



## *Embracing Excellence Through Diversity + Inclusion* Celebrating Heritage and Bringing Awareness

*Spring is in full swing during the merry month of May and this month the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) is embracing diversity and inclusion by observing both Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and Mental Health Awareness Month. We're honored to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month by recognizing one of our very own auditors, Mrs. Kusum Adhikari, and we're also privileged to have a platform to bring awareness to mental health by sharing resources and information to help #BreakTheStigma.*



Born and raised in Nepal, a landlocked country in South Asia that borders Tibet and India, Kusum Adhikari currently serves as a Senior Auditor with the Office of the State Auditor. Nepal's diverse geography, including fertile plains, subalpine forested hills, and eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including Mount Everest, make it one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

Kusum is the first in her family to go to school. Her father worked out of country in the Gulf to provide for his family. His sacrifice allowed Kusum and her brother to have a high quality education and greater opportunities. Her parents and a younger brother still live in Nepal. Nobody imagined Kusum would travel alone to the United States, excel in her education, and live the American dream.

Growing up Kusum and her fellow villagers endured continuous threats of getting bombed, kidnappings, and/or execution. Nepal went through a 10-year "People's war" launched by the Maoist party against the Monarchy and government party, which killed more than 13,000 people. The Maoists forced people from rural areas and villages to carry weapons and fight for their cause. At the same time there were threats from the government's military of prison time, torture, and even execution upon mere suspicion of supporting or helping the Maoist group. Due to the vulnerability of the country and uncertainty as to what was going to happen next, much of her generation tried to escape the country.

As soon as Kusum graduated from high school, her mother made a decision to send Kusum and her younger brother to the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu. They could be away from the war zone and focus on getting a better education and perhaps a better life. When Kusum arrived in Kathmandu, she had to make a decision for college and decided to take the International English language Testing System (IELTS).

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While at the time, Kusum had no plan or resources to go abroad, she gave the class a try. After she passed her test she told her parents of her desire to go abroad for further education. At first, both of them were hesitant and didn't know how they were going to get the funds. After a month or so, her parents told her they would find the resources so she could apply for a U.S. visa.

Like so many others around the world, the people of Nepal know of the *American Dream*. She applied for a student visa to the U.S. and was the first in her class to acquire a U.S. student visa.



View of the Himilayas in Nepal.

Photo credit: WorldAtlas.com

Entering the U.S. in 2008, Kusum lived in Texas, Nebraska, and New York before settling in New Mexico where she completed her schooling and built her career. Over the course of her education at Northern New Mexico College (NNMC), Kusum was active in various student clubs and organizations, such as serving as Vice-President of Student Senate, Secretary and Treasurer of Phi Theta Kappa (international honor society), Student Ambassador, Secretary of NNMC Campus Lions Club, and Vice-President of International Student Club. Presently, she is a member of Santa Fe Lions Club.

Kusum met her husband, Stephen Price, at NNMC with whom she has a daughter, Arya Adhikari Price. She began her career with the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) in Accounts Payable with the Administrative Division. While both going to school and working full-time, she built her experience and graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's in Business Administration focus in Accounting. Within five months at DFA, Kusum was promoted to accounts receivable and before her probation period with state employment ended she was promoted for a second time as a general ledger accountant. She stayed with DFA for three years and decided to take a different direction with her career, which is when she landed the opportunity to work with the OSA as a senior auditor. "We are very fortunate to have her on our team as a valued leader." said Auditor Colón.

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The New Mexico Office of the State Auditor is recognizing *Mental Health Awareness Month*, also known as *Mental Health Month*. In 1949, the then *National Association for Mental Health* first designated the month of May, with the purpose to raise awareness and educate the

public about mental illnesses, such as the nearly 20% of Americans who suffer from depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder; the realities of living with these conditions; and strategies for improving mental health and wellness. Additionally, *Mental Health Awareness Month* strives to reduce the negative attitudes and misconceptions that surrounds mental illnesses.

The focus of *Mental Health Awareness Month 2019* is to highlight the link between physical and mental health. This year's awareness month will promote a variety of ways to nourish mental health, including through social connection, leisure time, and therapeutic animal companionship. Participate in the mental health conversation on social media this May by using the hashtags **#4Mind4Body** and **#MHAM2019**.

State Auditor Brian Colón added, "*Mental health issues directly impact the lives of many New Mexicans, including the friends and family of affected individuals. I have personally experienced and witnessed the challenges and impact and urge anyone who may be experiencing a mental health issue or who has a loved one affected to please seek help.*"

If you or someone you know may need assistance with mental health related issues, the following resources are available:

- **Mental Health.gov:**  
<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/>
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255**  
<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- **Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255**  
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

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