

Hands in Outreach

Creating educational possibilities for poor girls in Nepal



Fall 2018

From the Director

The recovery effort from the devastating earthquakes of 2015 continues. The home of HIO-sponsored girls Rabita and Rabina in Bhaktapur, once an ancient capital city, still has crumbled bricks on a major wall. The girls sleep in that room on the third floor, and stay away from the edge. The rebuilding aid that was expected from the government has yet to appear. The summer monsoon rains have brought flooding and trauma for the residents of the Balkhu settlement next to our Strong Roots preschool, where we serve the mothers and children of poor families. The poorest of the poor live closest to the riverbank in cobbled together dwellings of tin sheeting with dirt floors and no electricity

This past spring, we constructed a new large meeting room, library space and guest room on the rooftop of the Bal Kendra/Chandra Kala Learning Center. We also renovated the Center's kitchen and bathrooms. In March, several sponsors visited their HIO girls in Kathmandu, along with many UNESCO World Heritage Sites. We also celebrated the opening of a marvelous new community library at our Strong Roots preschool, generously funded by the Berkowitz Family Foundation and the Friends of Nepal, an organization of former Peace Corps volunteers. Laura Gladding and Laura Hunt, along with the teaching staff at Strong Roots, transformed a dingy, dark entryway space into a stunningly beautiful children's library. In November, we plan to construct a new, Alan and Barbara Boroff Library at Bal Kendra.



The Strong Roots community library takes shape as Sunita Pariyar labels the new books prior to shelving.



Meena Tamang, devoted mother of Ishika and Ishani, was invited onto the Sano Sansar (HIO Nepal) Board of Directors.

In July, an intrepid group of eight students and two teachers from the Moses Brown School in Providence journeyed to Kathmandu for a service trip and spoke of how the experience changed their lives. The 10th and 11th graders engaged with the children at Strong Roots and Bal Kendra on creative language arts projects. What a marvelous cultural experience for the MB group, and a great benefit for our students and teachers.

Our marvelous grant to run the mothers' education initiative, Be Part of Her Dream, funded by the US based Dining for Women (DFW) organization ended in June after a very successful two-year pilot project. The class, for 48 poor women who never had the chance to go to school as children, was a resounding success with most of the mothers reaching the equivalent of a second-grade level. What an inspiration these hard-working, dedicated mothers are for us all. Though DFW support has ended, we've raised enough funding to keep the original class running and expand to reach 25 poor mothers in the Balkhu slum at Strong Roots.

On the Cover:

LMV School 1st-grader Sampana Jimba with her mother Nisha who joined the mothers' education class at Strong Roots.

Linda Liss-Bronstein, Maida McKenna, Laura Hunt and Laura Gladding, HIO education team members, continue to provide superb teacher training and language curriculum dialogue with our dedicated teachers in Kathmandu. Our unique Long Distance Learning program, providing real-time video tutorial with Nepali school teachers, is proving astonishingly successful. Every other week, we hold large group meetings with 30 teachers or more. On the off weeks, we have small group sessions with four to five teachers to introduce teaching method development as we listen to teacher concerns, empowering them to formulate solutions for themselves.

This spring we had extraordinary contributions from our HIO summer intern, Sofia Riva, a senior at Columbia, who spent two months working at Strong Roots, and from a veteran Montessori teacher, Tracy Tyson, who'll return in 2019 to assist our HIO partner schools. In May, our computer learning initiatives were bolstered with another volunteer group of engineers from Intel working in our partner schools. For the first time ever, our Senior Director Ram Adhikari was invited by Intel to be a participating member of the deployment team. Ram's service as an educator, guide, translator and technician proved invaluable to the group.



Rinchon Palden, a Tibetan refugee who began HIO sponsorship at age 10 when she walked over the mountains to escape the Chinese occupation. Rinchon, now a registered nurse, reunites with her sponsor Debora Kolwey on the recent HIO sponsor trip.



