



# STOP Girl Trafficking

SGT is twenty years strong now (!) and so we asked our partner, Dr. Aruna Uprety, to write about her early experiences in preventing girls from being trafficked. When we began our partnership, she was going door to door persuading parents to let their daughters go to school to keep them safe. From 52 girls then, SGT has now enrolled more than 23,000.

---



*Aruna in the field, 2001*

## My experiences, Then and Now

It was a typical winter morning in the middle hills this February, as the fog lifted and made way for the warm sun. I had traveled from Kathmandu to meet with local government officials. As I spoke with them, one young woman greeted me with a big smile.

“Hello Dr. Aruna, I am so happy to see you here!” she said.



*Seeing a vulnerable girl making it through high school, and developing a career despite all the challenges, is a big win for her, her family, and Nepal.*

I was surprised. How did she recognize me?

She saw through my confusion.

“You don’t remember me? I am Nirmala from Barabhise,” she explained. “You had come to our community ten years ago, visited my home, and insisted to my mother that I be allowed to attend school. My mother was hesitant. But you insisted, and my mother eventually allowed me to attend school.”

STOP Girl Trafficking supports at-risk girls’ education all the way through 12th grade. But Nirmala went on to university and found a government job. She said I had not changed much through those years, but her life had transformed dramatically.

When I meet or hear about our students, it makes me think of the early days when we had initiated our program to motivate and assist girls to go to school. As far as the parents were concerned, girls were expected to do household chores, and sending them to school meant extra expenses while losing help at home.

It was not always easy to convince reluctant parents to send their daughters to school, even if we were offering to cover all the costs. There were even occasions when parents requested our assistance to send their boys. We often had to collaborate with local teachers, social workers, and even political leaders, to convince the girl’s parents. Gradually, though, parents did realize if the girls went to school, she and the family would both benefit; she could be safe from harm, learn to make informed decisions and earn a living.

## Transforming a Community

I remember visiting a neighborhood called Sarki Tola in the far-western district of Kailali. The local school had 20 students, grades 1 to 5, a single classroom, with one teacher. But when we reached the school, we found the children studying under a tree. The area had many more children, most either playing or working in the fields.

The community consisted mostly of Dalit (untouchable) families. Due to their extreme poverty, parents were not keen to send children to school. However, with the Indian border nearby, we immediately realized the children, already at risk of early marriage or domestic servitude, were also vulnerable to being trafficked!

So we called a community meeting, and nearly 100 people showed



---

*Little did I know,  
with AHF's help  
and our great  
team, we would  
support more than  
23,000 girls over  
time.*

up. Our message was simple: it is important to send children, including daughters, to school. Their response was unsurprising: they could not afford to do so. But we explained the only way to break out of this cycle of poverty was through education. By the end of it, with our commitment to help, 15 new girl students were enrolled.

We worked with the community to build a small school with three rooms and what began as 15 new students became 150 girls.

Today, two SGT alums work as support teachers in that very school. They also play another valuable role: as an inspiration to parents, and mentors to young girls. Now, sending girls to school is the norm. It is humbling that what began as a small step to assist a few girls has transformed and energized the entire community.

## Growing SGT

I always thought our effort would be small, supporting perhaps a few hundred girls. That changed when I met AHF's Richard Blum and Erica Stone 20 years ago. At the time, we were supporting 52 girls from untouchable communities in two districts. After partnering with AHF, we were supporting 1,000 within two years.

Then, they asked if we could grow to 5,000 girls. I gasped. Impossible for a small organization like mine, I thought. Little did I know, with AHF's help and our great team, we would support more than 23,000 girls over time.

Twenty years ago, many rural areas did not have roads, and the communication system was poor. Sometimes, to reach communities and schools we would need to take a long bus ride and then walk 12 hours.

Today, our former students are working across the country. Seeing a vulnerable girl making it through high school, and developing a career despite all the challenges, is a big win for her, her family, and Nepal.

Thank you, I am grateful for your help.



Dr Aruna Uprety





Aruna (third from left)  
with a group of senior  
SGT girls and graduates.

---

*We take girls  
at a real risk of  
being trafficked  
and turn them  
into confident,  
articulate, grateful  
young women  
looking at very  
different futures.*

## SGT 2018: Notes from the Field

Each time we go to Nepal, we meet with SGT girls. And we always learn a lot. This field visit, we focused on seeing some of the girls who are in their last two years of school, 11th and 12th grades, and graduates, alums who are just starting their careers. With SGT now twenty years strong, we wanted to understand the impact SGT has had on their lives — what happened beyond keeping them safe from being trafficked.

Over tea, we talked with two groups of girls; one from the area around Pokhara and the other from Kathmandu. In both, the alums were almost all employed. They had become school teachers, hospital receptionists, and NGO staffers doing social mobilizing. Some had gone on to pursue their bachelor's, two in finance and marketing. All were beating the odds against young low caste women finding work.

A few years ago, when we asked SGT girls in 11th and 12th grades what they wanted to do, quite a few said, 'work in a bank.' Now they say, 'manage a bank.'

The Amar scholars and the alums are young women with plans



and dreams. When we met, they were thoughtful, poised, and eager to talk to us. I thought, 'How were these girls ever really at risk?' But then we heard their stories: extreme poverty, abusive, alcoholic or absent parents. Fathers burning their school books, never enough to eat, houses and family members gone in the earthquakes. One girl even scared away a tiger that was stalking her on her way to school.

And I thought, this is what we do. We take girls at a real risk of being trafficked and turn them into confident, articulate, grateful young women looking at very different futures. With 23,000 girls in SGT or graduated, it is a movement with huge impact.

Erica Stone

## Anju's Story

*Anju's childhood had all the hallmarks of a potential trafficking victim. She was born into poverty, orphaned at age four. Passed among relatives obligated to be her caretakers, she was overwhelmed with household chores, and never had a home she could call her own. Anju was living with her uncle when SGT found her, and was able to stay in school only with SGT's support. But, tragically, her uncle, the man she thought of as her father, died, and his family began to torture her by constantly asking her to leave their house. She finally did, and moved into her older sister's small rented room.*

*It was at school that she discovered Taekwondo. One day, a Korean Taekwondo group came to give a demonstration and she knew immediately she wanted to learn it. The confidence that she would be safe in school because of SGT gave her the courage to try something she could call her own. By the time Anju completed 10th grade, she had earned her black belt.*

*Last December, Anju's instructor Sunil Singh Thakur helped her participate at an International Taekwondo Championship in India. She won the Gold Medal!*

*Anju is the first member of her family to reach 12th grade. She has become a powerful role model for other SGT students, and an emerging national star athlete.*



Anju wins gold!





*From the early days: an SGT girl standing in front of her new school.*



## AMERICAN HIMALAYAN FOUNDATION

To learn more about SGT and our other work, you can visit our website  
[www.himalayan-foundation.org](http://www.himalayan-foundation.org) or call us at (415) 288-7245.  
909 Montgomery Street, Suite 400 San Francisco, CA 94133