



The Year (2024) in Review

Each year I have the privilege of addressing volunteers, donors, board members, partners and beneficiaries of our programs.

As I pondered what the message should be this year, one recurrent theme came to mind. Lately I've been thinking a lot about my great grandmother. She exemplified the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*: in exchange for life, we have responsibility for society at large, and an obligation to improve the world.

Though an immigrant with no formal education, a meager income as a huckster, and 9 mouths to feed, grandma freely extended her largess, with no expectation of anything in return. She was Jewish by faith, but religion held no barriers. She was just as likely to donate to a church, a synagogue or a drifter down on his luck, as the need arose. She strove for a better world, and always did her part to balance inequality.

That same striving to mitigate disparities and bridge the divide is a moral imperative and a call to action deeply ingrained in Project HANDS volunteers and supporters, regardless of faith.

So how do we know if we have fulfilled that covenant?

In 2024...

Through the Physician Incentive Program, 37,284 patients received medical attention from 7 doctors working in deplorable conditions in remotest Myanmar.

Through the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), 2,089 refugees and displaced persons from Myanmar were screened for cervical cancer, and 285 received potentially life-saving thermal ablation treatment. One group in particular stood out. 18 women arrived at the clinic together and piqued my curiosity. It turned out that one of them had lost a friend to cervical cancer, so she mobilized the community to attend the screening event. At first they resisted, skeptical of the procedure, but she was determined to use her voice to empower others. Of that group, 3 tested positive and received treatment for precancer dysplasia. Her advocacy and our team may have saved their lives. Our teams have now trained 50 health providers in the region, rendering the program virtually self-sustaining.

We also reached a technological milestone by incorporating an AI based diagnostic system into our cervical cancer prevention protocol, to improve screening efficiency and accuracy.

We're currently laying the groundwork to launch the WHI program in Ghana in March 2025. We chose that country, because cervical cancer is the leading cause of female cancer deaths. Every year, more than 3,000 Ghanaian women are diagnosed and more than 2,000 die, constituting a mortality rate of 67%.

While those metrics and achievements are certainly important, the truest measure of success might well be intangible and unquantifiable.

We recently received a letter of gratitude from a recipient of funding from the Physician Incentive Program. Her testimonial tells what the numbers don't. "Project HANDS not only provides us with resources. It gives us hope to know that we are not forgotten."

The places that we work don't figure into mainstream media, so you're not likely to hear about them, much less be aware of the healthcare challenges. We go where others don't, advocate for those who are overlooked, and support those left behind.

My message this year is simple.

To our volunteers, donors, board members and partners: You are the foundation of our work, and our success is a testament to your passion, dedication and humanity. You help us fulfil our responsibility to society and our obligation to improve the world.

To the beneficiaries of our programs in remote corners of the far reaches: You are not forgotten.

To Grandma Anna Berkowitz, of blessed memory: Thank you for valuable lessons about generosity and *tikkun olan*.

To anyone who would like to know more: We invite you to visit www.projecthands.org and connect further with our efforts.