Linda Liss-Bronstein leads a large group LDL session in the Bal Kendra computer lab for 30 teachers attending.

With the generous support of our sponsors in 2017/18, we accepted 17 young girls to become new HIO-sponsored students. Sponsorship support is now directly benefitting 166 poor girls and young women in six partner schools. Our superb staff members Ram, Palmo and Kanchan, deserve so much credit for their outstanding social work. Their dedication, vigilance and commitment to our girls and their mothers is profound and unwavering.

Access to learning is vital for effecting upward movement from desperate poverty. The educational programming made possible by your generous contributions is allowing a group of poor girls and their mothers to gain the skills that can change their lives to help lift themselves from profound poverty. Heartfelt thanks for all you do to make our efforts so vital and meaningful.

*With your kind generosity,
everything is possible.*

Warmest wishes,

Ricky Bernstein

Smiles and Smoke Rising

by Kiran Dutta Tewari

From the shade of some plastic propped up against the wall on the corner of the street a sharp little voice calling my name reached my ears. I looked over and saw smoke rising from an open charcoal grill, billowing from a hand fan swaying back and forth. On either side of the grill were two sacks full of fresh green corn and the face of a smiling young girl, sweat dripping down her face. It was Shrijana Basnet, Bishnu Maya's eldest daughter.

Bright and cheerful Shrijana, has been sponsored by HIO for over 10 years, and is now in law school. Seeing her on the street over the hot grill came as quite a surprise. In front of her grill was a pile of stones where customers could sit and wait for their roasted corn to be prepared. So I sat down near to her, and asked why she was not at college? She immediately reassured me that the grill was her mother's, and she was helping grill the corn that afternoon. Someone in Bishnu's family had died and she needed the afternoon free.



Shreena Basnet, an HIO-sponsored 4th-grader at the Bijeswori School is Bishnu Maya's younger daughter.

As I examined the sacks of fresh corn, Shrijana explained to me that every morning before dawn her mother walked a mile to Kalimati to collect fresh corn to grill. By 7AM, she returned to the house to prepare food for the children. Bishnu Maya is a brave woman and a caring mother. As she gave birth to two daughters and no son, Bishnu was met with displeasure from her family and was pushed to move away. By the time she gave birth to her third daughter, Shrijana was seven or eight and the family was living in the small corner room of a house still under construction. One day, while Shrijana was playing in the street with her four-year-old sister, the little girl suddenly disappeared. Mother and daughter looked everywhere for the little girl, until finally they discovered her body drowned in a water container she tragically had fallen into.



HIO-sponsored Shrijana Basnet is now a law school student who helps her mother Bishnu Maya with her corn roasting business when she can.

Bishnu Maya is a very private woman who seldom complains, and faces her daily challenges with a sense of resolve to do what she can for her children. Growing up in a large poor family, she never had the chance to go to school as a girl. She married young, and her alcoholic husband spends all the money he makes as a push-cart delivery man. When we first met Bishnu, she was selling roasted peanuts from a basket by the side of the road from early morning to nightfall. She had two children to provide for. Ram has been a constant source of support for her and has worked closely with the Basnet family for many years.

For the past four to five years, Bishnu has been working at Bal Kendra as our caretaker Sital's assistant. The job gave her a place to go every day and a decent living wage.



Bishnu Maya Basnet is a hard-working mother who attends our Be Part of Her Dream mothers' education class at Bal Kendra.

She was serious about her work cleaning the rooms, the pots and pans and helping the little ones tidy themselves. Bishnu Maya is an active participant in the Be Part of Her Dream mothers' education project. Before the class began, she had never even held a pencil in her hand. Often she has trouble remembering from one day to the next how to add or subtract, but this doesn't really matter at all. To have gained so much dignity by learning with the other mothers was success enough. Last month at the closing

ceremony of the mothers' class, she danced along with the women and looked so happy to be part of the group.

