thanks to the loving support of her sponsor, Will Dixon.

The Faces of HIO

by *Laura Hunt and Ricky Bernstein*

In traditional Nepali culture, the birth of a daughter, and not a son, is too often viewed as a burden or a curse. Parents think *who will take care of us when we're old if there's no son?* Many parents see no use in educating a daughter and arrange for her to be married off by the time she's fifteen. This is a tragedy. At HIO however, we recognize that access to quality education is every girl's human right. Our mission to educate girls and women as a means of lifting themselves from grinding poverty is steadily gaining ground. A dedicated team of social workers and educators is at the heart of our every success.

With the continued challenges Nepal faces as a developing country, there's no end in sight for HIO's social work and women's advocacy. We've gradually expanded our team to address growing needs. Last November, we conducted an extensive search for two Kathmandu social workers to join our Program Officer, Lata Rai. We were delighted to find Sushila Chaurel and Chanda Shrestha. Sofia Riva, who has worked with HIO as an intern, joined our team as a U.S. Program Manager in June. These forward thinking professionals add immense depth to HIO's capacity for serving girls and women.



Chanda's experience as a sponsored student herself drives her commitment to educating Kathmandu's urban poor.

Chanda is doing a wonderful job as our new Education Manager. She oversees our two early learning centers and guides our *Reach for the Stars* college and career counseling initiative. Chanda was sponsored by Educate the Children, another U.S. based non-profit from first grade through college, and she truly values the outstanding education she received. Many of her classmates were HIO girls, and she enjoyed joining their chats with Ram when he visited her school. Chanda has worked with many local NGOs and her command of English is superb.

Sushila's calm, reassuring demeanor and excellent organizational skills are helping our BPOHD program thrive.



Sofia's inclusive nature, sharp mind and big heart are such a benefit to our HIO community.

Sushila brings two decades of experience in the nonprofit sector to her role of Social Services Manager. Throughout her career, she's been a strong advocate for women and children. In addition to her full caseload of home and school visits, Sushila oversees our *Be Part of Her Dream* women's empowerment program. She's also leading our HPV vaccine clinic initiative, using outstanding networking skills to establish a new partnership with Ek Ek Paila, a Nepal NGO that offers free healthcare to underserved people.

When our *Be Part of Her Dream* women's empowerment project began in 2016, Lata was chosen as a lead teacher. She arrived each morning well before class began to help Sital make tea for the mothers. After class, she worked full-time as a kindergarten teacher. Two years back, after twenty years of teaching, Lata jumped at the chance to work for HIO, continuing to coordinate *BPOHD* classes and assisting Mamata and Ram with social work home visits. The children and women love her.

Sofia spent the summer of 2018 in Kathmandu as a Columbia University undergraduate working with our *Be Part of Her Dream* program. She created systems that continue to guide program monitoring and evaluation today. Now a Human Rights Master's Degree candidate at the University of Padova, Italy, Sofia has again fully immersed herself in HIO's work. She is brilliantly designing our *On Her Way* curriculum for women as a catalyst for sustainable change.

All aspects of development benefit when girls and women are educated. Educated women are more informed about nutrition and healthcare. They have fewer children, marry at a later age, and are more likely to participate in the formal labor market earning higher incomes. Educated women in positions of leadership dramatically improve communities, nations and everyone's well being. What a blessing to have a team that's filled with smart, capable and dedicated women like Sushila, Chanda, Lata and Sofia to lead HIO's transformative programming into the future.



Lata's quiet, hard-working nature encourages everyone around her to be at ease while doing their best.

What's Great About Sponsoring a Girl

By Duane Karlen

When I first considered sponsorship a few years ago, I thought it would be a good way to do something constructive in the world, similar to the way I felt decades ago when I applied to be a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal. I figured it would give me a sense of satisfaction that I was contributing something positive. And it has. But that's not the best reason for being an HIO sponsor.

Another motive was that I feel very grateful at this point in my life for having the financial means to be a sponsor, along with the desire to do something worthwhile with the resources that I am lucky enough to have come by. And in fact, I do feel good about assisting Sonu with her education and hopefully helping her create a brighter future for herself. But that also is not the best reason for being a sponsor!



Sonu's dedication to school is an inspiration for her mother, Samjhana, who now studies in our women's empowerment classes.



So what is it, then, that has really made me happy that I've taken on this commitment? Well, it's the relationship Sonu and I have. It's emailing letters back and forth, which is how we "talk" to each other. It's hearing that her favorite second grade school subject is math. It's sending her photos of vegetables from my local farmer's market and finding out which ones she recognizes and enjoys eating. It's seeing her photo, and occasionally her face on Zoom when I sit in on weekly story hour. It's sharing the similarities and differences of living in different countries and different cultures. It's connection.

Sometimes I wonder if we'll ever meet in person. I don't have plans to return to Nepal anytime soon, but that doesn't matter. Our relationship, like the HIO program, will last. We'll continue to communicate and be important to each other. That's the best reason for being a sponsor!

Duane Karlen, a long-time HIO supporter, served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1970's. His wonderful command of Nepali makes him a much-welcomed guest at Storytime sessions with Sonu and her HIO sisters.

A Loving Bond

By Poonam Maharajan

Kistal is a charming first grader who has captured my heart. In some ways, she seems like a little version of me. Kistal doesn't get any love from her parents. She is growing up with her grandparents, like I did.

I was Kistal's preschool teacher at Strong Roots. She stood out as a very disciplined, sensitive and soft-hearted child who enjoys solving problems peacefully. She was excellent in her studies and a very good friend to all.

Kistal's mother abandoned her when she was only four years old. They haven't had any contact since then. Sadly, her father passed away last year. This made Kistal so sad that it was hard for her to focus on school. She did what was asked of her, but she became introverted and stopped playing with friends. Gradually, she is adjusting. Her sincere effort is now helping her earn good grades at LMV where she has many older HIO sisters who help guide her.

After Kistal's father died, she lived with her grandparents in the Balkhu slum. Her uncle, aunt and cousin joined them. Soon her grandmother fractured both of her hands when she fell off a ladder, which made



Poonam, the lead teacher at our Sanepa Learning Center, loves making home visits to Kistal at her grandmother's home in the Balkhu slum.

caring for the house so difficult. Kistal did many household chores like washing dishes and cleaning utensils. She combed her grandmother's hair and helped feed her. The two of them have a very loving bond. Kistal's aunt treats her as a daughter and her uncle often comes to our learning center to walk with Kistal back home after school. It's nice to see that she has family members who love and care for her so much.

Working with girls like Kistal brings me great joy. I know that the support, care and love she receives from HIO and her sponsor, Christina Sewall, will help her succeed in her future. I am thankful for the opportunity to be part of her story now.

Kistal and her grandmother have a loving bond

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Twice a year, Arthur and Lisa Berkowitz provide a month's supply of basic food for over 200 HIO families. Sanam and her grandmother benefit greatly from this gesture of kindness.

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When girls and women succeed, everyone benefits

- ☐ **\$50** Reusable menstrual kits for five teenage girls
- ☐ **\$75** Three new pressure cookers for families in need
- ☐ **\$100** Uniforms for ten learning center children

- ☐ **\$150** Mobile phone to access remote learning
- ☐ **\$250** Underwrite a teacher training workshop
- ☐ **\$500** Support HIO girls attending college

To donate by credit card
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