

WHAT MATTERS TO YOU AND WHY?

I diligently washed the earthen stains off of the young boy's brown skin, applying the soapy towel on this stranger's body as if he were my own child. His little body vibrated with laughter as I cleansed him, which brought a smile to my face and eventually drove me to tears. I was an Indian American, armed with a Stanford degree, bathing an indigent boy in the rural fringes of my ancestral homeland, and that experience vividly exposed how wide the gulf was between me and that little boy. I knew that I wanted to dedicate myself to helping others, to serving humanity and making a difference.

My trip to India sensitized me to the existential despair that stems from extreme poverty and economic underdevelopment. The gulf of opportunity that exists between the world's industrial powers and the developing states is continually expanding, which has alarmed me to assume a more proactive role as a philanthropist and activist. India's slums rank among the worst in the world, and are riddled by inhumane sanitary conditions, ripe violence and corruption, and a deficit in opportunity. During my first visit, I was largely desensitized to the ubiquitous images of poverty, but was ultimately mobilized by my chance involvement with *Manav Sadhna* – a non-profit organization that provides grassroots community service to indigent women and children in India's slums and rural areas. The outfit was fittingly situated near the *Ghandi Ashram*, where the icon himself organized his revolutionary movements. My aunt, an archetypal figure in her own right, was actively involved with *Manav Sadhna*, and her example inspired that I commit my vacation to bettering the lives of the most neglected and marginalized segments of India. Thus, I dedicated hours delivering necessities and foodstuffs to indigent families, bathing poor orphans and street children, and transporting clean water to communities who lacked it. The experience with *Manav Sadhna* awakened a dimension of my being that was

either non-existent or asleep, but my consciousness and commitment to community service have since become central themes of every endeavor I partake in.

I came back from India a new woman, and namely, an individual whose worldview was enhanced by a sincere commitment to service. I envisioned business to be the professional venue where I could best maximize my skills and talents, but coupled this aspiration with service. Furthermore, because I was so fully empowered by my involvement with *Manav Sadha*, I sought to replicate that experience in other parts of the globe. At Stanford, I closely read about the ravaged educational system in Latin America, particularly Costa Rica, where schools suffered being grossly under-resourced. I was immediately mobilized, and held a fundraiser to generate money for a handful of the most neglected schools in Costa Rica. However, in addition to simply raising money, I also coupled my project with a practical component; namely, deploying a number of volunteers to teach English to Costa Rican children for several weeks. This would not only furnish these students with valuable language lessons, but also directly expose Stanford students to the difficult learning circumstances in Costa Rica. Although humanitarianism fueled my vision, I was also motivated to provide a reciprocal educational experience to all of the parties involved, and ultimately inspire my classmates to become activists in their own right. We spent three weeks in Costa Rica, teaching, learning and living with our students. When we returned to Palo Alto, my classmates and I were furnished with a global prism to notice injustice and inequality wherever it existed, particularly in the very community that housed our campus.

I led educational efforts in East Palo Alto, and whether contributing to marginalized people in India, London, Costa Rica, or East Palo Alto, I firmly knew that my individual contribution *mattered* to the lives of those I touched. As an aspiring Stanford Business School student, and businesswoman, my professional and personal journey will be guided by a single compass: a burgeoning desire and commitment to serving others.