



Shreejana Basnet teaching her mother, Bishnu, how to write a word.

Organization name: Hands In Outreach
Program Title: ***BE PART OF HER DREAM (BPOHD)***
Grant Amount: \$44,290.00 2-year grant cycle
Contact Person: Ricky Bernstein
Address: HIO, 1504 Silver St, Sheffield, MA 01257 413.229.7993

Core goal: To impart basic literacy and help alleviate a condition of abject poverty for a small group of marginalized women in Nepal.

The project at a glance: To provide a supportive learning environment encouraging basic literacy, financial education practices, health care and a robust social network to build self-esteem for poor, marginalized mothers in Kathmandu. The women will then have the capacity to elevate their personal and financial potential to enhance the present and future opportunities for their families. A culturally sensitive program to help our mothers break an endless cycle of poverty. A journey of learning, empowerment and financial inclusion.

Project funding: No changes in funding.

Program situation: No changes in program situation.

Program beneficiaries: Began with 54 women, after one year we have 52, with one mother learning at home/suffering from stomach cancer.

Key indicators:

- * Overall attendance rate for the 1st year - 80.5%. For May...83% overall.
- * 49 mothers had full checkups including OBGYN. 94%
- * All mothers have *salwar kameez* uniforms they wear to class.
- * 48 mothers have obtained citizenship papers. 92%
- * 48 mothers have obtained individual bank accounts. The women who don't, have their money placed into a joint account for them. 92%
- * Two lead teachers, one part-time teacher, 4 assistant teachers/HIO college girls, holding classes five days/week instead of the 4 at the project start.

Objectives, tangible outcomes and progress made toward achieving our goals:

1. Basic literacy: Imparting basic Nepali literacy, basic conversational and written English language, basic math, nutrition, women's legal advocacy, hygiene, counseling for domestic violence, small business vocational counseling and basic computer fluency.

Achieving the goal: Mothers are attending classes regularly, learning through traditional classroom methods and computer assisted learning. Topics include: Nepali literacy and numeracy, English literacy and numeracy, cultural enrichment and life skills classes including female general health and hygiene seminars, human trafficking, banking practices, self-esteem workshops, celebrating diversity among the group to encourage tolerance, meditation techniques for stress relief and women's legal rights. Classes are designed to accommodate advanced students and women who are slower learners, but no less enthusiastic. Mothers are gaining basic digital fluency using *Waterford Early Learning* software to assist with English language skills in computer labs HIO has at both project locations.

2. Financial inclusion: Creating a viable strategy to alleviate abject poverty, by providing small cash transfers in exchange for a commitment to attend regularly scheduled literacy classes organized by HIO. Mothers establish individual bank accounts with \$650 saved after 2 years, to enable and encourage financial stability. Mothers learn to save with other women, leading to empowerment, independence, higher self-esteem and a measure of gender equality.

Achieving the goal: Bank accounts have been set up with practice visits to banks to overcome the fear of using the system. Successful allocation of monthly cash transfers with mothers depositing the funds into their personal bank accounts. Some mothers have borrowed against their bank balance in an emergency, and successfully repaid their loan. Many mothers are adding to their bank balances, depositing money they earn at their daily jobs. Creating a culture of saving where none previously existed. Our mothers are gaining independence and confidence, knowing their own money is protected from their husbands forcing them to withdraw the funds. BPOHD is creating a measure of financial stability and empowerment these women have never known.

3. Women's advocacy and self-esteem: Assistance to obtain critical Nepali citizenship papers, and instruction in Nepali women's rights.

Achieving the goal: 48 out of 52 mothers have obtained their vital citizenship papers, securing access to their legal rights and allowing them to open a bank account. We've organized several workshops on team building skills, meditation, and efforts to celebrate major holidays for different ethnic groups to encourage tolerance. Most mothers can now read local store signs and headlines in the newspapers. Place phone calls without their children's help. In late April, Palmo organized the first major gathering of ALL the mothers in the project. It was a wonderful event with a meaningful presentation on stress relief, including lunch, dancing, storytelling and a chance for the women to meet and exchange contact information. The loved meeting other BPOHD women from across town, sharing a similar experience.

