The American India Foundation is committed to catalyzing social and economic change in India and building a lasting bridge between the United States and India through high-impact interventions in education, livelihoods, public health, and leadership development, with a particular emphasis on empowering girls and women to achieve gender equity. Working closely with local communities, AIF partners with NGOs to develop and test innovative solutions and with governments to create and scale sustainable impact. Founded in 2001 at the initiative of President Bill Clinton following a suggestion from Prime Minister Vajpayee, AIF has impacted the lives of 2.5 million of India’s poor and aims to reach 5 million by 2018-19.
History of the Fellowship

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 365 Fellows to serve in 165 partner organizations throughout India.

The Fellowship offers the opportunity to capable 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 2014/15 Fellowship class is composed of 35 Fellows, 10 of whom are Indian citizens, placed at 34 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 NGOs 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.
We’re happy to present the 2014-15 William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India Yearbook, documenting special moments from their 10-months with NGOs and social enterprises in India, leaving us in awe of their passion, creativity, and the ability of young people to make a difference. We’re proud that this program is completing 15 years during which we have placed over 365 Fellows at 165 organizations across India.

As the 2014-15 Fellows complete their service, we hope this Yearbook will serve to encourage them to continue a lifetime of commitment to the issues of social justice in India and inspire those who are contemplating involvement with India’s social development.

To the graduating class of 2014-15: We are incredibly proud of your achievements. We have seen you grow as human beings with a sensitivity to the problems of others and the awareness of the enormous task that lies ahead if India’s growth is to be shared equitably. All of you have been touched by the Fellowship experience and we hope it will continue to influence your lives. Do remain powerful ambassadors of AIF and help in our mission to disrupt poverty and catalyze social and economic change in India.

We’d like to thank the many individuals, who besides the Fellows, make this program possible, including the stakeholders who are involved in reading the applications and interviewing the candidates, partner NGOs and social enterprises, mentors, and the AIF fellowship team. Going forward, we hope that the Class of 2014-15 has done its bit to strengthen bridges between the two greatest democracies on the globe and produce outstanding leaders for tomorrow.

With best wishes for an exciting next chapter,

Lata Krishnan, Chair
Pradeep Kashyap, Vice Chair
Venkat Srinivasan, Vice Chair
M.A. Ravi Kumar, CEO
Nishant Pandey, India Country Director
A Note From the Fellowship Staff

To the Class of 2014-2015,

What a year. It only feels appropriate to kick off the yearbook with an enormous thank you. It has been a distinct pleasure to spend the past 10 months working alongside such a tremendous group of individuals. Thank you for your creativity. Your companionship. Your dedication. Your service.

Undoubtedly, upon looking back on this experience you will see an evident difference in your expectations going into it, and what the Fellowship has actually been for you over the last 10 months. Allow different, we hope that you can see the value in your time and your impact. We certainly do. The Fellowship is confident that the time and money invested in each of you as leaders on the forefront of positive social change is well spent. We know you all have sacrificed a lot this year to be here, with us, working on complex problems, sometimes with complex organizations, and we thank you for that. The influence of this class is not simply the lives that you have collectively changed over the course of the last 10 months, but the change that will continue in the work of your host organizations, and, perhaps most importantly, the personal change that you all have experienced, in many different ways.

As dissected during the Social Enterprise conference, impact is an elusive term; it is often thrown around casually, tossed into the air with no actual landing place because the recipient is undefined in the first place. In the case of the Fellowship however, these past 10 months are not falling unnoticed. The recipient of your impact is each and every one of us on staff. It's the people in your office, from the chai walas to the upper management, that you've smiled at, or challenged with your questions. It's the fruit wala down the street. It's each other. Maybe your impact for this year is measured in the thousands, or maybe in the single digits, and we are here to remind you that either one is completely okay.

We'll miss working so closely with all of you but we are thrilled to watch what comes next. Stay in touch, stay rapping about walas, and stay cool. You got this.

Sayonara to the Fellowship of 2014-15, and welcome to the life-long membership of AIF Clinton Fellowship Alumni, 360 strong.

With gratitude,
Cassie, Oindrilla, Gaurang, and Eli
The Clinton Fellowship Team 2014-2015
Ahmedabad and Bhuj
Hometown: Phoenix, AZ    Placement Organization: Khamir / KVMS    Placement location: Bhuj, Gujarat

I spent the majority of my Fellowship interviewing health workers, community leaders, and men and women of Kutch to assess the current health status and find areas for interventions. I spoke with hundreds of people and observed countless health programs in order to learn, understand, and eventually give my input. The last week of my Fellowship, a medical student from the UK came to KVMS to learn from me about women’s access to reproductive health care in Kutch. At first, I was very confused. I still felt like an outsider and wasn’t sure I could teach this student anything she couldn’t read online. However, within the first few hours of her visit, I was organizing site visits, setting up and translating interviews, and even being interviewed myself. Not only did I feel like I had legitimate things to say, but for the first time I felt like a member of the Kutch health worker community.

For the past 10 months I have been serving, learning, and living in Bhuj, Gujarat. Bhuj is the headquarters of Kutch, the largest district in India, and a well known home to many artisans. My main project was to design, conduct, and analyze baseline health surveys and community needs assessments for artisans in Kutch. This was the first time health data has been recorded for this community.

In order to carry out these surveys and needs assessments I was partnered with two organizations: Khamir, a NGO dedicated to improving the livelihood of Kutchi artisans; and Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), a women’s empowerment organization with a focus on health work. From these surveys and needs assessments, we have started a health insurance program for our artisans, implemented occupational health workshops, and revamped marketing strategies. In addition to working on artisan health projects, my work consisted of monitoring and evaluating current programs dealing with women’s health; analyzing maternal health data; designing youth workshops on puberty and sexuality; assisting in the design, implementation, and analysis of a nationwide survey on Indian girls.

I came to the Fellowship thinking that I would live in ten months of solitude with brief interactions with the other fellows. I was prepared to come to Bhuj and only have my work and Netflix to keep me company. Quite the opposite is true. The friends I have made in Bhuj will be with me for life. From community meals, to work collaborations, to all night Bollywood dance parties, I couldn’t love my Bhuj family more.

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Pride

Gratitude

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Amongst all the knowledge that I have acquired about sanitation, I have been given a glimpse into the complexity of Indian culture and have come to appreciate the form of ignorance about a culture that I, at times, feel that I know. The community that I worked with is very unique in that it has a drastically diverse culture. Even from neighborhood to neighborhood, house to house—there are Muslims, Hindus, and different varieties of castes within the Hindus; there’s conflicts among community leaders, and diverse economic backgrounds; it’s presented problems that I hadn’t foreseen. You’re trying to help around fifteen different subgroups; and while you may have the overall goal of trying to accomplish one thing, you have to cater to each one of those groups. When tackling problems such as these, you are forced to constantly learn new facets of the community, culture, or the problem itself to achieve the goals that have been set. The process of accepting my callowness and absorbing new knowledge has proven to be one of the more rewarding, yet humbling experiences, and has provided a new lens of perspective when looking at unfamiliarity.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of meaningful and tangible change. Just as the physical changes the city, I am grateful to have been among those who make the city transform as well. Through the change in architecture and aesthetics, an accompanying change of culture is occurring—something that I feel is far larger than any building we can construct. Deadlines are being thrown around in the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation that may have never been thought possible, especially when referring to sanitation and the construction of toilets. Community toilets and individual household toilets are arguably in their highest demand, both from the governing side and from those who are governed. I like to see the city growing as it does, and I am so grateful to be a part of that growth—whether it’s through the construction of individual toilets and public conveniences, or influencing positive behavior. It’s so incredibly fascinating to see it from the inside, and working on my Fellowship project, I’ve felt as if I’m in the middle of it. I feel as if I’m a part of a movement, working towards the broader idea of change.
Over the past ten months, I have worked on a number of projects at Sarvajal, a social enterprise that uses market-based models to provide safe, subsidized drinking water in rural areas and slums. My work has mostly been in research and operations, which involves conducting feasibility studies, identifying donors, and helping create custom solutions for different environments across the country.