Last week Bishnu Maya decided to leave her job at Bal Kendra to once again earn her living as a street vendor. We were upset by her leaving and we tried to convince her to stay on as a member of the Bal Kendra team. She said that by being self-employed she could spend more time with her daughters.

I overheard one of our Bal Kendra teachers saying that the work at Bal Kendra gave great respect to Bishnu Maya and that was the best thing she gained from her job. I agreed. The best we can do for Bishnu is to let her know we'll always be there for her. That we are her people, and her family is close to our hearts. We who gain so much as we try to bring light into their lives.

Kiran Tewari is a long-time Nepali social worker who serves as the HIO Nepal President and was the founder of Bal Kendra over 30 years ago.

The Be Part of Her Dream Sisterhood

by Laura Hunt

As the mothers' class project coordinator, Palmo makes it a point to regularly connect with each woman who participates in the program. As the **BPOHD** pilot project unfolded over two years, she noticed a greater sense of trust developing within the group. Though the women are poor and from low castes, they often still harbor a quiet, hidden prejudice toward people from other ethnic groups than their own. While social barriers are not easily broken down, somehow the program is inspiring the mothers to treat one another more as a family.

One day, Palmo's field notes included a story about Apsara, a 9th-grade HIO student at the LMV School who was rushed to the hospital with appendicitis. In a panic, Apsara's mother Kabita reached out to her **BPOHD** friends for help and support. As a single mother, without the bonds developed within the mothers' class, she may not have known where to turn for help.



Kabita Adhikari greets Bishnu Maya Basnet at an International Women's Day celebration when mothers from the LMV section traveled to meet the Bal Kendra mothers' class group.



All the Be Part of her Dream mothers join for the International Women's Day celebration at Bal Kendra.

Other **BPOHD** mothers showed up with food, financial support, and a sense of concern. The strong social safety net that held Apsara and Kabita that day is one of many intangible measures of the pilot project's overall success. This outpouring of sisterhood far surpasses any of the project's initial goals to help poor women lift themselves out of poverty and despair.



The mothers' project encourages a strong social safety net.

Laura Hunt is a veteran educator and a founding co-teacher at the Croft School in Providence, RI. Laura is also a new HIO board member.

A Message From Palmo Friendship and Bonding

by Palmo Tamang

Dear Ricky-Dai,

Apsara was diagnosed with appendicitis. She was admitted to Patan Hospital on Thursday in the ER and the doctors said that it was in the early stages so they gave pain killers and discharged her. She fainted the next day at home so her mother Kabita took her this time to Alka Hospital. Mr. Sitaula, the LMV Principal, contacted one of the doctors at the hospital who was an LMV graduate. Today Apsara visited again to meet the surgeon and during this time, Yen Devi, a neighbor from the mothers' education class, offered help with money. For hospital care, if money isn't paid up front, no service will be performed. She even sent Apsara and her mother dinner on Thursday night and breakfast on Friday morning since food isn't served by the hospital. She stayed at the hospital with Kabita for 4 hours. Kabita was very worried, so Yen Devi's presence meant a lot.



Kabita Adhikari, who sells fruit every day from a cart on the street, pictured with her 9th-grade daughter Apsara.

Meena also came to Alka hospital. Kabita was crying on the phone telling me that Apsara fainted then I called Meena to help her mother bring Apsara to the hospital. Meena dropped everything and stayed for the whole day. She helped Apsara's mother go around the hospital offices to collect different reports.

Rama, Devika's mother, visited Apsara today and brought a few apples and juices. It was so nice to see this bonding. This is all the result of the friendships made in the mothers' class which has done so much more than teach reading and writing. It's built a lasting sisterhood for these women that most have never known. Even deeper than family relations for Apsara's mother! What a support — such great

sisterhood. My eyes filled to see this worried single mother being helped so nicely by her friends from class.