4. Health care: A focus on general health care including check-ups and follow-up care.

Achieving the goal: All but three mothers have had full check-ups including OBGYN and eye exams. Dental exams will begin soon. Seventeen mothers have gotten glasses, two mothers needed surgery for gallbladder issues and one mother sadly was diagnosed with stomach cancer, now in her fifth round of chemo. The DFW grant and HIO are covering the cost. Some of the mothers never had a doctor's exam before. We're running a pilot project within the group for introducing the use of menstrual cups, with assistance from Putali Nepal (putali-nepal.com) Thus far, 15 mothers are trying the cups and we'll soon run a workshop at our Bal Kendra BPOHD location for the mother's there and introduce the cups to our older college girls. Since the project began, all mothers are far more aware of their general health and that of their children. Several mothers were pleased they could now read the labels and understand the directions for taking medications.

5. Daughters as project partners: Encouraging daughters to act as *project-partners* to help their mothers with practicing lessons at home.

Achieving the goal: In the past six months, nearly all the HIO sponsored girls whose mothers are coming to class have expressed admiration and respect for their mother's effort. The daughters are helping their mothers with lessons at home and in class. Several mothers have young children who are not yet in school. In the coming six months, we expect to work with our HIO girls much more on ways to help their mothers with academic work at home.

What challenges are we facing as we move forward with the project and how are we approaching those challenges ?

The mothers are truly excited to attend class. So much that they'd like to come every day. Both project locations are holding class for one and a half hours, five or six days a week. The mothers are split into three groups according to their ability, generally halfway through each daily session. The challenge is to keep all the women fully engaged since their academic levels are so varied. To effectively manage the classes, we have several HIO older college girls helping the mothers during class time.

Two of the mothers are developmentally challenged, and perhaps clinically depressed. One mother gets help every day from her eleventh-grade daughter Shreejana, who's an excellent student. Her mother Bishnu, still has difficulty remembering from one day to the next how to write her name. As a result, she's unable to get her own bank account, since she has to sign her name in front of a bank official and can't remember how. On the flip side, several of the mothers are moving far ahead of the group and will be able to meet Nepali school standards for passing the fifth or sixth grade at the end of the two-year project. The project is effectively having daughters help their mothers every day, along with working one-on-one with the slowest learners using every teaching aid available in the Montessori-oriented classrooms.

Maintaining a high level of attendance for the 5-day per week classes, especially during the coldest winter months, was a challenge. Most of the mothers are single heads of households and must deal with their own illness and their children's. Factors that impact attendance include not only sickness, but family pressures, work commitments, festivals, and family obligations requiring mothers to travel to distant home villages. Sometimes the mothers are just overwhelmed with responsibilities that cause them to miss class. Our HIO Nepali staff work closely with the mothers to overcome obstacles for attendance. Home visits are frequent, especially if there appears to be some problem at home that might prevent a mother from attending class. Despite this challenge, we're pleased that the rate of attendance for the program is quite high.

The lead teacher at the LMV School location left at the end of six months and we had to find a new teacher. In the interim, the lower school head, Gita Sitaula, a wonderfully gifted educator and our project

leader in that location, took over the teaching. Gita is now training the school librarian, Sharmila to fill the lead teacher role. What looked like a problem at first was handled skillfully by our overall project leader, Palmo Tamang - HIO's Deputy Director. Starting the second year of the project, we decided to give a small pay raise to the teachers and assistants, and had the extra funds because the number of women we originally targeted was 54, but we now have 52.

We also didn't anticipate the need for child care for the mothers in our LMV School location. Fourteen of the mothers had children who needed supervision when school let out at 4:00pm. So we started an after school help session and had all of our HIO sponsored girls attend from 4:30 to 6, while the mothers were in class. That solved the problem.

Have we revised our original objectives since the project began and if so why ? What are the new objectives ?

