It has been an honor and an exciting experience to participate for the last year in support of the WJC Fellowship program of AIF. This is particularly meaningful to me, because 45 years ago I was first exposed to India through Peace Corps service in rural Bihar. That experience created a life-long bond with India for me --- but equally important it enabled me to be a very different and more insightful person here in America because I had lived life through a very different lens than the US would ever have offered me.

When I first began to meet WJC fellows about five years ago, I was struck both by their talent and dedication, but also by the depth of the new perspectives they brought back with them. They are truly the next generation of leaders that we, and the US-India relationship need.

Thank you AIF for supporting the kind of education that changes both India and the US. And thank you for enabling the rest of us to share in that experience through this Yearbook. I hope you will enjoy learning about this class as much as I did.

As someone who was raised in two different continents before settling down in the US as an adult, I have understood the value of cross cultural exposure and learning. My time in Uganda and India allowed me to experience different educational environments with varied communities, this often brought both opportunities and challenges. I view the Fellowship in much the same light — a great opportunity to learn to use one’s skills in often very different circumstances and communities enabling enormous personal growth.

As a trustee of AIF since its inception in 2001, I have always been an admirer of the 366 Fellows who have undergone our program. We are proud of the graduating class of 2015-2016 whom we know to be committed and passionate leaders of tomorrow. We know that you have what it takes to make meaningful impact in the communities you live in and we hope that the memories from your time in India will serve you well as you journey ahead. You will always hold a special place at AIF and we look forward to celebrating your achievements as you forge ahead.

With admiration and congratulations.

Ajay Shah
Born from the high level of interest expressed by young Americans to assist in the post-earthquake rehabilitation of Gujarat in 2001, the William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India began with a pilot class of twenty-one Fellows. Since its inception, the Fellowship program has sent 392 Fellows to serve in 174 partner organizations throughout India.

The Fellowship offers the opportunity to candidates from India and the US to work in tangible and sustainable projects in the social and development sectors in India, and the opportunity to learn from civil society experts and India’s diverse cultures, people, and geographies. The program also offers Indian organizations an input of technical skills and intellectual resources for an extended period of time.

The 2015/16 Fellowship class is composed of 28 Fellows, 8 of who are Indian citizens, placed at 26 host organizations. The majority of Fellows spent their Fellowship working in the areas of livelihoods, public health, education, or social enterprise.

About the Program

Meeting India’s need for sustainable development requires not only hard work and dedication, but also leaders with the firsthand experience and real world skills to deliver practical, local solutions. The William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India is helping to shape the next generation of leaders committed to impactful change, and to strengthening the efficiency and efficacy of civil society.

The Fellowship pairs a select number of highly-skilled, young professionals with leading NGO’s and social enterprises in India in order to accelerate impact and create effective projects that are replicable, scalable, and sustainable. Through ten months of service and fieldwork, Fellows gain knowledge of development on the ground in the fields of education, livelihoods, public health, gender, human rights, environment, and social enterprise. Throughout this experience, they hone and harness their growing skills as change agents capable of effecting lasting impact.

In its vision to build a long-lasting bridge between the United States and India, the Fellowship brings together future leaders from both countries, providing them with an exciting platform for collaborative learning and innovation. Together, AIF Clinton Fellows and development sector leaders form dynamic partnerships, exchanging knowledge and skills while sharing their passion and commitment to improve development efforts in India—ultimately transforming both the individual and the organization.
Your class is diverse in interests, skills, and personalities, although united by one common trait—resilience. Your resilience as a community has shown through in how you have supported each other through the complexities, challenges, and adventures of India, and also through the AIF Clinton Fellowship itself.

On an individual level, each of you demonstrated immense resilience, creativity, and persistence to get up everyday and take on the responsibilities and challenges at your organizations. Over the course of the year, your persistence has transformed into resilience, and your creativity has transformed into contributions to your organization.

For all of us who have been part of the AIF Clinton Fellowship Team this year, we have been honored to watch each of you dig deep inside your own selves to expand your own potentiality. You have stretched, you have grown.

Your growth within has manifested in your contribution outwards— to each other, to your organization, and to your community. This is the core of the Fellowship, and we hope that this is a process that you take forward into every community, every organization, and every individual you meet.

Your class has stretched and grown along with the AIF Clinton Fellowship. The program itself is growing, changing, and developing. Your class has left an enduring mark on that growth and the individual stories, personalities, and experiences will shape the development of the program for years to come.

We invite you to keep on telling us your stories, your experiences as you move beyond the Fellowship, and to contribute to building a strong Alumni community connected to incoming Fellowship classes, and AIF.

With Service, Admiration and Deep Gratitude,

Katrina and Garima

on behalf of the 2015-16 AIF Clinton Fellowship Team
I have spent my time as an AIF Clinton Fellow living in the town of Rapar, Gujarat and working for AIF’s LAMP program alongside the NGO, Cohesion Foundation Trust. The town of Rapar is in the Gujarati district of Kutch, which is, for all intents and purposes, a rural desert peninsula far from the modern world. My project while living here was to conduct Qualitative Research, primarily in the form of Focus Group Discussions, for the 36 villages in the area that the LAMP program works with. Out of this qualitative research, I was looking to find out the perceptions of the villagers on girls continuing on to secondary education. The hope was that based on this data, interventions could be created that can raise the enrollment rate of girls in high school. This project was heavily field-based and allowed me to meet and interact with girls from all different walks of life. Every day I had the ability to see the vibrant colors of the different Kutchi Tribes, taste the sweetness of Gujarati Thali, and become more and more fluent in the local language. Living in rural India has changed me intrinsically as a person and while the adjustment period was a long one, I also realize that I am lucky to have been able to see India at its truest. This is a place and experience I will surely not soon forget.

Alyssa Russo

Fellowship Summary

I have spent my time as an AIF Clinton Fellow living in the town of Rapar, Gujarat and working for AIF’s LAMP program alongside the NGO, Cohesion Foundation Trust. The town of Rapar is in the Gujarati district of Kutch, which is, for all intents and purposes, a rural desert peninsula far from the modern world. My project while living here was to conduct Qualitative Research, primarily in the form of Focus Group Discussions, for the 36 villages in the area that the LAMP program works with. Out of this qualitative research, I was looking to find out the perceptions of the villagers on girls continuing on to secondary education. The hope was that based on this data, interventions could be created that can raise the enrollment rate of girls in high school. This project was heavily field-based and allowed me to meet and interact with girls from all different walks of life. Every day I had the ability to see the vibrant colors of the different Kutchi Tribes, taste the sweetness of Gujarati Thali, and become more and more fluent in the local language. Living in rural India has changed me intrinsically as a person and while the adjustment period was a long one, I also realize that I am lucky to have been able to see India at its truest. This is a place and experience I will surely not soon forget.
What was your greatest personal challenge during the Fellowship?