Kabita often appears as lonely, but she had earned so many close relationships with the other mothers. Even other vendors from the street where Kabita sells vegetables came to help her. They were there from the beginning to the end. Not even one of Kabita's relatives showed up to help. Only her friends. They gave her money and told her not to worry. They brought food and bedding for Kabita and Apsara for the night, and told her don't worry, we'll help. The mothers who visited met with doctors and did all the formalities at the hospital when Kabita was shivering and being so worried. It was amazing to see those women helping her like she was her own sister.

With regards
Palmo

**Palmo Dawa Tamang is the
HIO Educational Coordinator
and the Deputy Director.**

Teachers Leading for Change

by Laura Hunt

Delivering a top-notch educational program is no easy task in inner-city Kathmandu. Classrooms are small and crowded, and high quality teaching materials are scarce. Yet time and again, HIO receives complimentary notes from visitors to our partner schools. They're struck by the sense of dedication, professionalism, and warmth they find. It's our wonderful teachers whose hearts are so clearly focused on the welfare of the children.

As a teaching consultant, I've had the good fortune to mentor many fine educators. Two of HIO's teachers, Poonam Maharjan and Manisha Shrestha, are among the best. They serve as lead teachers at Strong Roots and Bal Kendra, the two preschools HIO fully funds. While each teacher is special in her own right, Poonam and Manisha share common gifts. Their smiles are infectious, and their thirst for new knowledge is unmatched. They're open-minded, enthusiastic, compassionate and forward thinking. Poonam and Manisha are

the kind of role models that any parent would dream of having for their children. Equally important is their capacity for bringing about real and lasting change in Nepal.

Poonam Maharjan

Poonam first came to our attention in 2012 as a teacher at LMV, an HIO partner school revered in Kathmandu for its progressive teaching approach. She taught kindergarten, and was impressed by LMV's outstanding facilities and program. Poonam's heart, though, is forever drawn to the most vulnerable people she can find.

Recalling her own childhood and education brings up difficult memories for Poonam. She was abandoned by her parents, and lived with a grandfather who was more focused on his young, new wife than on child-rearing. Poonam attended government schools where she was taught using the rote memorization system so common in Nepal. She worked hard and dreamed of becoming a lawyer. Tight finances and little support from mentors made it challenging for Poonam to pursue those dreams, and fortunately for us, she became a teacher.

Our deputy director, Palmo, regularly visits HIO partner schools, which enabled her to see how lovingly Poonam engaged with LMV students. Kindergarteners thrived under her tutelage. Palmo's husband, Tejendra, was in the process of opening the Strong Roots preschool in the Balkhu slum. Palmo recognized that Poonam was an obvious choice as a founding teacher, and reached out to see if Poonam would take a chance on Strong Roots. Poonam's big heart and can-do spirit prompted her to say yes.



Strong Roots preschool lead teacher Poonam Maharajan on the left, with the other SR teachers Jyoti, Sunita and Lahsang.

Strong Roots presents some of the most challenging working conditions for HIO teachers. Children attending school there require the most intense social services we can provide. One never knows when a flood might wash out a student's home, or an abusive family member may inflict wounds on a child. Despite these harsh realities, Strong Roots students meet with remarkable academic and social success. Poonam earnestly follows their journeys beyond Strong Roots, and takes pride in knowing that the foundation she's built leads to their future accomplishments.

Poonam has also been instrumental in guiding our new women's literacy program for 25 eager mothers, which she describes as the sisterhood at Strong Roots. Without Poonam's gentle persistence, the program may have taken years to launch. Poonam is now planting the seeds to begin realizing her dreams for becoming a social worker, following along in Palmo's footsteps.



Manisha Shrestha helping Bal Kendra preschool children learn to recognize how the sounds of English feel when spoken. Manisha is a gifted teacher who is serving as a language arts trainer for other Nepali teachers.