After the first six months of the project, it was apparent that our *academic objectives* needed amending. The established academic goals for the project were very ambitious. We had very high expectations overall and have decided to lower them to a more realistic level. Rather than expecting the mothers to be at a fourth-grade level in Nepali and English literacy, we revised that back to a second or third-grade level at the end of the two-year project.

Two years is a very short time for all the mothers to reach academic success at the levels we set for the program. Each mother has come to the project with little or no prior academic experience. Most of the mothers didn't even know how to hold a pencil before they came to class. Setting a high standard of achievement, when academic backgrounds are so varied among the mothers, had to be reevaluated carefully after the first six months of classes. We've been giving far more supportive types of assessments to gauge the mothers' levels of learning.

We also realized that for most academic instruction, teaching to a larger group of 25 women wasn't working well. More focus is now being placed on each mother's individual goals based on her skills, knowledge and capabilities. An approach based on individual instruction takes more time, energy, patience and help from assistant teachers and daughters. In the long term, this change in our teaching approach will help the mothers reach their personal goals while being given the opportunity to reach the program's goals.

We originally expected the mothers to save half their monthly cash transfer but, to our great surprise, the women decided to save all of their monthly cash stipend. Therefore, at the end of the first year, each mother had saved \$300. Initially, we expected the mothers to save a total of \$240 at the end of two years. So this is a dramatic shift with a projection of having each mother save a grand total of \$650 at the close of the project. This represents an increase in savings for each mother of 270% from our initial goal !

Do we anticipate any difficulties in completing our project in the timeline outlined in our proposal ?

We expect to meet our target goals for 96% of the mothers by the end of the second year. That is 50 out of 52. The mothers are hoping the project may continue if possible.

First year expenses:

Cash transfers - \$12,750

Year-end bonus - \$1275

Teachers/assistant teachers/financial coordinator - \$4400

Medical - \$1346

Food - \$1875

School supplies/uniforms - \$940

Total 1st year = \$22,586.00

Impact statement:

When we walked into the room, Shardha looked 30 years older than her 35 years. Just back from her third round of chemo, she was exhausted and chilled. 87 degrees that day, but she was chilled with the blanket wrapped snugly around her upper body. She'd lost over 30 pounds since the treatments began. She didn't complain about the nausea and fatigue. Shardha asked if we might bring up her school books so she could keep up with the class. We were amazed at her request. Later that day, we came back with her books, especially the dog-eared English language booklet with the simple illustrations she liked best.

Shardha, along with nearly all the women in the **BPOHD** mothers' class, never had the chance to go to school as girls. Nearly all thought this would never happen in their lifetimes. This small miracle. What a wonderful sight to see these women sitting together in class, eagerly repeating simple words and phrases. Attentively, hanging onto every word Lata, their teacher says. Every new word, every new phrase a challenge. As the mothers' comfort level increases from the newly forged bonds between the women, they're better equipped to venture into the unknown, trying new tasks with confidence. A mother called to the whiteboard will mispronounce a word, then quickly cover her face with her hands while giggling and squirming like a child. What passion for learning! What fun seeing the other women lip-phrasing the words, almost willing the mother at the white board to say them correctly. They see and feel themselves in her place. They take nothing for granted and wish success for everyone in class. For a small group of mothers, **BE PART OF HER DREAM** is truly a celebration of life. An inspiring affirmation to what the *journey of learning* can be if given a chance to blossom.

Credit: Megan Germain, Swati Makhija, Wendy Han, and Yang Xu - Columbia University graduate students, Chiara Fuller, Joyce Catsimpiras, Ram Adhikari - HIO Senior Director, Palmo Tamang - HIO Deputy Director, Dorothy Jakab - HIO Board



Jarmit Mager helping her mother, Shardha, with lessons at home.



BPOHD teacher, Lata Rai, working with Dhana Kumari.

Be Part of Her Dream Video Links:

SHARDA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=564yIMYrm_s&feature=youtu.be

AMBIKA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz7yXQOLW3U>