

LAXMI'S STORY

NEPAL



Laxmi (16) organises group games at her old school in western Nepal. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

16-year-old Laxmi lives with her mother and siblings in Jajarkot, one of the least developed districts in the remote Karnali province, with almost half of the population living below the poverty line. Girls and young women in remote Nepal face numerous challenges in their everyday life.

Despite the economic hardship that her family faced, Laxmi's parents were determined that their daughter receive an education.

But tragedy struck when Laxmi was 10 years old. Her father, who worked hard to pay for his children's education, fell ill and sadly, passed away. Laxmi was devastated and stopped attending her classes.

Prior to her father's passing, Laxmi joined the child's club at her school that was run with the support of Caritas Australia's partner organisation, Caritas Nepal, through the Nepal Livelihoods and Resilience Program. These clubs support students to participate in extracurricular activities to develop their speaking, writing and leadership skills.

The children also organise awareness-raising activities such as public rallies, street dramas and creating posters that highlight issues such as child rights. Since 2018, Caritas Nepal has supported more than 5,000 children through the child's clubs. With the encouragement of her fellow students in the child's club, Laxmi decided to return to school.

"If I don't get to study, then I'll experience hardship. I'll have to struggle like mother. If I don't get to study, then I'll have no knowledge. I know we can only get good employment after we study," Laxmi said.

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After Laxmi returned to school, she became more actively involved in her child's club and developed greater confidence as she participated in public speaking and debating activities. Laxmi was keen to take on a leadership role and she was elected as the chairperson of her club.

"Before I was involved in child club, I was very shy and didn't talk much," Laxmi said. "I used to walk with my head down, didn't talk to anyone, even when they called me first. Now, I talk to everyone, laugh with them."

Laxmi's grades have excelled since joining the child's club and she is the top of her class in many subjects. But her proudest achievement is something that will have a lasting impact for future generations.

Clean water has long been an issue at Laxmi's school. Laxmi and her child's club members discussed the need to build multiple water taps at the school so that all students can access clean drinking water. They lobbied the school administration, the ward office and the municipality office until they eventually agreed to construct a series of water taps on the school grounds. This experience made Laxmi realise that her voice matters, and that her actions can make a difference.

"Now, I know where to speak, what to speak. However big the gathering might be, I'm not afraid to speak," she said.

Laxmi has graduated from high school and is now studying a Diploma in Civil Engineering at a technical school that is a four-hour walk away. Her dream is to work as an engineer and create a better life for her mother.

Laxmi continues to be involved in the child's club, serving as an advisor. She attends the meetings regularly, mentoring the next generation of young leaders at her old school. Every time she walks by her old school, she sees students using the drinking taps and feels immense pride at her accomplishments.

Laxmi may have graduated from her secondary school but the impact she has made will continue for generations to come.

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TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges faced by Laxmi as a 16-year-old girl growing up in Nepal?
- B. Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners in Nepal have supported Laxmi and other children in her community?
- C. In what ways is Laxmi working towards making a difference in the lives of children in future generations?
- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Laxmi's story?
- E. What have you learnt about the importance of education from this story?

TASK 2: Water Audit

Laxmi and her peers in the child's club lobbied for the construction of water taps so that all students could access clean drinking water.

Complete a water audit at your school to identify any water wastage and produce a report on ways you can manage any issues you have found.

TASK 3: Plan your own lesson

Being a member of the child's club gave Laxmi the opportunity to work on her confidence and leadership skills. The club also supports students in developing their speaking and writing.

Imagine you are running your own child's club at your school that supports students in a lower grade to develop their confidence and leadership skills. This group runs for an hour.

Create a series of activities that you could run within the hour, to help the students develop the skills required to become a leader and act for justice.

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A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

"I plead with you! Never give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid."

Saint John Paul II

In what ways does Laxmi live out the above quote in her own life?

[Mark 10:13–16](#)

Read the above scripture passage.

How does the bible passage relate to Laxmi's story?