During the 10 months of the Fellowship, my greatest challenge was a personal one. Moving to rural India was a huge adjustment for me and took a lot of change on my part. I struggled a lot at the beginning with the invasiveness of the culture and lack of anything familiar. At times it felt too much but I powered through and dove head first into the experience and I am so happy I did. This experience has reminded me that I can rise up to any challenge thrown my way.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I would have to say that community is the one thing I have been grateful for this past year. When I heard that I was going to be moving to rural India I was a bit apprehensive. I was worried that it would take me a while to connect with anybody, if at all, and I expected to be lonely for most of the time. Instead, what I found was a warmth of people that accepted me into their circles and helped me in any way they could. Despite the language barrier, these people continued to talk to me, help me through, and eventually become friends with me. It is truly because of them that I have been able to survive so well in Rapar.
During my time at Khamir, I’ve worked to introduce a new digital strategy into the nonprofit’s communications and programs. I began by fully immersing myself in Khamir’s work and the region of Kutch by joining the team responsible for researching and designing an annual exhibition on local leather artisans. Through that experience, I came to find that most research stayed locked in hard drives stored locally. I felt it was important to make the information fully accessible, and so I sorted content, designed, and launched websites showcasing all of Khamir’s past exhibitions on handicrafts. I also developed a new way for artisans to create records of their own work. In collaboration with a software engineer in the US, I designed a realtime database for documenting handicrafts that artisans can update via Whatsapp and share with prospective buyers.
Exposure Visit

I traveled to South Indian cultural campuses to see if Khamir could learn any lessons for how best to engage visitors to their own space in Kutch. I visited Auroville, Dakshina Chitra, and the Crocodile Bank, and saw firsthand how they provide rich opportunities for families, students, and tourists to learn about traditional livelihoods and crafts.

Professional Challenge

I moved to Bhuj from Brooklyn, where I worked at a digital agency and was fully immersed in the world of user experience design and branding. I wanted to challenge myself to bring these tools to a rural nonprofit - something I knew wouldn’t be easy. I struggled sometimes to find the right balance between ambitions to introduce my colleagues to new forms for online storytelling, and working within constraints like intense heat, occasional power outages, faulty wifi connections. In the end, I found a way to accomplish professional goals but also to adapt to local working styles, and I’m proud of the relationships I built at Khamir with artisans, staff, and mentors.
Amy Jicha

Fellowship Summary

My caseworker colleagues provide legal representation and psychosocial support to children who have suffered sexual abuse. As the Team Leader for Research and System Change, I oversee target compliance for a three-year project funded by Human Dignity Foundation to bring justice and healing to these children, their families, and society. Through extensive internal data, we analyze our progress and strategize to make justice swifter, more child-friendly, and ending in more rightful conviction. We dialogue with police, court employees, law schools, and NGOs to train on the law and innovate new solutions. We produce reports that monitor compliance and recommend solutions to protect children and promote accountability. Essentially, I oversee the quantification, review, and dissemination of findings regarding criminal justice and restorative care for child sex abuse cases in Delhi.
Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why?

One of our targets is a national stakeholder event. At my Fellowship’s start, I had little personal connection to this. I did not yet know what specific challenges Indian child rights advocates faced or the complexities the government encounters in implementing justice. I also could not foresee how I would manage such a task, having no experience in event-planning, especially in Delhi. However, in April as our National Dialogue came to a close, I realized a lot had changed. Not only was I able to involve incredibly experienced speakers and guests from across the country, I understood their context. I was so proud of my team for facilitating a well-received event that forged truly important alliances.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am so grateful for CSJ’s encouraging environment! We face disturbing stories, inadequate official responses, and infuriating family dynamics. As this was my first project-management role and first time working abroad, there were plenty of potential pitfalls. However, CSJ’s leaders impart a balance of high standards and individual appreciation which reflects in the whole team. I deal with a lot of depressing statistics, but I’ve never seen a child or an employee supplanted by the data they represent. While we know the grim scenario for these cases, we highlight success and challenge ourselves to build on progress. As an incubatory place for me to learn Indian law, how to manage a young fluctuating team, and what long-term strategy looks like, CSJ has been incredibly influential.
During the ten months of this Fellowship, I was a Fellow at two different organizations:

At Adharshila, I worked with the organization’s resident primary care physician and gynecologist to monitor and evaluate doctors’ provision of healthcare. My tenure at the organization provided invaluable experience serving urban slum populations within the healthcare field. The experience also presented insight into the close intertwining between education and healthcare; a connection I hope to pursue within my future (and hopeful) career in healthcare.

At Naz, I conducted an internal research project to determine the nutrition and diet habits of the girls involved in the organization’s netball program. The research included developing and administering a baseline survey that gathered qualitative information regarding the girls’ daily food intake, and quantitative information such as their BMI.
and calorie requirement vs. intake. The information from the generated report will be used to develop educational sessions regarding proper nutrition and even to develop individualized diet plans so the girls meet their energy needs in order to play netball at their optimal caliber.

**What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?**

Since most of my time in India prior to this Fellowship was spent with family or childhood friends, my primary challenge in adjusting was to understand and navigate India from a professional standpoint.

**What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?**

Despite my answer’s generic nature, I am truly grateful to have had this opportunity to become friends with 30+ Fellows who share a natural desire to serve; who inspire me through dedication for their respective fields; who provided a network of support and solace for the past ten months.
The past ten months at Yuwa have constantly surprised and impressed me. The impressed part comes from seeing the kids, staff and mentors doing their bit to contribute for the larger good. I am impressed seeing my growth and the ability to cope with challenges that came along. Most of my work involved DRIVING. I drove more than 30,000 kilometres trying to build a new school, provide a better livelihood channel to the kids and their family, networking with related organizations and government agencies. There are things that I did not complete but, if asked to describe the whole journey in one word, that word will be “Revolving” as the football.
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why.

The one moment, that I am really proud of was when my name was called to be the Young Leader at the Street Football World in Lyon, France this year. I knew this before hand. But when it happened in front of the coaches including the other delegates, there was a cheer and a loud one where my name was called out loud even by the ones I never interacted with. I expressed my gratitude towards everyone and then a young coach said “Thanks to you Bhaiya. You are getting our school built. You will do great on this trip”. These words are the biggest achievement of my Fellowship.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

Trust is the most important trait that a human being aspires to achieve, I am grateful to have my mentors trust during this whole Fellowship experience. Both in the host organization and AIF, my mentors trusted the way I led the things and valued my opinion that gave me the freedom to implement my ideas in the best possible way. This paved the way for my personal growth in a huge way. My mentors gave me the network and the opportunity to get exercise my skills and always appreciated the efforts whether I was able to get the necessary outcome or just come out with a new learning.

Describe one big takeaway from your Fellowship experience; explain how you came to this new understanding / outlook / etc.