Sarvajal’s operations involve multiple moving parts that are tightly interconnected (ranging from sales to production, R&D, and even community awareness). Having worked to closely with the operations team, I have also begun spending a considerable amount of time helping systemize these processes to create room for scalable models.

Prior to the Fellowship, I had never really thought of effective water provision as being an issue that required much attention; but once I started working with Sarvajal, conducting background research on water scenarios across India, I realized the true nature of the problem. Now, when I’m asked about my work, people sometimes seem taken aback by my field of focus, like they just met someone who manufactures something oddly specific, like the buttons used in remote controls, or the Bollywood posters that adorn the inside of autos (“I always wondered who took care of stuff like that”). And I don’t blame them; I would have reacted similarly if it weren’t for my recent experience in the sector.

Through the Fellowship, not only have I grown sensitive to the issues of water within the development context, but I also now understand how, because of our tendency to simplify complex problems, there are probably hundreds of “micro” issues unknown to me that skirt larger questions like that of poverty in general. This awareness has made me curious about similar lesser-known problems, and who the people that “take care of stuff like that” really are.

My first extended feasibility study was for a CSR project in Maharashtra and Karnataka in October of last year. I spent two weeks on the road with a coworker, visiting roughly 6-7 villages everyday to shortlist ideal locations with the potential for maximum impact of a subsidized drinking water system. We created a list of about seventy villages from which our seven top recommendations were selected and fitted with Sarvajal installations under our Company-Owned Company-Operated model (COCO). As of mid-June, five of these systems have become the most successful COCO installations at Sarvajal.

Having the opportunity to work on streamlining Sarvajal’s overall operations has been great, but the satisfaction from feeling like I created a direct, tangible difference was definitely my proudest moment.

Raghav Anand

Hometown: Gurgaon, Haryana    Placement Organization: Sarvajal    Placement location: Ahmedabad, Gujarat

One Big Takeaway

Prior to the Fellowship, I had never really thought of effective water provision as being an issue that required much attention; but once I started working with Sarvajal, conducting background research on water scenarios across India, I realized the true nature of the problem. Now, when I’m asked about my work, people sometimes seem taken aback by my field of focus, like they just met someone who manufactures something oddly specific, like the buttons used in remote controls, or the Bollywood posters that adorn the inside of autos (“I always wondered who took care of stuff like that”). And I don’t blame them; I would have reacted similarly if it weren’t for my recent experience in the sector.

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I am grateful for all of the diverse and friendly people who have helped me throughout my fellowship, and the things I’ve learned from them. These people include my warm and welcoming co-workers, who have helped me learn about the challenges urban India is facing; my mentor Katie Pyle, who manages Janaagraha’s research team and has taught me all kinds of good research; the adorable kids who opened up to me about the challenges of living in Bangalore when I was conducting my research, and the AIF staff, who have helped me reflect on and learn from my experiences in India.

One memorable aspect of my time at Janaagraha involved designing and managing a research project that focused on how children are affected by urban infrastructure problems in Bangalore. While it’s clear that poor footpaths, garbage-laden roads, and traffic hazards affect children, little research has been conducted on their views of these issues. In order to get a better understanding of how children experience Bangalore, I designed a research methodology with a fun photographic activity for grade 8 students and found ten schools that were willing to allocate a time for their students to participate. I am looking forward to releasing my report, and hope that, by providing evidence of the impact of urban challenges on kids, and relevant policy recommendations, the report will help advance Janaagraha’s mission of improving the quality of urban governance in India.
Gratitude

The thing I’m most grateful for throughout my fellowship experience has been the continual support from AIF to brave my own path. As we all know, life does not always go as planned. There are always hiccups, and things you thought were certain, turn out to be empty promises. The staff of AIF has been incredible in supporting me as I worked to create a new project within my organization and develop something that would be able to have positive and lasting influence on my host organization.

One Big Takeaway

My biggest takeaway from this Fellowship has been that the opportunity to view and fully understand another country is incredibly important to the way we view the world as a whole. Through my position with Dream a Dream I’ve been able to interact with dozens of foreign students visiting India for the first time. Their initial observations are always the same: “India’s so different from what I expected.” The dismantling of the preconceived notions I had about India are what I view as the greatest takeaway from this year. I worked to help foreign students and volunteers explore the many different facets of Indian culture. This not only helped other people see India as a complex web of cultures, but also allowed me to delve deeper into the many different ways of life within Bangalore.

During my time with Dream a Dream I took on a variety of roles. My primary role was the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, in which I created and implemented a new system that organized and streamlined the process of recruiting and placing over 3000 volunteers per year. In addition to my work implementing a new volunteer coordinating system, I also conducted research with two other community-based, youth development organizations in order to study “How to Improve the Retention Rates of Girls in Youth Development Organizations in India.” I used this information to create an improvement model for Dream a Dream’s After School Programming. Through this study, I also developed relationships with two other Indian NGOs: Sauhard of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and Yuwa of Ranchi, Jharkhand. This has led to a lasting connection with several NGOs in India, all working for the betterment of youth.
One Big Takeaway

My time as a Fellow has enabled me to accomplish something that I had always dreamed of: namely, living and working in India. As a kid, I would always spin the light-up globe in my room and wonder about this far, far away place. To have spent ten months here and begun to develop my own impressions of the country is an experience that will always cherish and take with me. And perhaps best of all, my time during the Fellowship has left me with more questions than I originally came with. I am excited by this notion, as it further inspires my curiosity and drives my desire to continue working in India to promote social and economic change.

Gratitude

My colleagues kept me coming to the workplace everyday. I was very fortunate to work in a variety of capacities with a skilled, fun, and diverse staff. They welcomed me with open arms, and taught me a tremendous amount about the job-readiness industry and the immense work that goes into preparing content and design for a mass audience. They humored my myriad (and probably obvious) questions on India writ large, and repeatedly bore the agony of listening to me speak in broken Hindi and Kannada.

Frank Alexander

Hometown: Denver, CO  Placement Organization: Wadhwani Foundation  Placement location: Bangalore, Karnataka

As Implementation and Data Support Manager, I worked closely with colleagues and external partners to develop the strategy and support field staff as rolling out the Wadhwani Foundation’s skilling initiative. I also helped to create and maintain a comprehensive set of monitoring and evaluation tools as well as sales kit collateral. While in the office, I coordinated numerous weekly training sessions and also managed the New Hire Orientation process.
John Gibbons
Hometown: Western Springs, IL  Placement Organization: Babajob.com  Placement location: Bangalore, Karnataka

I worked for Babajob Services Private Limited, a tech social enterprise started in Bangalore that serves as the largest blue-collar and grey-collar job marketplace in India. During my time at Babajob, I was treated as an employee and worked in a variety of roles, applying for grant funding, managing strategic relationships, and working on our M&E among other activities. I had the privilege to work with the management team at Babajob and see the company grow from 30 employees to 200, as well as secure their Series B funding of 10 million dollars.

Outside of work, I lived with two other AIF fellows, Mrinal Mohanka and Brad Wintersteen. I spent a significant amount of time with them both, developing a daily routine with my coworker and mentor Mrinal. Life in Bangalore was exciting and busy as a result of life inside and outside of work. I met a bunch of people I will never forget and had the opportunity to see a lot of fascinating, socially-motivated innovation coming about in Bangalore and India.

Challenges
The AIF Clinton Fellowship was my first job after college, so I did not have any full-time work experience prior to this program. At Babajob, I was given a wide array of responsibilities, most of which I had little experience with. Often, when I was told what I would be doing I had to spend a decent amount of time figuring out what I was supposed to do. I was constantly learning throughout my Fellowship, needing to understand new business concepts and how to write convincing proposals, and developing many other skills that I had never practiced before. While I had a lot of assistance from people at my office, these responsibilities were my own in the end, and so the onus was on me to learn as quickly as possible so that I could complete them. At the same time though, much of what I worked on often hinged on other people completing interlocked tasks. I had to rely on other staff members at Babajob, whose priorities often did not align with my own. Navigating this space was challenging, but ultimately, very rewarding.

