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*Girls Inc.*

## ARLENE SAMEN *Fights* CHILDBIRTH DEATHS

**D**uring a 1997 visit to India, where Arlene Samen was volunteering to repair cleft lips, the nurse practitioner in fetal medicine met the Dalai Lama, who told her to go to Tibet instead and help mothers and babies who die during childbirth. Since then, Samen's life has been dedicated to fighting maternal and neonatal mortality in the most remote corners of the world. She founded the nonprofit One Heart World-Wide and created its Network of Safety model, which provides expecting mothers — most of whom plan to deliver alone at home or in an animal shed — with every aspect of care needed throughout the birthing process.

"I was out in the field when I realized the ripple effect: By one person doing something different in the community, it helped others," said Samen of her outreach work. "This ripple effect was driving systemic change that would benefit now and future generations."

There are challenges, of course, for Samen and her team must observe and respect the cultures around them as they train communities on safe motherhood practices. That's very much true in Tibet and Nepal, where One Heart World-Wide successfully navigates both countries' strong spiritual beliefs. "We spent a year understanding the cultural beliefs of childbirth that hindered getting care," said Samen. One such belief



**STRONG, SMART, BOLD:** One Heart World-Wide founder Arlene Samen (right) will discuss her lifesaving work at Girls Inc.'s Women of Inspiration luncheon.

professes that the blood of childbirth is polluted, so mothers should deliver outside to avoid contaminating others. "Our solution was a clean delivery kit with a cloth that could contain the pollution," explained Samen. After extensive teaching and trust building, Samen and her team train the women from their own communities to be the "foot soldiers."

Samen will discuss her work on Monday, April 4, at the Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's Women of Inspiration fundraiser luncheon, where she hopes to teach young women that they have a Network of Safety within the Santa Barbara community, as well. See [girlsinc-carp.org](http://girlsinc-carp.org).  
— **Rebecca Hartt**