There are a lot of persons who impacted me and my functioning during the last 10 months. Professionally, it had to be my mentors Rose and Franz. The amount of work they do from the morning till the night is phenomenal. Seeing them achieve so much and still being so humble and open to hear out the advice and suggestions has made me more connected to the ground and the audience that I work with now. On the personal front, the staff at Yuwa especially Shyama helped me get a new hobby of Photography that I enjoy to the core now. She is the one who made me grow more patient and take things in a more neutral way rather than forming opinions too quickly.
From September 2015-January 2016, I served on the Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation team with WASSAN, an NGO based in Secunderabad, Telangana focused on watershed management for drought-prone communities. Per The Companies Act, 2013 regulating corporate social responsibility (CSR) in India, my major project comprised developing case studies on nature and biodiversity conservation in India for WASSAN’s partner India Foundation of Humanistic Development to utilize in its Leaders for Nature program engaging companies in incorporating natural capital into their core business.

From January-June 2016, I served with ONergy Solar (ONergy), a social enterprise based in Kolkata, West Bengal providing solar energy to rural East and Northeast Indian communities. As a business development team member, I served as the initial...
point of contact for ONergy’s technical partner Omnivoltaic and supported expansion of partnerships with East India’s microfinance institutions, which included developing proposals, managing sales, and organizing a workshop promoting solar energy. Additionally, I created proposals and analyzed village survey data for companies looking to incorporate solar energy within their CSR initiatives. I also supported management in developing a proposal promoting rooftop solar systems and researching new financing options for ONergy – including through completion of clean energy social enterprise grant and incubator/accelerator applications.

What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

My greatest professional challenge was striving to work effectively in ONergy’s fast-paced start-up environment. In the face of multiple, frequently changing priorities, I encountered challenges in time management and producing quality results within a short turnaround. With limited supervision, I learned further how to work independently and creatively, truly be a “self-starter”, and champion to move projects forward. Regularly interacting and clients and partners also challenged me to further improve my communication skills and business sense. Through navigating these challenges, I have gained a greater appreciation for the commitment required to run a social enterprise and consequently increased my confidence.

Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why.

One of my assignments with ONergy Solar in Kolkata included organizing a workshop promoting solar energy to microfinance institutions in East India. During the two weeks’ prior, my manager, team members, and I busily sent invitations; finalized the attendee list; developed the agenda and supporting materials; and coordinated logistics with our organizing partner, guest speakers, and attendees. As event coordinator and live facilitator, I also created a team task list and ensured the workshop ran smoothly. We received positive feedback afterwards, and I felt really proud that I was able to take the task head-on and organize a successful event.
spent the last 10 months with the Skill Development Network initiative at Wadhwani Foundation, as part of their data and impact assessment teams. Excel spreadsheets, management meetings, data collection and interpretation, attending conferences were the staple features of my role. However, the most important learning was understanding the demographic whom the development sector fondly labels as – “beneficiary”. India is often, and rightfully so, seen as the IT powerhouse, a hub of booming start-up scene, vibrant/successful democracy, and young professionals/millennials with global dreams. What gets muzzled in that noise is the voice of over 50% of the nation which is not part of the 7% GDP story. Not that I was not aware of those unfortunate statistics, but the Fellowship gave me an opportunity to explore those unheard voices, dedicate time to pay closer attention to those voices, and think of ideas to support those voices in the long term.
What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

While I was part of the corporate America, I often talked to family and friends regarding the need for inclusive growth in India and how the silence of civil society and apathy of the urban middle class is allowing social hierarchies and systemic issues to prevail in modern Indian society. But then I realized that the conversations I had were the person I wanted to be and my actions are the person I am. This Fellowship has helped me to bridge that gap between my personal aspirations and professional choices, and I am grateful for that. And I am grateful that the Fellowship has given me an opportunity to come back home, explore the social space, and take a shot at contributing to the communities I grew up in and have grown apart from.

Describe one big takeaway from your Fellowship experience; explain how you came to this new understanding/outlook/etc.

Social change is a long term game. Development sector is a long term game. Impact is a long term game. Trust, strong ground network, and innovative approaches to tackle poverty require resources and time. And 10 months is too little a time to make a tangible impact. However, it is enough time to think about future choices and ways to remain involved in ways that might possibly result in sustainable change.
Over the past 10 months, I have served as AIF’s Media Fellow. My primary responsibilities have been to document AIF’s programs in the field, then produce series of videos highlighting beneficiaries and programs for distribution to AIF’s donor network. My secondary responsibilities have included documenting the work of my co-fellows and making a number of impromptu videos that cover AIF’s interests. Such videos range from a commercial slot in the Cricket All Stars series, to a disaster relief call to action video following the Chennai Floods.

As a second year fellow, I have had the opportunity to apply the skills I gained from my first year placement at Mummy Daddy Media toward shooting in the field with our NGO partners. Living in Bangalore has enabled me to collaborate with local
What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am most grateful for the opportunities I’ve had to see my family while living and working abroad, this year. AIF has been very accommodating in allowing me to work on holidays and weekends to gain additional vacation time, which is how I’ve been able to see my family in both the U.S. and Vietnam. December 2015 was the first time in 3 years—or since I started working in India—where I got to see my family for the holidays, for which I’m truly grateful.

production companies to produce viral content on local issues of personal interest, which constitutes the personal project aspect of my Fellowship.
I was placed at Utthan, a human rights organization in Ahmedabad that also works in the tribal and coastal regions of Gujarat. This allowed me to live in a city and travel to rural areas to learn about agriculture, water and sanitation, and what it means to incorporate gender equality into every aspect of development. However, a tragedy took place during my time here which shook my host organization and directly impacted my work. To keep me engaged, AIF encouraged me to research and develop a project, a course-change that led me right back to my professional interests in long-term disaster recovery. While I continue to create communications materials for Utthan as part of their institutional development, I have also been able to travel to Kutch and Chennai to learn about recovery work after the 2001 earthquake and 2015 floods. When I return to the states most people will believe that I was only gone for ten months, but I’ll know it was several lifetimes.
Describe one big takeaway from your Fellowship experience; explain how you came to this new understanding/outlook/etc.

Transition is a constant, and it’s better to learn now how to enfold it into your world and appreciate the growth that it brings. I thought ten months in India would be enough time to settle and create a steady routine, but every month brought new challenges, new ways to fall in love, and new ways to adapt. If working in disaster didn’t solidify my belief that stability is an illusion then my time in India most certainly did.

Who made a big impact on you in the past 10 months? Tell us a bit about that person and how they affected you.

My mentor, Pallavi. I admired her straight-forward professionalism from the start of orientation, and my respect for her grew throughout my time here. She looked out for me and included me when I was far from home, but never fussed or worried. She allowed for my independence but understood the concerns of being alone in a foreign country. One of my first experiences with Pallavi outside of work occurred when she invited me to a “fundraising” event for Utthan. I showed up to an art auction hosted by the Ahmedabad Harley Davidson Club, of which she and her husband Niral were members. Men in leather jackets were showcasing local artists who paint motorcycle-inspired art. Afterward, I watched the two of them tie bandanas around their heads and ride off into the night. That’s cool anywhere, but if you know Ahmedabad you’ll know just how rare that kind of cool is in a place like this. Pallavi and her family left an indelible mark.
Having a background in Film Making but not having a professional experience to carry out communications related tasks at Naz was difficult but I learned a lot as I progressed through the Fellowship. Naz has been known to work in the field of HIV and for their advocacy for the LGBTQ community but we also have a sports for development program “Goal” which not many people are aware of. My project was to come up with communication strategies that will help them showcase their work better as they had already done a brilliant job on ground, they just needed someone to communicate the impact. Besides producing promotional media content, I made an external and internal communications plan for Naz, helped them draft policies and enhanced staff capacity. And as a result, I am glad that I will be working with them for another two years!
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

My greatest challenge was a professional one. When I applied for the Fellowship, I was hoping to make a lot of videos as I had talked to the media Fellow from the previous year (Christopher or as I fondly call him Christu!) but when I talked to my mentor he said that they were looking for someone who can handle their communications department as they functioned without one until I joined. I was very nervous and was doubting whether I would be able to do it but with the help of my mentor and support from Fellows, I think I managed to do my project well.