Manisha Shrestha

Manisha has a long history with HIO. Her mother Maya, was the Bijeswori School sweeper, where she first met Ricky over 20 years ago. Education was out of her family's reach, so Manisha was provided an HIO sponsorship when she was five. The first to read in her family, Manisha excelled in her studies. In sixth grade, Manisha was transferred to LMV. The transition was humbling, as it forced her to stretch outside her comfort zone. Students at LMV are required to speak only English, and this was tough. A few embarrassing moments left Manisha wiping her tears, but she was determined to excel and her English is now flawless.

As a young adult, Manisha dreamed of becoming successful in business, defining her worth as a woman by earning as much money as possible. While working as a receptionist, Manisha took on a side job tutoring neighborhood children. The extra pocket money was appealing, and parents took notice of Manisha's positive impact. So did our wise senior director, Ram Adhikari, who had been following Manisha's career path.

One unique aspect of HIO's programming is the level of individual care each sponsored girl receives, even beyond graduation. Once an HIO girl, always an HIO girl. Recognizing that a career in teaching might ignite Manisha's potential, Ram considered her a good candidate for an open teaching position at Bal Kendra, instead of for a travel agency. Manisha decided it was worth a try.

Manisha has now taught at Bal Kendra for eight years, and she appears to improve daily. She recalls learning about Montessori methods from Janet Bralove, an expert Montessori teacher trainer from Providence, and using this experience to make her own lessons more creative, joyful and lively. Recently, Manisha embraced a suggestion from HIO's Education Committee to teach language arts using a workshop model. This dynamic classroom management structure is common in the U.S., and all but unheard of in Nepal. With Manisha, our students are learning to collaborate, think critically and communicate well in English. Manisha strives to become a teacher trainer herself, extending her professional reach throughout Kathmandu. What pride we'll take seeing one of HIO's own in this role.

Meeting Ayushma

All HIO supporters are familiar with the words of HIO's motto—*Educate a girl, change a life forever*. Add to that poignant phrase the equally valuable call to educate a girl's mother. My husband Jim and I got to see both firsthand on the Sponsor Trip to Nepal in March. The itinerary included Nepali treasures - Buddhist and Hindu temples that are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a master maker of singing bowls, beautiful mountain vistas. We walked up an undreamt-of number of steps at Swayambhunath, commonly called the Monkey Temple, and rode in a van driven by a driver with nerves of steel, through horrendous traffic that we usually only experience in movies.

We were fortunate to share this experience with a wonderful group of twelve HIO supporters from across the country. The main focus of the trip was to meet our sponsored girls. Jim and I have been sponsoring Ayushma, now 10, since she was 4 and just starting school. We have six years of pictures, and letters written in a small and increasingly sophisticated hand. For several years Palmo has made it possible for us to correspond with Ayushma by video. It was an ineffable feeling to finally meet her.



Ayushma lives with her small family and several relatives in the old brick house where she was born. The house is near the ancient Nepali capital Patan, about a 30 minute walk from the LMV School.



Ayushma Stahpit, a 5th-grader at our partner LMV School, reading from a favorite Frog and Toad book given to her by Ann and Jim.

We were received in her home by Ayushma and her mother and grandparents, with whom she lives. Unlike the homes of most of the HIO-sponsored girls, Ayushma's home has been in her family for several generations, with the space partitioned among the sons. We were a fairly large group of unfamiliar adults, and Ayushma entertained us with aplomb. She is delightful and gracious, and I hope that someday we will see her again.

We were able to visit several of the other sponsored girls, in homes that usually consisted of one small room. In the customary way of Nepali hospitality, we were always welcomed with a cup of hot sweet tea. Often mats are arranged on the floor for sleeping at night, and rolled up during the day. Meals are prepared on two-burner gas hotplates. With little room for a table, vegetables are stored in plastic bins and chopped on a slightly raised cutting board on the floor. There is no indoor plumbing and scant electricity. Usually the girls are being raised by their mothers alone. If the mothers' work begins early in the morning, the girls are responsible for cooking breakfast. Then they walk to school, sometimes a half hour away.