Pride
During my fellowship, I was responsible for all of our grant writing activities as well as managing existing grants we had won. The NSDC announced an innovation challenge that we wanted to enter, and it fell to me to write the proposal for it. The challenge had three different rounds, and previously we had not made it past the first one. I spent a significant amount of time drafting and editing our submissions for each round, compiling legal documents, crafting budgets, and preparing projects necessary for the NSDC to select who would proceed. I had a lot of help in all of these tasks, but the proposal was still my responsibility. We made it past the first two rounds, and while my managers offered to let me present in the third round to a panel of judges, I was unable to because it conflicted with the Midpoint conference. Instead, our COO and Director of Strategic Partnerships presented a presentation I had helped create, and we were selected as one of the competition winners. As a result of internal decisions, my company chose not to complete the finals parts of the competition, but I was still proud of the effort I put in to help us get this opportunity.
Receiving confirmation that we had successfully completed a $10 million round of venture capital fundraising from SEEK, an Australian investor, was a moment of extreme pride for me and for Babajob. I worked very closely with the organization’s top management to prepare the necessary materials for our investor conversations, and successfully completing our investor round was not only validation of the time and effort we had put in, but also that we were part of something that others had faith in. I always believed that Babajob was doing important and good work in helping Indians find better jobs in the blue-collar sector, but it was a sense of immense pride when that was acknowledged by SEEK, one of the largest players in the job portal industry worldwide.

Pride

One Big Takeaway

Having lived away from India for eight years prior to the Fellowship, a lot of what I thought about the country was based on stories I heard. People talked about how exciting a time it was to be in India because of the booming tech industry, the rise of the middle class, startups being founded by the dozen, and the tremendous amount happening in the social enterprise space. I couldn’t help wonder how much of what one heard was true. For the last ten months, I was fortunate enough to live in Bangalore—the epicenter of those stories. It was certainly eye-opening to see the truth behind all that one hears, and an inspiring experience seeing young, driven, motivated individuals—some straight out of college—taking a risk to create something of their own in order to help transform society. I was lucky enough to meet people doing fantastic work in the poverty alleviation, renewable energy, civic engagement, access to capital, healthcare, and children’s rights spaces among others, and I’m left in no doubt that the stories I heard in the past were not exaggerations, but may have even failed to do justice to the reality of what is actually taking place in India today.

Mrinal Mohanka

Hometown: Kolkata, West Bengal
Placement Organization: Babajob.com
Placement location: Bangalore, Karnataka

While at Babajob.com, I experienced a fascinating journey of expansion. I only had 30 colleagues when I joined the team in September, and the team exceeded 200 by June. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of a rapidly growing start-up that was assisting Indians in the informal sector find better jobs, and it was a pleasure helping the CEO, COO, and Chief Business Officer on some of their main initiatives: building the business model for potential venture capital investors, implementing a third-party background verification service for candidates that get hired through Babajob, and trying to instill a more data-driven culture across the organization. The excitement when Babajob successfully raised $10 million from VC investors was the undoubted highlight of my Fellowship, and while there were some challenges and growing pains along the way, on the whole it was a phenomenal learning experience that will certainly hold me in good stead in the future.

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Shubham Fitkariwala

Hometown: Kolkata, West Bengal  
Placement Organization: Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy  
Placement location: Bangalore, Karnataka

Janaagraha is India’s premier not-for-profit organization, having the mission of transforming the quality of life in India’s cities and towns by working with governments and citizens. As my mentor and I belong to same fraternity, we have common interests towards Audit and Finance. Having been placed at Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, I was given an opportunity to lead a project on Municipal Finance in India. (Project name: Annual Performance Report of Indian Cities.)

The Annual Performance Report of Indian Cities is intended to be a benchmark report on financial and operational performance of Indian cities. The Report is expected to both serve as a template for Municipal Corporations to publish their own annual reports, and to also create a comparative framework of finance and operations. My day-to-day activities involved collecting financial, audit, and other report data from Municipal Corporations, putting up information in various spreadsheets, analyzing data, etc. I visit Municipal offices to meet various officials. The work also involved helping others to understand financial aspects of urban local bodies.

I am most grateful for the experience of interacting, serving, learning, and growing with amazing people around me; I will cherish this Fellowship experience throughout my life.

Gratitude

Pride

When I came to know that there are very few chartered accountants working on municipal finance to define the role of auditing and accounting for the Smart City concept recently developed in India, I really felt proud to be part of the community and helping India grow.
Delhi
Gratitude

I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to live and work in Delhi, and to have had time to travel and experience some of the vast culture of India. Living and working in Delhi has exposed me to an unfamiliar and intriguing environment and allowed me to develop an understanding of the challenges confronting urban India while immersing myself in the local culture. I have also had the opportunity to visit northern, eastern, and central India; the highlights of my travels include Hampi, Ellora Caves, Ajanta Caves, Jaisalmer, Tiruch, Pushkin, Rameshwaram, Kochi, Dhanamkula, and Munnar. I am certain I will return to India to revisit some of these places and travel to new areas that I did not have time to see.

One Big Takeaway

Through my work at Shubham I came to understand the importance of financial inclusion in development. Roughly 94% of the Indian workforce has an informal income and is typically excluded by formal financial institutions that do not invest time in evaluating their ability to successfully manage debt. Lack of access to finance precludes people from expanding their businesses, purchasing a stable home for their families, or satisfying their basic daily needs. As more of the population is financially included and access to basic financial services facilitates inclusive development, there will be an enormous impact in basic standards of living and overall quality of life for those that had been previously financially excluded.
Pride
I felt a real sense of accomplishment on the day my proficiency in Hindi reached the point where I could comfortably read a BBC Hindi article about current events in India and discuss the topic with my peers. One of my big goals for the year was to attain fluency in Hindi and strengthen my vocabulary. I knew I had achieved my goal when I started a tradition in my office of writing a Hindi word of the day on our community chalkboard. Often, my colleagues, most who were educated in English medium schools, were learning these very proper Hindi words for the first time.

Challenges
In my decade in the workforce, I had never before been forced to navigate the complexities of managing interpersonal conflict. What I learned most this year was how to adapt to different management and communication styles while trying to stay productive, efficient, and motivated. After making it through the challenges I faced in my workplace this year, I am now confident I am prepared for any situation I may encounter in my future professional career.

Alexander Hunt
Hometown: Fayetteville, AR
Placement Organization: Central Square Foundation
Placement location: Delhi

The main focus of my project was to develop a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for my organization. This entailed designing and overseeing the creation of a new website, creating a social media plan and content calendar, and enhancing email marketing efforts and customer relationship management.

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Christine Garcia

Hometown: Phoenix, AZ    Placement Organization: Central Square Foundation    Placement location: Delhi

I used my Fellowship to work on a couple of projects to improve teacher training in India. First, I helped build a data portal to collect, aggregate, analyze, and publish data on Teacher Education Institutes across India. I designed the entire front end, including data queries, comparison tables, and dashboards with hundreds of graphs, infographics, charts, and all their underlying calculations. I also implemented and tested over a thousand data validations to improve the quality of data on the portal.

Second, I wrote a report on how to improve the accreditation system for Teacher Education Institutes. The majority of my work was researching and writing six case studies on international accreditation systems for teacher education, but I also worked on restructuring and rewriting the domestic case studies and report recommendations.

Impact

The person who made the biggest impact on me was Alexander Hunt, a co-Fellow who was also placed at CSF. At first, sharing a placement with him was not easy since he made me feel so unaccomplished—he has crazy amounts of experience across all sorts of sectors, speaks beautiful Hindi, and always looks immaculate with his perfectly matched pocket squares and bowties. But I quickly grew to love working just across the aisle from him. His passion, professionalism, and humor were an inspiration, and I am forever grateful for his patience in listening to all of my rants about data validations.

Pride

One of my proudest moments was directing an auto driver from Lajpat Nagar to Saket in Hindi, using only my memory. Not relying on Google maps or defaulting to English was a personal victory. After all of my struggles to learn the city, and all my time spent in Hindi classes, that auto ride was one of the first times that I felt like I actually knew what I was doing.