Who made a big impact on you in the past 10 months? Tell us a bit about that person and how they affected you.

A lot of people made a big impact in my life - all the fellows and everyone at my host organisation. But two people who affected me a lot were Aparna and Ayush from Naz’s care home. I didn’t realise when Aparna and I became such a good friends; she has always stood by me through thick and thin. Ayush’s zest for life is contagious and inspiring, I can never forget dancing with him during the Navratri celebrations!
As an AIF Clinton Fellow at Broadleaf Health and Education Alliance (BHEA), I managed three projects in my 10 months in Darjeeling. My first project was to redesign the Comprehensive Health and Hygiene Improvement Program (CHHIP) curriculum and simultaneously draft a second curriculum (25 new lessons). In March, I planned and facilitated the 7-day CHHIP Educator Training in Hindi to the CHHIP School Health Activists (SHAs) and educators throughout the Darjeeling hills. I pulled from my experience teaching for three years in San Jose, California and broke-down the importance of student-centered and joyful learning in the classroom. In April, I helped write, design, and facilitate the CHHIP Behavioral Health Training for CHHIP SHAs and educators throughout the Darjeeling hills. I was tasked with the challenge of breaking down medical and scientific concepts such as cognitive behavior theory and functional behavior hypothesis and
William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India

What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

One of my projects this year required me to design and operationalize a sustainable monitoring and evaluation system for our School Health Activists (SHAs). This meant I was directly encroaching on the livelihoods of educators in rural Darjeeling hills. The most difficult task this year was demonstrating to the SHAs that I was there to serve them, not overpower them.

A proud moment definitely has to be when I facilitated two trainings BHEA was piloting this year because I led both trainings in Hindi. Darjeeling has really helped me improve my Hindi speaking and listening skills far beyond Bollywood movies ever could in the States.

I have a newfound passion for teaching that I never really tapped into as an educator in California. Training teachers, designing curriculum, and coaching staff have allowed me to explore a different facet of education. Initially, I thought working one degree away from students would push me away from my work in education, but I have a newfound passion for unlocking the talent hidden in so many of the educators, curriculum, and staff at CHHIP.

What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

One of my projects this year required me to design and operationalize a sustainable monitoring and evaluation system for our School Health Activists (SHAs). This meant I was directly encroaching on the livelihoods of educators in rural Darjeeling hills. The most difficult task this year was demonstrating to the SHAs that I was there to serve them, not overpower them.

A proud moment definitely has to be when I facilitated two trainings BHEA was piloting this year because I led both trainings in Hindi. Darjeeling has really helped me improve my Hindi speaking and listening skills far beyond Bollywood movies ever could in the States.

I have a newfound passion for teaching that I never really tapped into as an educator in California. Training teachers, designing curriculum, and coaching staff have allowed me to explore a different facet of education. Initially, I thought working one degree away from students would push me away from my work in education, but I have a newfound passion for unlocking the talent hidden in so many of the educators, curriculum, and staff at CHHIP.
I am a Story Collector and Content Strategist for Nanhi Kali, a girl’s education program, part of Mahindra CSR. I’ve been traveling to rural, and urban areas throughout India to conduct in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with schools girls and their communities on topics that affect retention in school in order to understand the gaps in the program.

Lack of truly functioning bathrooms, taboos of menstruation, and raising younger siblings are all reasons why girls don’t go to school in India. I have found myself in a dozen new villages each month talking to numerous communities about religion, caste, and child marriage, trying to figure out how we can serve them better.
Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why

My coconut guy outside work hides the best coconuts under a tarp to save for me. As a South Indian Fellow from Dakhshina Karnataka, I was ecstatic to find a Udupi restaurant minutes from my workspace. The owner saves “Sheera” a breakfast food for me until 1 pm and messages me to come get the last piece.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I asked a 16-year-old girl in an informal interview if she feels girls do not get the same opportunities as boys. She said, “Yes it’s called discrimination.”

I then asked, “What do you think we should do about this?” To which she replied, “We should revolt.”

The stories I have collected sitting on porches of government schools and people’s homes range from stopping child marriage, building toilets for girls in rural areas, and traveling many kilometers to go to college in a new town. Every moment that I am in the field talking to communities, I feel privileged that I get to hear these stories and get to know my India and its people better.
Merit provides livelihood opportunities for rural and marginalized youth through the creation of digital jobs. Along with these jobs come professional soft-skills training, such as English language training. I worked with the Communications & Training Team to help strengthen their communication-training program, train the communications trainers, and provide project specific training to both the team-leads and employees at the Salt Lake, Baruipur, and Salt Lake centers. One very special project included working with visually impaired employees on an Audio-Transcription Project at the Welfare Society for the Blind in Taratala; this was a fantastic experience, as I had never worked with this learner population before. It was an amazing experience – I’ll carry with me the skills I gained at iMerit throughout the rest of my professional career.
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

One moment when I was proud came when I got the first batch of assessment results from the visually impaired students I was training at the Welfare Society for the Blind. I had never trained such a learner population before, so I often felt like I had no idea what I was doing. But when I saw their feedback and comments, saying how they were learning things they’d never dreamed of learning before, I thought, “Alright cool, I don’t completely suck at this.”

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I think I’m most grateful for having had the opportunity to live in Kolkata for ten months and call myself a member of the professional community there. It’s an amazing city, and it’s hard to imagine that I won’t be there anymore, but just the experience of living there has really changed me. It’s hard to put into words, but it’s a special place. I used to have kind of a love/hate relationship with it, but now I’m happy to say that the love side has certainly come out on top. Kolkata: thank you.