Ann Rollins and Jim Jose traveled to Nepal this past March as part of the HIO sponsor trip to meet Ayushma and her family.

Because of Ram and Palmo, we were able to visit neighborhoods not usually frequented by Westerners. We passed groups of children eager to practice their English with us. There is a fascination with the U.S. that is still unsullied.

We visited several of the HIO partner schools our sponsored girls attend. At each school we were graciously welcomed with colorful scarves or lovely fresh flower garlands. We bowed our heads to receive these gifts from a child's hands, accompanied by a child's warm smile. At Bal Kendra the students and teachers had been busy in anticipation of our visit. Each class had prepared a special performance for us. We were treated to a wonderful program of Nepali songs and dances, often in elaborate ethnic costumes. A highlight was a rousing up-tempo rendition of Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes presented by some of the youngest students.

We spent a morning at Bal Kendra to take part in a wonderful International Women's Day program the mothers had prepared for us. There were demonstrations of math skills, and performances of songs the women had been practicing for the occasion. Several mothers read profound poems they had written celebrating their pride in being women. The mothers were eager to interact with us. Their conversational English was limited and our Nepali even more so, but we all found common ground for warm communication. The morning ended with music and dancing, with visitors drawn in to the celebration. I was struck by the support the mothers show for one another. They come from different

religious, social and economic groups, which often do not mix, but this was not apparent in their shared laughter. The women seem to find their time together a haven from the challenges of their daily lives.

We have known the value of the work that HIO does for many years. We have treasured our correspondence with Ricky, and with Ram and Palmo. The contributions of Ram and Palmo are vast and selfless. To be able to meet these endlessly dedicated people was tremendously meaningful. Many times during our trips around Kathmandu in the van, the doors would slide open and Ricky and Ram would vanish, off for another home visit. Palmo would be off on her motor scooter, expertly tending to whatever needed to be done. Both Ram and Palmo opened their homes to our group for a fine dinner and a memorable evening that became high points of the trip.

The mothers and daughters sponsored by HIO face daily hardships that would be overwhelming to me. The hopefulness and resilience with which they face them are truly remarkable. We met young women who had gone through the HIO program as girls, and were now teaching at the schools themselves, or studying to become doctors, dentists, accountants, or lawyers. This is an organization that changes lives. To touch the lives of people on the other side of the world is truly a gift. This is a trip worth taking.

Ann Rollins and Jim Jose live in Atlanta and are long-time HIO sponsors and supporters.

Flooding in Balkhu

by Sofia Riva



The Strong Roots school is on the main road in the Balkhu slum that often floods during the monsoon.

One day in July, the Kathmandu valley experienced a heavy storm during which rain fell for approximately 10 hours straight. Due to this influx of water, the river passing through Kathmandu swelled and spilled over its banks. Especially at risk were the settlements built on the Bagmati River's edge, where there are no drainage run-off systems.

In the Balkhu slum, one of the poorest areas of the city, the residents were especially hard hit. The settlement of about 300 cobbled together shanty houses has grown over the river bank, with tenuous shelters perched over the water on poles. The people live in temporary dwellings where the river flows directly on the other side of a thin sheet metal wall. Most of these homes have dirt floors with no indoor plumbing, no windows and a wire with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling for light. The toilet for many is the flood plain of the river bank next to the shanty homes.

Around mid-morning the Nepali police arrived and began to force residents out of their homes, ostensibly because of the danger from rising waters. Residents were given no clear idea of when they could return to their ramshackle huts and were left out in the rain. The pitch of the settlement was raised to near hysteria.

The Bagmati is the main river that flows through the Kathmandu valley and Kathmandu itself. The river is the dumping ground for nearly all sewage and solid waste. Balkhu families utilize the waters for washing clothes, dishes and bathing. In several more developed areas of Kathmandu, storm walls have been put in place to safeguard property against rising water levels. But not in Balkhu.