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Christopher Witschy

Hometown: Oak Park, IL    Placement Organization: Mummy Daddy Media    Placement location: Delhi

At Mummy Daddy Media I worked primarily as a videographer and editor. In addition to filming and editing projects for our clients such as Brooksings India, The British Council, the American India Foundation, and Ritu Kumar, I produced a number of short videos with NGOs and festivals I reached out to, independently. The aim of these videos is to increase various organizations’ visibility to parties who are potentially interested in donating their time or resources. Additionally, I served as a production assistant at Mummy Daddy, researching new projects, conducting market research, managing and updating our company blog, and transcribing interviews to be scripted.

One Big Takeaway

I definitely developed a more mature and realistic attitude toward routine, less creative client work over the course of my Fellowship. I’ve heard the old show business adage, “You make one for them and one for you.” The idea is you secure yourself financially in order to take artistic risks. In film school, most everything we made consisted of artistically risky content. This is the first position I’ve held where I’ve really seen the philosophy of that saying in action. Witnessing my mentor maintain and prioritize client relationships that distracted from our more challenging and exciting work frustrated me at first, but ultimately taught me the importance of financial independence in a creative field. Without the Weinsteins financing one’s every move, client work—even for clients whose worldviews one may not agree with entirely—is essential to securing the independence and the resources necessary to the pursuit of artistic endeavors. That, or I could sell all my prized possessions and max out ten credit cards à la Kevin Smith’s Clerks.

Gratitude

I’m most grateful for second chances. I’ve received a number of second chances both professionally and personally, from moving into a new flat with the most considerate housemates I’ve ever had, to being able to completely scrap my first editing assignment for one of our larger clients. My mentor took a chance on me when I insisted I could make something worth watching for a major client, and my next effort not only passed her mark, but is currently the channel’s preview video when one visits their YouTube page, seven months later.
The Fellowship experience enhanced my understanding of the relationship between policy makers and civil society in India, and gave greater perspective on the challenges faced when seeking to amend or create new policies related to gender on a citywide basis. Through working directly with Jagori’s Safe Delhi team, I contributed to data collection, prepared policy documents, and witnessed how relationships are managed at the local level in order to promote change.

By and large, I am most grateful for having developed a tremendously wonderful set of Indian friends over the course of the Fellowship. While living in Delhi is a truly rewarding experience—it is a city of immense diversity, culture and history—many challenges arose over the span of ten months, ranging from the practical (i.e. solving health-related and housing issues) to the personal (i.e. trying socially connected). This dedicated group of friends helped me navigate day-to-day challenges of life in Delhi, and in the process, through our many visits to restaurants, movie halls, and a significant number of hours spent at coffee shops, I was also able to gain a deeper, and more nuanced understanding of the individual states from which my friends hail from, including Odisha, West Bengal, Chattisgarh, and others.

**Dustin Smith**

Hometown: Holyoke, MA  
Placement Organization: Jagori  
Placement location: Delhi

During my time with Jagori, I worked primarily as a researcher, assessing violence against women in public spaces in Ranchi and Hazaribagh cities in the state of Jharkhand. As part of this process, I designed a questionnaire to be used in a household survey, helped develop relationships with local organizations in Jharkhand, and conducted a gender policy analysis for the state. Additionally, with Jagori’s Safe Delhi team, I regularly drafted policy recommendations and other materials for Delhi Government, and recently began the development of an online legal resource on violence against women in India.

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One big takeaway is the understanding that in today’s India, young people understand the issues that their country faces, and they want to make a difference through their NGOs, their social enterprises, and their work in the development sector. What strikes me most though, is the disconnect that still exists among these like-minded organizations. There is a lot of potential in collaboration and partnerships, and it hasn’t come together till now; organizations are still operating in silos. If we want to create an impact on scale, this is something that we need to work on first.

I’m really grateful for the number of super bright, talented people that I’ve met. The number and quality of people, whether Fellows or people that I’ve met during the course of my work, and the passion that they bring for the development sector is something I haven’t experienced before.

Elaine Colaco

Hometown: Goa   Placement Organization: Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs   Placement location: Delhi

I worked with the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs in New Delhi. It was an interesting Fellowship placement as the IICA is the hub of all CSR-related activity in India. My ten months were spent in the Learning & Development vertical, which has the mandate of creating “an army” of CSR professionals.

The Fellowship has given me a deeper understanding of what the Government expects from corporates, foundations, and NGOs in the conceptualization and implementation of CSR projects and programs.

As an AIF Clinton Fellow, I’ve been involved in every aspect of the work this department does, from policy consulting to content development, managing training programs to contract making, and proposal creation to client engagement. I’ve finally come close to understanding why the Indian Government functions as it does, the strengths and weaknesses of the system, and why the need for Public-Private Partnerships is so strong in a country like India.

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I was unsure whether I really would feel comfortable living in another country for a year, whether it was something I honestly wanted to do or was just a passing urge. I’ve always had a close connection to my home, so staying away for ten months seemed like a daunting task. Now, approaching ten months, I’ve decided to postpone coming home by a further two, and feel emphatically that this was the right decision. The biggest takeaway is how much living in Delhi has come to feel like home, something I didn’t expect but for which I feel grateful.

I’m most grateful for the friends I’ve made through this experience. I think that the chance to meet the other Fellows and to learn about all the different paths that could lead someone to a year of working in India was really important; the fact that these people are all fun, smart, and cool as hell is just icing on the cake.

I worked for I Say Organic, an organic food home delivery service for New Delhi and the North Capital Region. Primarily, I managed social media for the company and contributed to a range of digital marketing projects to better promote the company. I also wrote press releases, blog posts, and pieces for contributions in different media outlets, including pieces published under our CEO’s name on Huff Post India and the Times of India Online. I traveled to meet several of the farmers we work with, writing and publishing five farmer stories on our company blog.
Hometown: Charlottesville, VA    Placement Organization: SightLife    Placement location: Delhi

**Impact**

Someone who had a big impact on my fellowship experience was Charlotte Brown, our co-Fellow placed in Uttarakhand. Part of it was professional—given our mutual interest in public health, being able to compare Charlotte’s experiences with rural Himalayan communities to my own work in Delhi and other urban centers helped me put together a more complete impression of healthcare in India. Beyond that, though, conversations with Charlotte have been a big part of my personal development this year. She’s confident, humble, and hilarious in turn, and the way she weighs situations with a grounded head and a light heart adds a wonderful perspective to long cups of tea and intense field visits alike. I especially appreciate Charlotte’s ability to call me out when I’m waffling and challenge me to look at old issues in new ways. By doing so, I come away from our chats both more sure and more questioning of myself, and she has made my year all the richer for it.

**Gratitude**

I’m most grateful for the incredible communities I’ve been a part of in Delhi, which have made the city feel warm and welcoming. There’s the Dillydallers—the little crew of Delhi Fellows that’s always up for adventures and down to chat, whether we’re listening to qawwalis in Nizamuddin, or going on impromptu food tours, or griping about the pollution over What’sApp. There’s my Fab Five of current fellows—Du Du (me), Dam Dam (Adam), and Di Di (Di)—who have been the perfect home base and sounding board from Day 1. And then there are my hilarious and inspiring SightLife co-workers, who adopted me and became solid friends through a mutual love of food, forays to Old Delhi and old ruins, and long conversations about the past and future of India. My favorite memories from this year were spent with these groups and individuals, and I’m already looking forward to reminiscing with them about the good old Delhi days.

During my time with SightLife, I’ve conducted mixed methods research on drivers of eye donation and awareness at our partner eye banks across India, with an end purpose of boosting voluntary donation numbers. For the first part, I designed, coordinated, and analyzed behavioral surveys to understand influencers of eye donation from an individual perspective. This included a short survey pilot in hospitals in Delhi, as well as developing and conducting a training program for eye donation counselors from four states (Delhi, Telangana, Kerala, and Odisha) who would administer the questionnaires. Meanwhile, I used a combination of interviews, surveys, and awareness material analysis to create a landscape of current awareness programs at fifteen eye banks. Through this, I was able to find a series of best practices and tools to improve the effectiveness of awareness campaigns.

In the end, I combined both studies to create a set of recommendations for future eye bank awareness programs, including concrete steps to improve current programs within the next year. I was also able to present my findings at two conferences, starting conversations about the need for change.