My Fellowship experience certainly would not have been the same without the constant support from my mentor, Anita Chakrabarti. She helped introduce me to iMerit, answered my questions (no matter how trivial) about the organization, the trainings, Kolkata, and always supported me in the work that I wanted to do.
How to describe my Fellowship experience? I’ve had the opportunity to travel India, meet lifelong friends, and begin to call a new city home. I’ve had bad rough spots and intense highs. Morning yoga sessions have become part and parcel to my daily routine, and afternoon Lassi’s a much-needed respite from the heat. The people around my office might consider me a nutcase due to my innate excitement and immediate Snapchat videoing of the local goats; I’ve even named them. I’m most proud of my ability to navigate positions in the local trains. I can seamlessly get on at Elphistone and out at Bandra without breaking a sweat during rush hour. It probably helps that I’m a foot taller than the average Indian woman – no sweaty armpits in my face! I’ve found that India is a country of

Josephine Helland

Fellowship Summary

How to describe my Fellowship experience? I’ve had the opportunity to travel India, meet lifelong friends, and begin to call a new city home. I’ve had bad rough spots and intense highs. Morning yoga sessions have become part and parcel to my daily routine, and afternoon Lassi’s a much-needed respite from the heat. The people around my office might consider me a nutcase due to my innate excitement and immediate Snapchat videoing of the local goats; I’ve even named them. I’m most proud of my ability to navigate positions in the local trains. I can seamlessly get on at Elphistone and out at Bandra without breaking a sweat during rush hour. It probably helps that I’m a foot taller than the average Indian woman – no sweaty armpits in my face! I’ve found that India is a country of
contradictions, good and bad. I’d have to say that my Fellowship experience has followed the same line of thinking. And while this might be the case, the opportunity to have lived this past year in India trumps all else. It’s definitely been an experience of epic proportions.

**What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?**

The opportunity to live in a city like Mumbai has been a blessing in disguise. Sure, there are plenty of times I get super frazzled by little things like oh, the 20.7 million residents or the soaring summer heat, but overall it’s a pretty amazing city. Mumbai is such a dynamic place with experiences waiting around every bend. From a half understood Hinglish conversation with a rickshaw driver to a fresh gola carved from blocks of ice on a 100 degree day, I’m quite happy to say I’ll be staying around Mumbai for some time to come.

**What was the greatest challenge you faced during your Fellowship?**

Sometimes things don’t go as planned. I fancied my role to be much more important than it ended up being at Akshara. At the same time, I met some amazing women working on gender equality, I was able to get an inside look on women empowerment work in a city as economically diverse as Bombay, and I had the opportunity to witness important protests addressing issues that often go unreported and unheard by the mass public. This past year has pushed me to be more honest and open with myself. While my placement was both personally and professionally challenging, I find that in that, I was able to grow much more as a person.
Kiara Feliz

Fellowship Summary

Oniondev, nee Gram Vaani, specializes in bringing information technology to marginalized communities in rural India. Pioneering a mission to “reach the unreached”, Oniondev hopes to foster an inclusive India that is actively informed on government schemes and private campaigns that directly affect its well-being. Oniondev is an avid believer in informing to empower and accomplishes this via an offline IVR system and an online mobile application that I was tasked with developing. I managed a largely remote UI/UX team of engineers responsible for the creative and technical development of the Mobile Vaani (MVMA) app through its design, development, testing, final implementation, and post-launch optimization. MVMA is a sustainable alternative to Oniondev’s
current IVR system that will enhance Oniondev’s impact and profitability at a nominal cost to its users.

Secondary projects include but are not limited to website development, SEO, and curriculum development for financial literacy.

Former and future Fellows

Former and future Fellows – if you find that the serving and learning components of your Fellowship are immutably mutually exclusive, do not be afraid to spend part of your work day learning skills that may have no direct impact on your organization. In the mornings, I teach myself how to code in C, and in the late afternoon once the engineers have arrived, you’ll find me dutifully working on MVMA and Oniondev’s new website. Create the learning experience you want because your needs are just as valid as your organization’s.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

The Delhi Bellies! I admire all of the fellows and have formed close bonds with many of them especially those placed in Delhi. It’s going to be difficult to part ways with fellows I’ve come to call family, but I trust these ties will only strengthen with time.
carried out impact assessment of an intervention program called Sauhard Students’ Social Fellowship. Largely, my role was to monitor the progress of the program and evaluate its impact on social and behavioral change, life skills and awareness.

It has been an effort on my part since I’d never done anything like this before, that too on behavior change and “to measure the impact of the program in the context of conflict, peace and social harmony”.

Nevertheless, I took on the challenge and basically taught myself about Monitoring and Evaluation throughout the Fellowship. I can’t say I am very good at it now but in the past 9 months I have created a monitoring matrix for the program, a feedback mechanism, a profile database and helped establish a basic structure to increase efficiency of the organization. With Sauhard’s support, I have also published a mid-term evaluation report, a yearbook and made a few videos for their campaigns. The final report will be out soon. In any case, I still have much to learn and I look forward to it.
A moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud

There are many but the first prize goes to when I was finally able to complete the videos I was editing and show them to my peers at the mid-point conference. I had to juggle between lots of tasks to complete the videos. Since the videos were specifically on the region where I am from, I didn’t want to miss the opportunity. It felt really good to hear and watch the reactions from the fellows.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am most grateful of the fact that I got selected for the AIF Fellowship in the first place. Had I been not selected, I would not have had the opportunity to know the experience itself. As far as the Fellowship is concerned, it has been a case of many ‘first time’ moments – all the places I have been to during the Fellowship (excluding vacation trips), my project itself, working in Ahmedabad, sharing an apartment with Crusty in a ‘society’ where unmarried couples are not allowed (well, apparently they did but it’s still not allowed) and last but not the least, GUJARAT! – Navratri, Fafra, Khakra, Ghathia, Chhaanch! Sev, Oondiyoo, Uttarayan, White Desert, Salt Pans….the list goes on. So basically everywhere I turned, it was a new experience and I’m also grateful for it.
My work in New Delhi (and partly in Mumbai) revolved around improving the quality of low-cost/affordable private school education in India. More than 40% of students in grades 1 to 12 attend private schools, with the vast majority of children attending schools that charge less than Rs. 1500 per month. The heterogeneous and rapidly-expanding market, paired with patchily-conceptualized or -implemented regulations, has led to numerous challenges in providing high-quality education. I managed a research grant to a legal policy think tank to design a practical national and state regulatory framework for opening, operating, and closing private schools. I also developed better-informed school leaders through a newsletter and generated demand for a school-focused marketplace. I built an extensive understanding of the needs of school leaders through site visits in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, and drove change through close collaborations with policymakers, entrepreneurs, foundations, funders, researchers, and school leaders.
I have come to the realization that I can happily live and work in India in the long-run and can truly have an impact in this country. The realization is not something sudden or something new. It’s taken time to evolve, but it started when I first visited classrooms in Mumbai and took 2nd Class trains in the city.
I spent her Fellowship with a team of data scientists and engineers hacking on India’s most critical problems. I worked with my team to create an index and dashboard that enables targeted agriculture investments in low-performing districts, developed a health and nutrition portal to encourage the government to track the most important indicators, fact-found for Indian comedy group All India Bakchod on issues of drug abuse and rape, and occasionally got too serious while playing company games of Captain’s Ball after monthly planning days called Town Hall. At almost any time of the day you could find me in the SocialCops office bunkered down with my teammates drafting the next analysis plan that might positively impact millions of lives through data-driven decisions. Although I didn’t spend much time outside of my office, I spent my free time on terraces with Delhi Fellows, reuniting with friends I made while studying in Delhi two years ago, or eating (and sometimes regretting) pani puri wherever I could find it.
What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am incredibly grateful for my placement organization. The SocialCops team welcomed me as one of their own and entrusted me with projects, challenges, and goals beyond my expectations. I cannot imagine my Fellowship year without the warmth and humor of my brilliant teammates. I am extremely lucky to have been placed in an organization so fiercely devoted to solving tough problems that make a difference in the lives of others.