When the flood hit, the water crawled up the river bank about 10 feet to lap at the doorways of the houses.

People balanced on logs and attempted to divert pieces of rubbish, timber and waste before they crashed through the flimsy walls of their homes. The dwellings built further down the embankment had no such luxury. The water poured straight into their homes. Many belongings were lost, the rest thrown into plastic bags onto the street where the crowds coming to watch the rising water trampled them. On the main road very close to Strong Roots, drainage pipes backed up and the road filled to the brim, threatening to flood the shops and houses nearby.

The homes of Anjeli and Uman, two Strong Roots students, went almost completely underwater. Both families are part of the very low Mahaut caste group, who are segregated to

the area of the settlement flush against the river. The Mahaut are one of the poorest groups living in the settlement, lacking even basic necessities such as a kerosene stove or electricity. The families were forced to flee the rising waters, with one mother wandering the streets wailing.

**Balkhu families
were given
food, shelter,
and support.**

Anjeli's family is composed of six members with children ranging from nine years to three months old. Uman is from a family of seven, with children ranging from eighteen to three. Both families had nowhere to go. The Strong Roots team invited both families to come in out of the rain and eat at the school, with teachers taking breaks from classes to help prepare extra food. Five days after the flood, a home visit was conducted for each child to check on the condition of the family. Anjeli's family was living with a neighbor as they attempted to repair the damage to their home now open to the lapping water. Uman's family had no other place to stay and is currently living in the same shack. Many of their meager belongings including bedding and clothes were lost.



Strong Roots teacher Poonam makes a home visit to see how Sharmila Pariyar's mother Kumari managed after the recent flooding in Balkhu.



With a torrent of rain brought on by monsoon weather, the Bagmati River flooded its banks and filled many riverfront dwellings with water and mud.

With income stretched extremely thin under normal circumstances, these families are now faced with the choice of either spending their money on food or using it to replenish what they've lost. As an added pressure, any time spent working on the home is time spent away from daily labor work which translates into lost wages. In the meanwhile, the plentiful monsoon rains won't end until September, with no guarantee that the river won't overflow again.

During the flooding crisis, support for these families was crucial and HIO provided emergency family relief. Thanks to the welcoming generosity of the Strong Roots teachers Poonam, Sunita, Jyoti and Lahsang along with Sarita, the SR caretaker, both families were given food, shelter and encouragement. For the poor of the Balkhu slum, each day is an unfolding challenge. Access to education is vitally important for the children of the slum and equally important is our care for the welfare of each family whose lives we touch.

Sofia Riva is a senior at Columbia University in NY, and was an HIO intern for two months in Kathmandu, during the summer of 2018.

A Letter of Thanks and Inspiration

by Debbie Phipps

Dear Ricky,

As you will certainly understand, it's hard to put into words our experiences while in your beloved Nepal. What I can offer is huge thanks for supporting our involvement. We left Moses Brown with eight intrepid students, and returned with eight young people committed to making a difference by telling the story of their journey and recognizing their roles in making the world a better place for young learners.

We had a number of opportunities to reflect on the trip, and while some of those focused on how our students formed a bond that surprised them, our final Meeting was about service, and what it now means to them. The kids spoke of reciprocity and authentic engagement, all ideas we treasure. The students feel very strongly that the trip should happen again, and two want to lead the next iteration.

We so appreciated Ram making so much time to represent HIO: to guide us through Nepal, and to become a surrogate dad for eight kids and two adults. He is so inspirational and knows how to make people laugh when things are hard. I'll never forget his racing one of our students, a track super-star, up the path to Namo Buddha, an image that captures his spirit and joy. Dinner at his home was a highlight for all. Ram has become an important icon in their lives. Palmo's warmth and care were so helpful as well, and getting to know her better, and seeing the schools HIO supports, lets me think more helpfully about other ways we can partner with teachers there. I cannot thank them enough.