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As a member of the Undergraduate Outreach & Admissions office at Ashoka University, an up-and-coming liberal arts university based in Sonipat, Haryana, I worked as a part of the Outreach team, spreading the word about what “liberal arts” is, how it’s a legitimate education, and how it can actually be a better educational choice over engineering and/or medicine for some. I visited dozens of schools and met thousands of students across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Nepal. I also assisted the Admissions team in evaluating applications and conducting interviews.

Additionally, I worked as a part of the Communications team, helping to prepare print and digital collateral for prospective students and parents. I also helped manage our social media accounts, and created a series of student testimonials on our blog.

During the first seven months of my Fellowship, I traveled an immense amount. While I was technically a “Delhi-based Fellow,” I felt more of a “Wandering North India Fellow.” However, the experience of traveling to several tier-2 and tier-3 cities in India, understanding the educational landscape there, and interacting with students from all walks of life, was perhaps the most interesting part for me. This intensive solo travel also made me a much more confident single traveler as a woman in India. There were several moments when despite my best judgment (and my cynical, mistrusting, Delhi conditioning), I chose a taxi driver or a random person in the street, and I was very pleasantly surprised to see how hospitable and kind people can be.

One Big Takeaway

Gratitude

Through all the trips I took for work, I also got a chance to discover interesting things about all these cities I was in. I discovered that Gwalior, an erstwhile royal kingdom and perhaps one of the most underdappled heritage sites, is home to the most beautiful forts in the country; and that the burning down of a famous cloth mill company destroyed the economic future of the city in the ’80s. I went to Lucknow for the first time, where my father spent his teenage years, and had not been back since five decades. This trip proved more than just a work trip—I visited his high school, took photos, tracked down his teachers, and managed to register him for his Old Boys (Alumni) Association. In Bhopal, I learnt that a famous Bollywood star owns half the city, visited an ancient Buddhist stupa, and had dinner in a restaurant that was a single stationary car of a train that was owned by the Indian Railways. There was so much life in the smaller cities of India, just waiting to be chanced upon by the next travel blogger, or a Lonely Planet contributor.

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I am grateful for the kindness of strangers in the rural heart and hinterlands of India. During my travels in the towns and villages of Jharkhand and Bihar for work, I met a variety of different people on the road. Despite having spent most of my life in India, I had never taken the time to explore these parts of my country. These states are known to be some of the “worst” in India for women’s safety and quality of life. Yet, I was struck by the kindness, humility, and openness with which people let me in. It was a wonderful feeling when I managed to convince volunteers in the field that it is as okay to convey all the things going wrong, as it is to broadcast the positives.

During my Fellowship I worked at Gram Vaani, a social enterprise that runs a community media platform accessible through mobile phones. This is a free-of-cost, voiced-based platform accessed by rural disadvantaged communities in Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa. My main project on the Fellowship was to identify Gram Vaani’s impact among the community where it is present, and implement systems in the organization to monitor and evaluate impact. I spent the majority of my time in the Delhi office, with frequent visits to the field in Bihar and Jharkhand to understand how this platform was being used, and how effectively our field activities were taking place. The impact assessment and M&E system that was built as a result of my Fellowship will be used by the organization to track our effect in the communities Gram Vaani works with.

Vishnupriya Das

Hometown: Kolkata, West Bengal    Placement Organization: Gram Vaani Community Media
Placement location: Delhi

While designing an impact assessment system, it was hard to effectively implement a process that was not biased towards only finding the “positives.” In the competitive world of social enterprises, where social impact signifies success of the organization, it becomes very easy to ignore the lack of impact and sometimes even the negative consequences of organizational activities. It was a wonderful feeling when I managed to convince volunteers in the field that it is as okay to convey all the things going wrong, as it is to broadcast the positives.
Kolkata
One Big Takeaway

I learned a lot about the importance of being flexible and having patience. It is easy for a Fellow to show up at a host organization, think they have all the answers right away, and push for immediate action. However, in the context of a non-profit foundation operating around 150 training centers in multiple Indian states, both being flexible about what actions will become necessary and having the patience to really take the time to assess the situation is essential to developing a meaningful project. With flexibility and patience, a Fellow in a complex, challenging, and even frustrating situation can ultimately pursue a project that is genuinely aligned with the needs on the ground.

Gratitude

I was most grateful that I was able to share India with many of my friends and family who visited. It was always nice to show people like my parents around such a unique city like Calcutta or Varanasi. It was also wonderful to share new experiences with visiting friends, such as the Triund hike near Dharamsala, and the mountain views provided in a setting like Mussoorie. One of the greatest parts about ten months in India is that you cannot exhaust the list of potential experiences; there is always something new to encounter with a friend or family member.
I can’t pick just one thing for which I am most grateful, but for now I will point to my city, Kolkata. Despite its cultural richness and history, Kolkata is not the most “happening” city these days. It lacks the endless new restaurants, bars, and events that exist in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, and that brought me comfort and excitement in my past New York life. Despite initial adjusting pains, I ultimately came to both value all of the new things Kolkata had to offer—an unending, fascinating stream of sights, tastes, smells—and (even better) to listen to all of the parts of my identity that had gone neglected in places more familiar to me. Being in such a truly new place gave me an entirely new way to see myself and the world.

**Gratitude**

**Hometown:** San Antonio, TX  
**Placement Organization:** iMerit Technology Services  
**Placement location:** Kolkata, West Bengal

I will greedily refuse to pick one person who made the greatest impact on me, and instead pick them all. I had the privilege of unique, energizing, and inspiring co-Fellows by my side while living and learning here, and they each made an impact not only on how I view the world, but on how I view myself and my future. Each Fellow came with a fascinating story to tell, and a head full of exciting ideas. On the big scale, that means that countless conversations led me unswapping a new way of thinking, or yet another possibility I hadn’t considered, or a dream I did not know I had. On the daily scale, having fantastic co-fellows meant I could always find someone to encourage, comfort, support, or just entertain me. Swapping countless stories and thoughts—be they thrilling, devastating, frustrating, or just plain strange—gave me the space to process, explore, laugh, and create. Thank you all!

**Impact**

During my time at iMerit, I led the pilot program of a new service offering, and managed the development and completion of a new company website. Working with the sales and marketing teams, I developed new collateral materials and took part in conversations about positioning and branding. Outside of the office, I thoroughly enjoyed exploring various corners of India with my wonderful co-Fellows, learning how to navigate the chaotic streets of Kolkata, and eating my way through many a city and town.
Gratitude

I am very happy that I have been to accomplish so much from my Fellowship. I got first-hand experience of working in energy nexus for agricultural development. I was able to streamline site selection and entrepreneur selection parameters for installing community managed solar water pump irrigation, and provide research support to ON Farm Producer groups to manage community cooling cold room for post harvest management.

Pride

Hometown: Kalimpong, West Bengal  Placement Organization: Switch ON-ONergy  Placement location: Kolkata / Nadia and Howrah, West Bengal

The Fellowship has been a great professional experience; it has opened new opportunities, and has given me a clear understanding of my personal skills, strengths, and areas of improvement. I have also come to understand the kind of working environment and norms I want to join. I am very satisfied that during low points I have been able to manage difficult situations with an utmost professional attitude, and this has made me stronger. I’m now confident that in the future I will be able to not only cope in but also adapt to a challenging situation.

Yojna Lama

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I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with a technology-based livelihood project. I became responsible for many aspects of the project—from project implementation to management—gained exposure to technical aspects, and tested innovative implementation strategies.

I have been highly inspired by the ON Farm producer group for the dedication farmers have indicated towards their community development. I am grateful to have been able to work closely with them and establish a strong rapport.

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Lucknow
Impact

Over the span of 10 months I think one person who has had a big impact on me has been my mentor, Christopher Turillo, Co-Founder of Medha and an AIF fellow from the class of 2005-2006. Chris has helped me during this journey both professionally as a mentor, and personally as a friend. He has been a constant source of motivation when I have doubted my capability of doing a particular project. He gave me the autonomy to make decisions, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes. This attitude has helped me gain confidence about taking risky decisions. During moments of loneliness, anxiety, and frustration Chris has been there as a friend helping me sail smoothly through those moments.

