



## HCC Student Stories

Each one of our students has a story. A story of tragedy, a story of triumph, a story of hope. We are honored to know them, so proud of their accomplishments and grateful that they have shared their stories with us.

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## Our First Students - Nari & Chet

Nari and Chet were HCC's very first students. The sisters are from the so-called "untouchable" Dalit caste and were born into abject poverty in the Solukhumbu region of Nepal. Their father died when they were babies and their mother remarried. Because of the extreme poverty and scarcity of resources faced by many in rural Nepal, children from previous marriages are rarely accepted into newly created families, and, as is unfortunately common, their new step-father refused to accept them into his home. Abandoned and soon starving, Nari and Chet were separated from their brothers and taken to an orphanage in Kathmandu.



In 1999, Bruce and Susan met them when they were just 3 and 4 years old and began sponsoring their education. The following year, they were taken out of the orphanage and placed into a high-quality boarding school. Nari and Chet are an integral part of HCC's origin story because it was their request to bring their friends from the orphanage with them that HCC was born. And ever since, HCC has been provided quality education, mentorship and loving care to children in need.

Since graduating from university and HCC's program, the sisters have continued to thrive independently. Nari graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2018, and is the first person in her family with more than a 5th-grade education. She is now a neonatal nurse in Kathmandu. She also supports the education of her brothers' children, giving her nieces and nephews the hope of a life free from poverty.

Chet graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Public Health in 2020. She is an accomplished advocate for the rights of children and helped found Himalayan Children's Charities Nepal (HCC-Nepal) in 2017. HCC-Nepal is an independent, survivor-led NGO that supports vulnerable Nepali children and youth. In 2021, Chet welcomed her first child with her husband Milan, and in 2022 she began a Master's degree in Public Health in Perth, Australia.

Both Nari and Chet are still involved with HCC, coaching and mentoring the young students and helping them achieve success. We are so proud of the women that they have become and are so grateful that they are part of the HCC family.



## From Tragedy to Triumph - Mun Maya

Mun Maya began life in the high hills of the remote Midwestern region of Nepal. Her earliest childhood memories are of running barefoot, raising oxen, playing with her baby sister, and helping her mother around the house. But when she was 4 years old, the death of her father plunged her and her family into abject poverty. Soon thereafter, unable to put food on the table, her mother made the heart-wrenching decision to remarry. Mun Maya's new step-father refused to accept her and her sister. The young girls found themselves in a pitiful state, and eventually, and unbeknownst to their mother they were taken by a relative to an orphanage.

In the orphanage, they lacked nutritious food, warm clothes, and shoes. "Many of us shared a single bed, and we survived the best we could. It was a place to be, but it was never a home. I felt lost." Soon after arriving in Kathmandu, Mun Maya's younger sister was abruptly adopted abroad, and Mun Maya was left utterly alone.



But in 2003, Mun Maya became one of the first students supported by HCC. At age 8, Susan and Bruce Keenan took her out of the orphanage and placed her in one of the best schools in Nepal. After graduating from grade 10 in 2009, she moved from her school hostel into HCC's "Khushi Ghar" youth home as part of our first cohort of older students. Mun Maya continued to work hard in her studies, and on her personal development, and in 2015 she graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration.

In 2015, devastating earthquakes hit Nepal, destroying many rural communities. Mun Maya spearheaded HCC's disaster relief efforts, and helped to develop our rural program that keeps children safe and in school. "Deep in my heart, I knew that I could help the communities that were ruined and the children who were left orphaned. I knew this was my passion."

In 2017, Mun Maya and other HCC students and graduates founded HCC-Nepal, an independent, survivor-led nonprofit that partners with HCC to run our RISE and PEAK programs on the ground. Since 2018, Mun Maya has been leading HCC-Nepal as the organization's Executive Director. The same year, she obtained her Post Graduate Diploma in Counseling and Psychology, and in 2020, she



graduated with her Master of Arts in Child Development. Today, Mun Maya lives in Kathmandu with her husband and a cousin from her village, who is pursuing her university degree with Mun Maya's support.

"I've always held a vision for my future of working with and for children like myself, and this vision has been realized through HCC. Getting support for my education and having a family at HCC was the greatest gift and blessing. Now I'm in a position to pass along this blessing. I'm using all my strength and education to help children in need."

### **The PEAK Experience - Siwani and Saraswati**



In 2016, with 16 years of experience supporting our students' educational and life journeys, we opened scholarship applications for higher education to students who grew up outside of HCC's programs. Siwani (right in the photo) joined us beginning in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She is from a remote region of Nepal and is a member of the so-called "untouchable" caste (Dalit). Her father died when she was a baby, pushing her young mother into extreme poverty. After several years of struggling to keep her two young daughters fed and clothed, Siwani's mother remarried. Unable to bring her children into her new married home, Siwani and her older sister were left with their elderly grandmother, who was herself disabled and impoverished. Local people took pity on the two young sisters, and they were brought to a local boarding school, where they were given shelter and access to education.