What we saw in the schools was amazing. I've been lucky in my career to see a lot of good teaching, and there was some very good teaching indeed happening in both Bal Kendra and Strong Roots. I spent my first days at Strong Roots, and was especially struck by the amount of instruction the children experienced each day. I noted that all the teachers found time each day, in both schools, to connect individually with each child for at least a few moments; the kids must feel seen and known. I don't know how the teachers do it? The energy and care required are enormous and I'm inspired by them.

So again, thank you. Your work is hard and tiring, but what amazing dividends! I'm honored to be part of your HIO team.

With hugs, Debbie



Debbie Phipps, a seasoned traveler, is the assistant head of academic affairs for the Moses Brown School in Providence, RI.

Moses Brown School travelers and the Strong Roots teachers. Front Row, L to R: Lahsang, Poonam, Maddy, Sunita, and Jyoti. Back Row, L to R: Debbie, Mary Beth, Morgan and Olivia.

A Piece of My Heart

by Cate Green

As we made our way through alleyways and maneuvered around pits of mud, it was still unclear to me where Strong Roots was amongst the densely-populated housing surrounding it. The building soon came into view, marked by the large, carefully painted letters of the school on the exterior wall.

Upon taking off our shoes and entering the small space, we were warmly greeted with smiles and ceremonial scarves to be wrapped around our necks. It was odd to me that even though we'd been there for less than a minute, our presence was so appreciated.

As I observed the teachers maximize the limited space with rotating stations and precise systems, I couldn't help but feel like my presence in the classroom was a disruption. But, over the next week and a half of service in both Strong Roots and Bal Kendra, I realized just how wrong I'd been.

As our relationships with the teachers and students grew, we truly found our place within the school communities. Performing simple tasks such as laminating flashcards for the teachers, and creating educational crafts to hang on the walls, I genuinely felt that our group was making a small, but tangible difference. I became a frequent participant in the English classes, feeling incredibly grateful that the teachers trusted me enough to teach a new lesson. Although our expertise in the classes learning Nepali was certainly restricted, I was enjoying learning along with the kids and will be sure to practice my new fruit vocabulary if I'm ever lucky enough to return to Nepal.



Cate Green, with seven other students from the Moses Brown School in Providence, RI, volunteered at Bal Kendra and Strong Roots for 10 days in July. A life-changing experience for Cate.

Watching the children absorb new information with immeasurable enthusiasm, it was evident that the teachers were the creators behind an environment filled with such genuine love for learning. The passion the teachers carried as educators gave way to the passion of learning embedded within each and every student. I recall one of the teachers at Strong Roots telling us that her walk to school every morning was an hour, but worth every second, as it meant she would arrive at school to see the infectious smiles of her students.

Returning to high school this fall, I hope to hold within me the same eager spirit carried by my younger Nepali friends. To rediscover a true love of learning. I hope to carry the same dedication and selflessness as the teachers at Strong Roots and Bal Kendra, to have passion and know what it means to pursue it. And to everyone contributing to the wonderful organization that is Hands in Outreach, I hope that you all understand how much this incredible opportunity means to me. A piece of my heart will always belong halfway around the world.

Cate Green, an 11th-grader at the Moses Brown School, loves to write and play soccer. Cate hopes she might return to Nepal soon.

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Nothing uplifts a society more
than the education of its girls



*It's always wonderful when Urmila receives a
hand-written note from her sponsor
Kate. We encourage you to correspond
with your sponsored child.*

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☐ \$50 An after school meal and extra tutoring
for a group of children for a month

☐ \$75 One month supply of lentils, rice, potatoes
and cooking oil for 3 families

☐ \$100 Uniform & Books for one HIO girl

☐ \$150 Provide healthcare coverage for
five mothers

☐ \$250 Help educate the children at the
Strong Roots preschool

☐ \$500 Help sponsor the education for the
children at the Bal Kendra Center

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