Gratitude

I am grateful for meeting and working with helpful and friendly co-workers. There were numerous challenges that arose over the span of ten months, ranging from the professional, personal, and day-to-day challenges. My co-workers helped me learn ways of dealing with these problems. This warm and welcoming nature of my coworkers has helped me develop close personal bonds with many of them.

Aanchal Aggarwal

Hometown: Delhi  Placement Organization: Medha  Placement location: Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

I spent my Fellowship leading the monitoring and evaluation department at Medha, a non-profit organization that works to bridge the gap between education and employability. My work could be categorized into three domains: First, system creation and data management. Within system creation I was involved in designing the Management Information System (MIS), creating processes for data exchange through the MIS, and training of the employees on how to use the MIS system. The second domain was internal and external reporting. I was involved in preparing an internal report on the program feedback for the academic year 2014-15 and quarterly progress reports for the donor. The last domain included research. I assisted the fundraising team, researching about potential donors.

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The Mountains
In my first week in the Himalayas, a lifelong Garhwali resident said to me, “when you look at them from outside, they are beautiful. But when you live in the mountains, with the beauty, there is one thing connected and that is hardship. Whatever you travel in the mountains, the mountain life is full of challenges, all the time. These challenges can teach you to be kind, to be honest, to be gentle, to be big…” Ten months on, I can think of a no more concise and appropriate way to describe what the Himalayas cultivated in me: to be kind, honest, gentle, and big. Honesty rooted in kindness, being big without sacrificing gentleness. It’s impossible to detail exactly how these lessons are learned here, I guess it just comes with the territory.

Hometown: Walnut Creek, CA    Placement Organization: Aarohi    Placement location: Okhalkanda, Uttarakhand

Charlotte Brown

The second half of my Fellowship was spent with Aarohi’s Rural Maternal and Child Health Intervention in the remote areas of the mountain region of Kumaon. The mission of this project is to reduce maternal and child mortality and encourage women to adopt health-seeking behaviors. My role on the project was to do preliminary research for a potential change in strategy. In the 105 villages of Okhalkanda Block, I ran a qualitative and quantitative study into the sources of health information, i.e. what or who are the trusted sources of information, and what types of print and media people consume. The results of this study are being used to develop a more targeted media and behavior-change campaign in this region. Additionally, I assisted in various Aarohi health projects like surgery camps, mobile health clinics, and a trek to the villages near Pindari and Sundardunga Glaciers to deworm children and deliver basic healthcare.

Looking out over the central Himalayan range – Trishul, Maktoli, Nanda Devi - my mentor, another non-mountain bred transplant, drifted off the topic at hand and said, “You know, I have felt like I could die here... it’s just that I have looked out at these mountains and felt complete.” This feeling of magnificence could also be described as gratitude, gratitude for being given a human chance. And it’s a deeply comforting and nourishing feeling. Nourishment is integral to being able to serve the communities here, because behind and within those views are struggles - hardships born from living in such an extreme environment, one with a lack of adequate infrastructure, education, healthcare or employment opportunities. And I am equally grateful to have been given a chance to bear witness to the difficulty threaded in with the beauty. It is immensely valuable to be a witness to and grow with the lives that have not been favored by the local and global systems, as my existence has been. I have served to the best of my capacity, and I have learned, a lot. I have been unavoidably imprinted upon. And for all of this, I feel most grateful.

One Big Takeaway

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Hometown: Elkton, MD    Placement: Aseem Foundation and Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network
Placement location: Jammu and Kashmir; Pune, Maharashtra

My Fellowship year largely revolved around a research project that examined various approaches to peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir. Working with two organizations—the Aseem Foundation and the Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network—and interacting with many more, I helped to facilitate and participate in programs ranging from entrepreneurship development and educational exchange, to spiritual harmony and mental health camps. Using the ethnographic approach, my study looks at the deeply social nature of these organizations—how they interact with participants, with donors, and with one another. Beyond the project, I have enjoyed learning bits of Kashmiri songs and Ladakhi dances, and even sampling the wide variety of Maharashtrian street food.

Marios Falaris
Gratitude

Over the past few months, I have been incredibly grateful and inspired by the community that I finally feel accepted into. The experience has humbled me and given me a taste of what a fluid, successful project ecosystem can feel like. I am surrounded by people who have overcome incredible family hardship, physical abuse, discrimination, and community pressures to blossom into successful project leaders and trainers. I no longer seek out support when things go wrong, as the community itself moves in to support me. When I demonstrate a problem, a community forms to provide the answers. I am most grateful for this community, and will miss it the most when leaving.

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Mumbai
I am most grateful for the relationships with current Fellows, past Fellows who stayed in India, staff members (and Sridar), roommates, friends outside the program, and growing closer to family members—even my parents back in Boston. I’ve shared a lot of laughter and explored India through the Fellowship in the last year, and I’ve gained diverse relationships with people who are simultaneously friends and mentors. My experience would be nothing without the people with whom I’ve been able to share this last year. Chai raps. Thanksgiving. Life convos and cupcakes with Gini-ben. Karaoke with Eli. Three domestic relationships with my Zeba Corner yogis. Beard competitions. Making Ranu laugh. Being overwhelmed by Andrew’s social media presence. The most epic birthday with so many wonderful people surprising me. Finally, I’ve been fortunate to admit the influence of being surrounded by women this year, particularly my roommates and my Romanis (plus the rest of the Mumbai fellows/alums). Dare I say they’ve helped me become slightly a feminist? Who knows, but I’m grateful for all of their attempts to get me to open up and be more expressive.

I’ve been able to accomplish a few of the objectives I set for myself when I decided to extend my Fellowship for a second year. Professionally, I’ve continued to manage the successful Little Sister project that I helped launch, which uses mobile technology solutions to improve SNEHA’s response, tracking, outreach, and understanding of the prevalence of gender-based violence in Dharavi. I’ve also grown into a trusted member of the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children team, serving in various operational, planning, strategic, research, and advisory roles.

Personally, I’ve developed a stronger connection to my makeshift community and life in Mumbai, as well as continued my exploration of different regions and cities inside. My experience in the Fellowship this past year has been shaped by my role and relationships as a Fellow, as an alumna from the previous class, and as a mentor and the greater Fellowship community. For me, the most important part of the Fellowship is each individual’s personal growth, and I believe this year has continued to challenge me and hopefully helped me become a better person.

Ashwin Advani

Impact

Gratitude

While I count many important relationships from the past ten months, I have to single out my placement mentor, Dr. Nayreen Daruwalla. While I clearly view her as a mentor and a boss, I feel that our relationship is also that of friends and equals. We have mutual trust. I ask for her advice on all life and work matters, and she asks for my opinions likewise. She has guided me through the various intricacies of life as an NGO in India, and has pushed me to take more ownership within the organization, polling me as an insider in the organization. I feel that SNEHA, and Dr. Nayreen particularly, has helped me merge my professional and personal lives, which I used to separate. In addition to my aunt in Mumbai, Nayreen is like another mother in my life in Mumbai, and we now know each other’s family. Despite dealing with very serious and tragic issues with SNEHA, Nayreen is a beacon of laughter and calm. I have been truly lucky to have her in my life and I couldn’t learn from a better role model—open, compassionate, and dedicated to making her ideals reality.

Hometown: Boston, MA    Placement Organization: SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education, and Health Action)    Placement Location: Mumbai, Maharashtra

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Ashwin Advani
During my first year as a Fellow (2013-14), my day-to-day work was deeply rooted in Mumbai. This year, I had the amazing opportunity to spend much of my time on the road, visiting Fellows in their placement sites. I learned an immense amount from the experience of traveling on my own across the country; each day presented new challenges, as well as new possibilities. The world was my classroom and each person I met was an invaluable teacher. Yet, no one has taught me more this year than my co-Fellows, Back in August, I harbored a secret fear that my co-Fellows would find my camera and microphone intrusive, or that it would be difficult to connect during such brief visits. On the contrary, I was stunned by how quickly and naturally we bonded through mutual efforts to explore and process the world around us. Without exception, each Fellow I visited welcomed me with open arms, a spare blanket, a cup of chai, and heartfelt, honest, engaging conversation. My co-Fellows are brave, brilliant, humble, and hardworking; I'm grateful for the chance to share their stories with the world, especially because it has given me the chance to share the world with them. 