It quickly became evident that Siwani was a brilliant and hardworking student. The principal and teachers at the school took note of her potential and supported her through grade 10, although she couldn't pay the fees. In 2016, after she passed her grade 10 exams with excellent results, she joined HCC and moved to Kathmandu and into our youth home, Khushi Ghar. In 2018, she completed a



competitive two-year science program for grades 11 and 12 and joined a 4-year university program. She is currently studying her final year of a Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Technology.

“I chose this field because I am interested in the medical sector and have a keen interest in helping people. I'm working hard to get good grades so that I can become a lab technologist and serve the sick people of my country. I am very grateful for the help HCC has provided me. I have the chance to pursue my career goals and live in a big family with many friends who understand me. I feel proud to have so many opportunities to be successful and fulfill my dreams.” - Siwani

Even though she came into HCC at 16, Siwani blended seamlessly into the HCC family and excelled at her studies. Because of her success, the following year we published an open call for PEAK Program applications in the national newspaper. Saraswati applied independently, and we were impressed by her drive to succeed and passion to lead a purposeful life. Saraswati is from a remote area that has been historically impoverished and marginalized. She received minimal yet crucial support from a Spanish organization during her elementary years that allowed her to attend school. Seeing education as her way out of poverty, Saraswati worked hard in her studies and was determined to continue her education past grade 10, despite the obstacles she faced.

Upon moving from her village into the HCC youth home in Kathmandu, Saraswati joined a Humanities program for grades 11 and 12. In 2019, after completing an internship at a local news agency, she joined a 4-year university program in Journalism and Mass Communication, where she currently studies.

“In the [2015] earthquake, I lost my house and many people I knew. At that time of need, many people came to support us. I knew that one day I would like to be like them and support others. I am grateful to all my HCC family members and supporters for providing me with a beautiful home with supportive and caring people. My goal is to be able to give back to society. I want to fight for the rights of women and other disadvantaged people, and give them a voice.” - Saraswati

### **Brothers Rising Up - Kaman and Jaman**



Kaman and Jaman are brilliant young men. They come from a marginalized indigenous community and were left orphaned at an early age. Despite their hardships, they worked hard and excelled in their studies. With no one to care for them after the death of their parents, the brothers were eventually brought from their village to an orphanage in Kathmandu. “It was very difficult to be an orphan child in Nepal. Living conditions were very poor and it was difficult to manage even basic needs like food, shelter, and clothes”, says Kaman.

Despite their difficult situation, they both did exceptionally well in school. A local nonprofit organization found out about them and supported their education through grade 12. However, both brothers were determined to continue with their studies past high school. In 2019, Kaman was referred to HCC by the Nepal government and was welcomed into the program after submitting a moving application that showcased his motivation to learn and give back. The following year, Jaman joined his older brother at HCC.

Kaman is currently in his third year of university majoring in physics and mathematics and doing very well. He plans to pursue advanced degrees and become a physics professor in the future. He is an active member of HCC and his university's student union, continues to volunteer at the orphanage where he grew up. In addition to his work in science, Kaman is also an accomplished painter and visual artist. “I am so excited to study physics. It was like a dream come true to have an opportunity to further my studies. I am so lucky to have HCC in my life. I want to become a physics professor because teaching is what makes me more excited and joyful than anything.” - Kaman



Like his older brother, Jaman excels in his studies. He was one of the top students in his high school, finishing with a 3.70 GPA. Jaman is now in his second year of university, studying Microbiology, and is currently applying for medical school. He aims to be a doctor. Kaman and Jaman have integrated well into Khushi Ghar and built many close friendships. While they are known to spend copious amounts of time studying, they also take on many household responsibilities, including in the kitchen and garden. Kaman also tutors the younger students daily.

“I am so thankful for all of the learning opportunities I have here, and the beautiful memories I’m making with my family here. We are facing tough challenges together, but everyone in the house is helpful and supportive, and I am forever grateful.” - Jaman

### **A Second Chance At Life - Pabitra**



After her parents abandoned her as a child, Pabitra was sent to live with an uncle. He allowed her to stay in school but also expected her to work to earn her keep.

“I always had to work a lot so I didn’t have much time to focus on my studies. I used to wake up at 4 am each morning and work in my uncle’s small restaurant. I would go to school during the day and then have to come back to work again until 8 pm each night. I used to study as much as I could, but I was often too tired and short on time. I didn’t expect to continue my education after grade 10.” - Pabitra

HCC learned about her situation from local government authorities and offered her a scholarship to continue her studies. In August 2019, Pabitra moved to HCC’s youth home in Kathmandu, and officially joined our family.

“Before, when I was in the village, I thought that I was the only one like me, without a mom or dad. But when I came to HCC, I met many friends like myself and I don’t feel alone anymore. I am surrounded by people who understand me. There are so many kind people around the world who care about us, too, and that feels so good. Now, I feel that I can do many things in my life and that there are lots of possibilities. I have this opportunity to study at a good college in Kathmandu and I



am very thankful. Since being supported by HCC, various doors are opening for me and my life is changing, I believe that all the children in the world deserve an education. My education is now my priority so that I can move forward in my life and eventually help others.” -Pabitra

In 2021, Pabitra finished grades 11 and 12 at the top of her class. She is also a talented performance artist. In 2022, she will begin university with a plan to study psychology. She aspires to become a psychiatrist in the future.