One big takeaway from your Fellowship experience?

My work with SocialCops has inspired a passion for the use of technology to scale and drive social initiatives. Our extensive work with partners from all levels of technological literacy is evidence that data-driven decision making can and should influence decisions at the grassroots. I am inspired by one of my teammate’s observations that, “We build things other people are afraid to build.” Our dedication to building technology that works in all contexts—places with no internet connectivity, low literacy levels, and multilingual users—is a testament to the problems we are committed to solving despite the challenges of non-traditional markets.
Marissa Harrison

Fellowship Summary

My host organization, Medha, aims to improve employment outcomes for youth in Uttar Pradesh. Through skills training, career counseling, on-the-job exposure and job placement support, Medha connects youth to the job market and better prepares students for life after school. My work at Medha could be categorized in two major domains: monitoring and evaluation and curriculum development. I have spent my Fellowship collaborating with the M&E Department to undertake a social impact assessment, manage data, design impact evaluation tools and methodology, and strengthen Medha’s monitoring framework. I have also collaborated with local staff to develop, deliver and revise an English language curriculum that aims to enhance youth employability. During the course of my Fellowship, I have been trying to better understand the impact Medha’s program is having on the lives of its primary stakeholders so that the organization can develop student-centric curriculum that will better address the needs of its beneficiaries.
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

Confronting my own privilege and inadequacies. As a Western-educated (recent) graduate with a great amount of global privilege, I often struggled to justify my presence in my placement organization and in India itself – am I skilled enough, should I be the one engaged with this work, is my presence helpful or harmful? All of these are questions I continuously asked myself as I attempted to fall, as Ananya Roy describes it, somewhere between the hubris of benevolence and the paralysis of cynicism.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

The support and guidance I have received from my colleagues. Staff at my host organization went out of their way to welcome me, include me, and, often, challenge me. Each person I met educated me in some way – culturally, linguistically, professionally and personally – and constantly enabled me to more fully understand the complex nuances of the region, the populations we serve, and the issue of skill development itself. The opportunity to learn from a group of people with such diverse skills, perspectives and passions was an invaluable learning experience.
Sneha (Society for Nutrition, Education, and Health Action) is a public health NGO in Mumbai that serves women and children throughout the city’s urban informal settlements (slum communities). There are four main divisions within SNEHA and I spent my Fellowship working with the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children department. Domestic/Gender-Based Violence has recently received significant attention as a serious public health concern and SNEHA combats this through a variety of interventions. My main project for the year focused on inventing a method to quantitatively measure increases in empowerment for survivors of Gender-Based Violence. All SNEHA patients are administered an empowerment test which scores four unique indicators. Using various statistical analyses, we observed the significance and variance of individual sub-indicators to establish a system of coefficients (which served as weights). These were applied to pre and post intervention test results and were displayed graphically to show the four indicators of empowerment in comparison to one another. The established method

**Natasha Ramanujam**

**Fellowship Summary**

SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education, and Health Action) is a public health NGO in Mumbai that serves women and children throughout the city’s urban informal settlements (slum communities). There are four main divisions within SNEHA and I spent my Fellowship working with the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children department. Domestic/Gender-Based Violence has recently received significant attention as a serious public health concern and SNEHA combats this through a variety of interventions. My main project for the year focused on inventing a method to quantitatively measure increases in empowerment for survivors of Gender-Based Violence. All SNEHA patients are administered an empowerment test which scores four unique indicators. Using various statistical analyses, we observed the significance and variance of individual sub-indicators to establish a system of coefficients (which served as weights). These were applied to pre and post intervention test results and were displayed graphically to show the four indicators of empowerment in comparison to one another. The established method
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

One of my biggest personal challenges during my Fellowship was making sense of my surroundings. Everyday, I would leave home in Bandra (one of Mumbai’s most expensive and exclusive neighborhoods) and come to the government hospital in Dharavi where I worked. They were two completely different worlds, only a mere three and half kilometers away from one another. Train tracks separated ocean-front properties, home to Bollywood’s biggest celebrities, from children forced to openly relieve themselves on crowded and busy streets. Traveling back and forth day after day never really became normal, I continuously saw things in both areas that would catch me off-guard.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

Apart from having the opportunity to work on meaningful projects at SNEHA, I’m most grateful for the opportunity I had to see a vast amount of India this year. Growing up in America and only coming to Bangalore to visit during India trips, my teenage self made many (inaccurate!) assumptions about the rest of India and I’m so glad these were put to rest this year. Seeing the massive amounts of diversity but also the rich culture and history throughout the country instilled a sense of pride in my heritage which was missing before.
My Fellowship began with my initial placement at the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs in Manesar, Haryana. My project focused on corporate social responsibility, and aimed to improve cooperation and symbiosis between the business and development sectors. During this time I lived in the Shahpur Jat neighborhood of New Delhi, acquired a moped, and explored as much of Delhi as I could – especially the older parts of the city. In April, I was reassigned to a placement at the Rishi Valley School in Andhra Pradesh. My project was to contribute songs and stories to English as a second language curriculum for 1st and 2nd grade across half a dozen primary schools in the Rishi Valley network. I immensely enjoyed contributing to the curriculum and interacting with the students in the classroom.
A moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud

At RIVER, I helped to design a book for the students. It is a simple book that can be folded from a single sheet of double-sided printed paper. Making two folds and two cuts produces an eight page pocket sized book. When we gave the students their new books, they were so excited that they made us listen to them read their books over and over for at least half an hour.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I’m grateful for the friends I’ve met. Whether in Delhi, Rishi Valley, or the places I travelled to in between, I was fortunate to meet really solid friends everywhere, and that has made a huge difference.
As a public health Fellow at Thirumalai Charity Trust, I’ve been examining patients who have been diagnosed with communicable diseases such as osteoporosis and diabetes. I am conducting research to determine if the current interventions have been effective and, if not, how best to implement new interventions. Through the entire process, I have used a variety of skills ranging from research methodology, questionnaire development, and statistical analysis to clinical interactions and language skills. My work has allowed me to reach a large patient base, which has been incredibly meaningful, but it has also taught how change works within hospital system, which is incredibly important with regard to new medical interventions. Outside of my hospital work, I’ve traveled, explored India, and made lasting, meaningful
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

My greatest challenge was learning to let go of my self-pity. Since I had never lived in India before, let alone independently in a semi-rural Indian town, hours away from friends and family, it was easy for me to wallow about one thing or another—the water heater breaking down, a frog hopping leisurely in my bathroom, the bees from the hive outside my window sneaking into my room, or the constant struggle to connect to the internet. Finally realizing that self-pity changed nothing, the only solution was to live life despite these struggles and find the resourcefulness to overcome them (becoming much less squeamish in the process).