Gratitude

Many people have left an indelible impression on me over the past two years, but is Cassie Denbow, my 2013-14 co-Fellow and current Fellowship staff, whom I'd like to take this opportunity to single out. Cassie was the first Fellow I ever met when this journey began, and from day one she's been a constant inspiration. Through her interactions with Fellows, colleagues, heads of organizations, and countless others, she consistently demonstrates her dedication to approaching both work and friendship with an open, kind, thoughtful, passionate, and inquisitive spirit. During my moments of greatest worry, confusion, or frustration, Cassie has always been there, as both mentor and friend, to help me find a way forward—be it the perfect Beyoncé song, the missing puzzle piece, or the right auto on the wrong road. She is a gifted listener, a brilliant navigator of people, places, and emotions, and an up-for-anything kind of adventurer; she is also, as we've learned beyond her years and living beyond measure. Together, we've explored India, which is an education unto itself; yet, it's through discussing, questioning, reflecting, and dreaming together that I've learned the most.

During my time as a Media Fellow I used my original writing, photography, illustration, and film to create multimedia stories that depict the content and context of each Fellow's work, as well as that of the organizations they served. In addition to completing six full-length multimedia stories—each with a photo essay, two-minute short film, and written component—I also created a three-part series of short films entitled “Tell Me,” organized and designed the Fellowship yearbook, illustrated an AIF comic strip, and documented Fellowship conferences.

Outdoors of my official role, I kept my camera in hand and my notebook in my pocket, always eager to explore beyond my existing boundaries. I was joined in this process of constant inquiry by the three best roommates I could ever ask for, and by our wonderful family of Mumbai-based Fellows and Fellowship alumni. We're encouraged, pushed, and nurtured; each other, and I've learned an indescribable amount through their example, and through the examples they've challenged me to set for myself. The past two years have held more laughter, dancing, confusion, panic, hope, sorrow, surprise, adventure, calm, confidence, and kindness than I ever could have imagined, and I am forever grateful for each second of it.
After getting approval to pilot a mentoring program, I selected former Affirmative Action trainees who had been at TCS for several years, to act as mentors to new joiners from the same program. It was fascinating to hear people’s stories of how they had come to Mumbai to work with TCS. Whether they came from Kashmir, rural areas surrounding Mumbai, or another part of the city, each person had to learn how to adapt to work in a large company. Employees from the Affirmative Action program have such a wealth of experience, often moving from rural locations away from their families. It was a wonderful feeling to stand in front of this brave group of people to recognize that these experiences are valuable. I am proud to have helped start a program that helps new joiners from marginalized communities by connecting them with mentors who have had similar transitions to TCS. Furthermore, this program teaches mentors valuable leadership skills so that they can continue to have a positive impact on TCS: changing the demographic and offering new perspectives.

Pride

I am a career changer. After working for seven years in non-profit and international development work, I recently graduated from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy with a concentration on Business and Human Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility. This was my first time working for an extended period of time for a large corporation. Moreover, the TATA group is one of the largest conglomerates in the world and TCS alone employs over 300,000 people. I learned how to apply the program management skills that I developed working in international development to the private sector where even social programs need to keep impact and profitability in mind. It was a pleasant surprise to know that programs with a social benefit and are subject to the same amounts of scrutiny as those bringing in a profit. I learned how to discuss the Affirmative Action training program both in terms of social impact and profitability.

Challenges

I worked closely with my co-Fellow Ranu Nath to conduct an evaluation of the Tata Consultancy Services’ Affirmative Action (AA) Employability Training Program, which trains underprivileged communities on soft skills. We were tasked with finding ways to increase the number of AA trainees who are recruited for employment with TCS. Upon evaluation, we have learned that the quality of trainers and the training curriculum, and lack of engagement outside the training room affect the number of youth successfully seeking employment at TCS. I designed and piloted three programs to engage trainees. The first program is an SMS-based story that follows two Affirmative Action trainees—one male and one female—from training to joining TCS, including taking the entry test, going for an interview, and moving to a TCS location. The second program is a toll-free hotline where trainees’ questions are answered during working hours. Finally, the third program matches former AA trainees who have been with TCS for 2-3 years with new joiners as mentors.

Laura Van Voorhees

Home Town: Bethesda, MD  Placement Organization: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)  Placement location: Mumbai, Maharashtra

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One Big Takeaway

For decades, poverty eradication has been a challenge taken on by NGOs, INGOs, and public interventions. This Fellowship taught me the extent of a company’s role in promoting sustainable development. I came into this Fellowship with very little exposure to the corporate world. I didn’t know if it was possible for companies to integrate social issues at the core of their business vision. I doubted that a company wouldn’t allow its business agenda to blur social responsibilities. I thought that at the end of the day, companies cared how much profit they made, not how many people they helped. However, this Fellowship taught me that business-integrated social intervention can drastically impact development. Inclusive approaches such as the TCS Employability Training Program provide skills training to disadvantaged youth and increase the pool of potential employees. This leads to social responsibility becoming a business agenda. Being aware of this has made me more curious about understanding other innovative ways the corporate world can become a part of development goals.

Gratitude

I am eternally grateful for the people I have interacted with these past ten months. In order to evaluate the Training Program, I spent several months traveling and conducting field visits throughout the country. My conversations with trainees, trainers, host institutions, and members of the AA team helped me understand how the training program creates short-term and long-term impact in underprivileged communities. Whether they are moving from their rural villages to work in an urban TCS center for the first time or trying to prepare for the recruitment process, each stakeholder has a different challenge that they must overcome. Hearing stories about their experiences inspired me to look at the Training Program from multilateral angles. It was incredible to be a part of a movement that provides the most vulnerable youth with skill training to increase employability and eradicate poverty.

Ranu Nath
Hometown: New York, NY    Placement Organization: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)    Placement location: Mumbai, Maharashtra

During my Fellowship at Tata Consultancy Services, I worked with my AIF co-fellow Laura Van Voorhees in the Affirmative Action Team to evaluate and restructure the TCS Employability Training Program. Since 2010, TCS has dedicated itself to training unemployed youths from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and other underprivileged communities in English communication, numerical ability, analytical reasoning, and corporate etiquettes. This 80-100 hour training program is designed to develop skills that increase marginalized youths’ chances of finding employment. Laura and I used tools we learned from Lean Six Sigma—a business process tool—to gather and analyze data related to the Training Program. Then, we identified major challenges to the Program and solutions to these challenges. The solutions that I implemented during the Fellowship include: a new trainer recruitment, training, and evaluation process, and an updated training curriculum.

Laura Van Voorhees
Hometown: New York, NY    Placement Organization: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)    Placement location: Mumbai, Maharashtra

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Gratitude

I remember being asked at my interview if I looked forward to getting to know the other fellows in the class, if I was accepted into the fellowship. Caught off guard by this question, I scrambled for a neutral response and said that I was eager to learn from the experience and knowledge that the other fellows would bring. My vague answer to the question revealed just how little I expected from the fellowship in terms of friendship or camaraderie. Cocooned in a small liberal arts college, with all my friends within shouting distance, I really couldn’t imagine how a group of people, in far-flung places across the country, doing different things were expected to form a meaningful bond. Thankfully, I was completely wrong. At the end of my ten months, I find that the thing I am most grateful for are the friendships I have been lucky enough to find this year. From an incredible support system in Bombay, to a co-fellow who made my placement much more enjoyable to friends who were always willing to share a laugh over whatsapp, I have an immense amount of gratitude for the wonderful people I have gotten to meet and know this year.

Challenges

For many months, I struggled with the fact that my work seemed more geared towards sales and marketing than towards my own preconceived notions of what non-profit work should look like. As the months rolled by, I came to terms with the fact that it was impossible for me to assume or expect that working at a non-profit would exclusively mean performing tasks that had some sort of non-profit worthy stamp on them in my head. I came to understand and accept (with more than a little difficulty) that working at a non-profit was an endeavor that would include what I considered the not-so-noble tasks of sales and marketing. Understanding that it is both important and good that NGOs and non-profits carry out a variety of functions forced me to re-examine my own intentions for wanting to work in the development sector, and re-examine my personal goals with what my placement organization needed from me. It took me the last part of my Fellowship to understand that more than selling a school, I was helping students see that they had access to a wider (and hopefully more fulfilling) range of higher education options than before.