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am most grateful for the immersive experience of being in India. I have a new understanding of the country both personally and professionally. I’ve understood the landscape of public health and translational research in the realm of communicable diseases. Additionally, I’ve been able to experience and appreciate the multifaceted culture in many different parts of India. These past 10 months have flown by and without the immersive nature of the Fellowship, I think my experience would have been very different. Lastly, and probably most importantly, the food, wherever I’ve been, has been amazing.

friendships, both in Ranipet and outside. The confluence of my personal and professional experiences has resulted in an incredibly satisfying Fellowship experience.
As a Communications and Programme Officer at My Choices Foundation, my primary project was to set up a support group for survivors of domestic violence. After much research and an exhilarating exposure trip to see a similar system run by the NGO Swayam in Kolkata, I kickstarted Saath-Saath (meaning Together in Hindi), my placement organisation’s first such long-term follow-up care initiative. I have laid the framework and guiding principles for setting up similar groups in all centres. The pilot group has three women, and the power of breaking the silence on domestic violence and understanding the effect of isolation on victims, could not have been more stronger.

I also had the unique opportunity of co-designing my organisation’s first Performance Monitoring and Evaluation process for our community workers. Another major project I successfully led was creating a data lake on my NGO’s work with women and families.
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

Due to the nature of my work, I had daily and regular conversations with our community workers and counsellors about handling difficult cases. As a domestic violence survivor myself, hearing these situations would lead to moments of self-doubt about past decisions that had the potential to make me wallow in illogical grief and despair. It would take immense strength to breathe deeply and tell myself that there was nothing I could have done more that would have altered my abusive relationship for the better. Being able to hold up my head without sinking into a cesspool of despair was a big biggie.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

The opportunity to work in the area of domestic violence was completely unexpected and I am grateful for the chance to work with the counsellors and community workers at My Choices. I got to meet and hear the stories of victims and survivors, see first-hand how the cycle of abuse works and its debilitating effects on women. This helped me immensely in facing my demons and I experienced tremendous personal growth.

I am now able to recognize abusive behaviour in relationships, and point out the patterns to an abused person. I also now have a better understanding of the laws related to domestic violence better and how to navigate them. Consequently, I place great importance on healthy relationships and standing up to any kind of disrespectful conduct.

Interacting with the team at Swayam in Kolkata was one of the best professional experiences of my Fellowship. I got to see first-hand how Amartya Sen’s capability approach is being used to empower women and also see the vision in action of an organisation that works against all forms of violence against women. I was privileged to meet some of the most inspiring, committed and fun feminists—from case-workers to counsellors, to managers, to elderly Bengali women in the communities.
My Fellowship placement Profugo is a grassroots organization that provides rural communities access to tools that promote a better quality of life. During the Fellowship I worked on various community initiatives that focused on youth development, and women’s empowerment. I assisted my organization with conducting community based surveys, trained field staff with project documentation, research, proposals, and managed their income generation programs.

For my primary project, I implemented a business training program which initiated the first phase of the organizations’ Social Enterprise Incubation Program. I organized a series of business workshops that provided rural women access to resources, skills development, and the confidence to create their own small businesses. I concluded the project by designing a business training curriculum and assessment guide.

Rebecca Mukiibi

Fellowship Summary

hometown Riverside, California
education University of California Riverside
Placement Organization Profugo
Placement City/Village Wayanad, Kerala
What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

Residing in the tropical forests of Kerala without other co-fellows in near proximity can be extremely daunting at times. I am tremendously grateful for the many people: shop owners, rickshaw/bus drivers, parents, students, neighbors, random strangers and friends in my community that have made this Fellowship experience exceptionally unique and unforgettable.

Who made a big impact on you in the past 10 months (personally and/or professionally)? Tell us a bit about that person and how they affected you.

The person that has made the biggest impact on me professionally and personally during my Fellowship was my coworker and counterpart Mrs. Jessy Chechi. Although we disagreed on many things, Jessy Chechi reinforced my potential to persevere through many obstacles in my site and the workplace. When I felt defeated from the inescapable language barrier she assisted me through every single step of my project implementation. When I had mating cobras in my bedroom, she voluntarily came to my rescue without any reservations. I am forever grateful for the witty, fearless, outspoken but yet patient women that she embodies.
This amazing Fellowship tenure has been immensely enriching for me professionally and personally where I got an opportunity to contribute my time and skills for creating nurturing environments for young kids at Govt. schools. Working on the project Girls Glory with Reaching Hand have given me deep insights into institutional/organisational as well as my own personal machinery not only in and about Bangalore but my own state as well. I’m very passionate about extension of this project to contribute for improving water, health and sanitation status for young girls at schools in J&K and am looking forward to it. There were challenges and difficult times as well but the support and encouragement from AIF CFP team, the Fellowship class and Reaching Hand was an inspiration to look beyond the doubts and fears for more possibilities of finding a way to welfare and contentment.
What was the greatest challenge you faced during the Fellowship?

Being a project Fellow for Girls Glory was a challenge in itself wherein a Fellow has to find the best possible way of contributing to enhance the impact of project implementation, balancing it with the personal growth working as a team in a social, cultural and geographical set up very different from my earlier experiences. Paving a way to extend the same project to the state I hail from, where intervention regarding the same issues are equally desired and required, was another set of challenges which deepened my experiences and broke many preconceived views and beliefs about the whole political and social functioning back at home.

Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why?

Developing a guidebook for facilitating workshops on Puberty and Adolescent Health and successfully implementing workshops accordingly was worth a pat on our back. The most amazing moments were the days when I trained 45-50 J P Morgan employees according to the module and also witnessed them executing the same in the schools. It feels amazing, beyond description, to be aware of the positive chain reactions happening around and yourself being a part of it.

Who made a big impact on you in the past 10 months (personally and/or professionally)? Tell us a bit about that person and how they affected you.

The working environment at my Host organisation has left a deep impression on my heart. It has been very Fellow friendly - gives you space for expression, where your opinions matter, you are allowed to be creative, where you are loved and respected and cared for. The staff has been an amazing support for all these months especially my mentor. He is a friend for all the employees, patting the back when a job is well done but pulling your ears too when you do silly mistakes. He once said, “I always look out for people who are better, more experienced and knowledgeable than me in every respect to work for Reaching Hand. That’s how we will progress and will be benefitting ourselves and others more.” He always inspires me to do better, become more of myself but staying down to earth.
During my time as a Fellow with the Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources (RIVER), I have had the opportunity to utilize and enhance my background in classroom instruction, curriculum development and Special Education in innovative ways. My tasks have included developing curricular materials in mathematics and English as a second language for grades K-2, conducting 6 training sessions with teachers on instructional best practices, introducing data driven instruction as a regular practice, providing one on one support to teachers with struggling learners, and working with an incredible team to organize an international conference. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to extend my time with RIVER and grow both personally and professionally in the process.
Describe a moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud; explain why

A moment that stands out is the day that the Multi-grade Multi-level (MGML) world conference began at IIT Chennai. The process of planning this conference began during my second month of the Fellowship. Having the opportunity to work with leaders in the field and a mentor who trusted me to anchor the conference organization was invaluable. Although the planning process was challenging and required compromise and patience it was exhilarating to stand at the entrance as guests arrived, hear passionate dialogue on the sidelines and receive positive feedback from participants at the close of the conference.