As a member of the Admissions and Outreach team at Ashoka University, I had the chance to travel across the country and work with students, teachers and parents as they navigated the treacherous waters of the Indian tertiary education system. My job, when stripped of all the fancy jargon and buzzwords surrounding it, was essentially to help the idea of a liberal arts education gain traction in the very narrow education landscape in India. Undoubtedly, the highlight of my Fellowship experience was the chance to meet, talk to, and work with many bright, ambitious and interesting students across the country, and helping them understand why a liberal arts education might be the right choice for them.
Plateaus and Valleys
For my fellowship, I have been placed at The Akanksha Foundation in Pune, Maharashtra. The Akanksha Foundation is an educational NGO that runs schools and after school centers for students from low-income communities in Pune and Mumbai. My experience at Akanksha has truly straddled the fine line between intern and employee. As a Fellow, I have had the freedom to explore projects and areas that needed attention but did not have a project lead.

Throughout the year, I have worked closely with the curriculum team and the Matoshri English Medium School. With the curriculum team, I have worked to create units for grades 7-9 English class. I completed evaluations of the BURP (Buckle Up and Read for Pleasure) Program and a center curriculum unit. I reorganized the library at the Matoshri English Medium School, which included cataloging all books online, re-numbering all the books (over 2000), creating book pockets and book tickets, and piloting a check-out system for students. Lastly, I took over a majority of the curriculum team’s logistical work for Ed Talks, an annual teacher training conference. This year we had over 400 staff at the conference, a majority of whom were teachers.

Jessica Meckler
Hometown: Newtown, PA    Placement Organization: The Akanksha Foundation    Placement location: Pune, Maharashtra

Gratitude
I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity to explore—explore myself, a new country, and another aspect of education. I’ve gotten to live in an incredible city and meet wonderful people in the Fellowship and in Pune. However, I am most grateful for the time I’ve had to learn from experience. I took a leave of absence from my Masters degree program to complete the Fellowship, and I will be returning to my program after the conclusion of the Fellowship. This moment has helped me see how interconnected I’ve become at the organization throughout the last 10 months and made me grateful for the wonderful people I’ve worked with here!

Pride
One of the moments when I felt most proud during the fellowship was at Ed Talks, Akanksha’s annual teacher training conference. A lot of my work this year has been separate from many teams at Akanksha. For Ed Talks, I spent a great deal of April and May emailing teachers and school leaders, figuring out logistics and other necessary (but mundane) tasks. Running around at Ed Talks and making sure that all facilitators had the correct materials—all the operational work—was the unseen insanity. During the busiest day of the conference, I had several teachers come up to me and thank me for helping them feel comfortable before presenting. Another teacher expressed her excitement to teach my English curriculum in the coming year. These moments helped me see how interconnected I’ve become at the organization throughout the last 10 months and made me grateful for the wonderful people I’ve worked with here!
The proudest moment of my fellowship came when the 10th standard board exam results were released to eager and nervous students around India. I had been working one on one with Sunita, an exceedingly bright but sometimes shy student, on her English and general test taking skills. Last year, Sunita failed her 10th board exam and scored the lowest in English. She had spent the months after her first board exam feeling pretty bad about herself, and was a little embarrassed and shy when we started our daily tutoring sessions. For three months we worked side by side at a little table in the Yuwa library/living room, going over official board exam questions, reading Mr. Popper’s Penguins, and discussing the best ways to beat nerves before a big test. There were days when neither one of us wanted to be there, but we were bound to each other by a desire to vanquish this stupid, sometimes downright offensive, exam.

We did countless practice problems, took timed practice tests, did meditative breathing exercises, and pushed each other to work just a little bit harder every day. Sunita and I found a rhythm in our work that I haven’t really experienced before, and tutoring her was one of the most fun parts of my fellowship.

The day the scores were released, I was so busy teaching my summer school class that I didn’t even realize it was result day. My coworker Neha called me out of my first class of the day to show me the scores on her computer. Suddenly there they were—Sunita had placed second overall in her class and received the highest mark in English. I can’t remember if I laughed or cried first but I definitely did both. I pulled Sunita out of her class and hugged her as hard as I could and told her how proud I was of her. That was a very, very good day.

Kayalyn Kibbe
Hometown: Bronxville, NY
Placement Organization: Yuwa India
Placement location: Hump Village, Jharkhand

During my time at Yuwa, I worked as a teacher, a chaperone, a handkerchief, a piggy-back-ride giver, hand holder, secret keeper, cooking student, and dog caregiver. My work was always shifting and always engaging. My main role was running and teaching an academic bridge program for around 100 tribal and scheduled caste girls. I taught English and Science classes with varied success, but I got to know and befriend the most interesting and loving people I have ever met. I began my Fellowship with two long-term projects in mind and did not complete either of them. However, I do not view them as a complete failure. There were some unforeseen complications that made completing my cookbook impossible, and while Dreams a Dream and Yuwa are not “official long-term partners” as we intended, my co-Fellow Brad and I were able to share some best practices, and Yuwa hosted Brad for a two-day visit during which he was able to observe and participate in a host of Yuwa activities. In failing to complete my projects, I learned a great deal about reasonable expectations, project goals as moving targets, the uselessness of quantitative data in rural development, and learning from more than a project proposal.
Sarah Manchanda
Hometown: Cerritos, CA
Placement Organization: Rishi Valley Institution for Educational Resources
Placement location: Rishi Valley, Andhra Pradesh

During my time as a Fellow with 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 new material for general, remedial, and enrichment mathematics instruction in grades K-3; conducting four 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 developing the framework for a comprehensive Special Education system that will be integrated into the unique educational methodology in use in Rishi Valley rural schools. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to extend my time with RIVER and try out the materials and systems I have developed.

Despite the challenges that have presented themselves over the past ten months, I have had the positivity to overcome them because of the loving and supportive community I am surrounded by. From the Directors of the organization who have consistently offered patient ears and supported all of my ideas, to my team members who have respected my input while helping me develop personally and professionally, to the friends and family who always know the right words to say or treats to cook on harder days, I am consistently finding myself feeling sincere gratitude for the strength living in a tight-knit community has provided me.

A moment that stands out in my experiences over the past months is the day that the first hearing and vision screening training was hosted in partnership with the rural health center of Rishi Valley. This moment was so special because it was a first step in implementing a comprehensive and effective Special Education system. All of the teachers were extremely excited about acquiring the skills to better understand health-related obstacles that may be standing in the way of their students’ success. There were countless stories I heard of students who had hearing or vision-related problems but went undetected, so having the opportunity to help provide support in a needed area was quite thrilling.
I actually came into DRF with little idea about my role. Initially, in an observing mode, I made exposure visits to field locations to better understand the organization’s role and objectives. Thereafter I presented my interests and expectations to the rural livelihoods team. It was decided that my project would help expand the rural livelihoods projects in terms of technological strategy and support. So my day-to-day work involved researching rural technologies, making site visits to institutions, and discussing with my mentor the feasibility and usefulness of various livelihood enhancement options. Some of the interventions took off in the initial months in the form of pilots, and others were developed further.

Thereafter, I worked on developing documentation that could serve as a reference for the implementing field teams. In all, I was able to finalize and document twenty new intervention options that are going to help DRF work with small-scale and marginal farmers to improve their livelihood conditions.

Vishal Potluri
Hometown: Mumbai, Maharashtra Placement Organization: Dr. Reddy’s Foundation Placement location: Hyderabad, Telangana

The Fellowship provided me with a unique position of being both an insider and an outsider to the organization. I got to work with flexibility and design my own projects, while I also held the privileges of a regular employee at DRF, receiving guidance from experienced professionals, a life insurance scheme, and a bank loan. The intervention was well received and being a part of that initiative felt great.

The other moment I felt proud was when I realized that my inputs of strategy development were accepted by the rural livelihoods team and were to come to fruition by being implemented across various locations.
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