What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

I am most grateful for the incredible community of people I am surrounded by. The directors of RIVER have consistently offered patient ears and supported my ideas, my team members have challenged and pushed me to think critically, and my friends and family always know the right words to say or treats to cook on harder days. This year I am also particularly grateful for my co-fellows Sylvia and Owen who have immensely enhanced my experience in Rishi Valley.
For my Fellowship I was placed with Wildlife Conservation Society, Bangalore under the mentorship of renowned conservation scientist Dr. Krithi K. Karanth. My project was to collect and analyze compensation policies for human wildlife conflict in India. To get an understanding of issues related to conservation, I travelled to H D Kote, Hunsur and Gundlupet to speak to farmers and visit sites of human wildlife conflict. Further, I also went around Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary and spotted Gaur, Chital, Sambar, Flying Squirrel, Giant Squirrel, Malabar Grey Hornbill among others. The opportunity was critical as it helped me to visualize issues related to conflict when I was reading government documents on compensation schemes in the country.
What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?

The fellows!!! Meeting a diverse set of individuals from across the world has been nothing sort of extraordinary. They have been inspiring and funny, and just a good bunch of people to be around. The time I have spent with them will stay with me wherever I go.

My greatest takeaway was the opportunity to understand firsthand questions related to environment, wildlife and conservation. How can we work towards achieving global environmental aims while protecting local rights? I hope to explore this at my future work in public policy.

Who made a big impact on you in the past 10 months? Tell us a bit about that person and how they affected you.

Personally, Dr. Ravi Shankar Parameshwaran has changed my outlook towards life. I remember walking with him to lunch to a nearby eatery when he remarked “hey! Look at that Fellow so happily going all around!” I was a little surprised because there was no one around. It took me over two-minutes to realize that he was referring to the butterfly!! Over the next few months I came to realize that this was not a one-time thing, for Dr. Parameshwaran there was no ‘it’ for animal life as we have been trained in our English classes. “I can never be alone because I always have company”, he tells me, “it does not necessarily have to be humans.” Dr. Ravi’s respect, love and imagination for things are beyond comprehension. In his company I have understood what it means to be sensitive to all life and appreciate the pleasures that it can offer.
After a long day of school, Aakash, 13, instead of wandering around the beach was now a part of the Young Adult Program before leaving to run his masala peanuts shop to support his family. The objective of my project was getting kids like Aakash to rediscover their childhood through play and develop into emotionally intelligent and versatile adults.

I designed an after school program for teenagers of the fisherman community located next to the beach. We used Ultimate Frisbee not only as a bridge to connect with the children but also to teach them gender equality (boys and girls play on the same team) and integrity (a sport without referees). I adopted a holistic education approach that involved drama and dance, spoken English, gender focus group discussions and...
role plays. Pudiyador was a safe space where we provided children with academic assistance and an activity based way of learning.

During my time at Pudiyador I also worked with the community through regular home visits. This enabled us to learn about children’s families and dynamics within them which contributed to a better understanding of each child’s mental health. Through this process I was able to mentor the children, tackle their distress effectively and seek support from their parents when needed.

**A moment from the past 10 months in which you felt really proud?**

Not being able to engage with the children due to a language gap left me feeling pretty dejected in the beginning. I wasn’t able to counsel them (as most of them struggled to understand English), something I was looking forward to do. However, I moved to a more macro level position by designing/monitoring the program and managing and building capacity in our teachers/coaches. As time passed, I adopted ‘Tanglish’ (A combination of Tamil and English) through my daily interaction with the teenagers which left them pretty amused but also brought a lot of joy to our relationship.

Students would show a lot of resistance in attending our program as the beach was huge distraction for them. In hindsight, it was naive of me to assume that the children would want to come to the program, During the first two weeks we had to chase them around and bring them to class. After a lot of thought and conducting a needs gap assessment I redesigned the program and worked on improving the quality of classes. A month later our attendance doubled which launched the inception of our after school program.

**What are you most grateful for in your Fellowship experience?**

I am most grateful for my class of fellows who were always ready to help and offered some advise in an aspect of work that I faced a challenge with. Be it a monitoring tool to track a child’s overall progress or a focus group discussion technique to change boys’ perception of their sisters or just some games to play in class, the fellows have supported me immensely. Not only did the fellows help me with my project but also back me financially to represent India at the World Ultimate Guts Championship in London! Thank you fellows.
## Mentor Acknowledgement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Organizations</th>
<th>Mentor Name</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akshara-1</td>
<td>Nandita Gandhi/ Snehal Velkar</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadleaf Health and Education Alliance-1</td>
<td>Michael Matergia</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Square Foundation-1</td>
<td>Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative-1</td>
<td>Vinu Sampath Kumar</td>
<td>Law and Advocacy</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel to Secure Justice-1</td>
<td>Eliza Rumthao</td>
<td>Law and Advocacy</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Vaani Community Media-1</td>
<td>Dinesh Kapoor</td>
<td>Social Enterprise</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iMerit-1</td>
<td>Anita Chakrabarti</td>
<td>Social Enterprise</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC Mahindra Education Trust-1</td>
<td>Gauri Rajadhyaksha</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHAMIR-1</td>
<td>Ghatit Laheru</td>
<td>Livelihoods</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAMP</td>
<td>Arjun Sanyal</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Gujrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDHA-1</td>
<td>Christopher Turillo</td>
<td>Livelihoods</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Fellow</td>
<td>Rowena Mascarenhas &amp; Drew Foxman</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Banglore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Choices- 1</td>
<td>Dr. Farzana Khan</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naz Foundation-2</td>
<td>Vivek Gaur/ Jaya Tiwari</td>
<td>Law and Advocacy</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Nergy Solar-1</td>
<td>Piyush Jaju</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profugo-1</td>
<td>Jenny Koleth</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pudiyador - 1</td>
<td>Chiai Uraguchi</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching Hand-1</td>
<td>Akhaya Kumar Sagar</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIVER - 2</td>
<td>Padmanabha Rao</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauhard-1</td>
<td>Gaurang Raval</td>
<td>Law and Advocacy</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SocialCops - 1</td>
<td>Prukalpa Sankar</td>
<td>Social Enterprise</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action-1</td>
<td>Dr. Nayreen Daruwalla</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirumalai Charitable Trust -1</td>
<td>Bhooma Parthasarathy/Mandalam Seshadri</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utthan-1</td>
<td>Pallavi Sobtirajpal</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Gujararat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadhwani Foundation-1</td>
<td>Manish Mohan</td>
<td>Livelihoods</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Conservation Society-1</td>
<td>Krithi Karanth</td>
<td>Livelihoods</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuwa - 1</td>
<td>Rose Thomson</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Photo Essay