Perspectives
Indicorps’ 2008-2009 Reflections on Change
On his recent trip to India, a good friend asked me what I want to do next with my life. My answer: I cannot think of anyplace that I would rather be. At Indicorps, we are surrounded by inspired and inspiring people. We select for young people who respond to the urge to live for a greater purpose and are willing to examine themselves throughout the journey. We strive to create the foundation for “a higher standard of leadership” based on the Gandhian notion that your life is your message — a message resonating with timeless values — leading to lasting change.

Indicorps will have completed 10 fellowship classes in 2010. To mark that occasion, we embark on a process of collective self-reflection ... to re-visit our experiments in individual transformation as a precursor to social transformation and to contemplate how best to leverage emerging opportunities ahead.

Here, we present a glimpse into the personal journeys of ten recent Indicorps fellows. Understanding the journeys of Gaurav Madan in Uttaranchal, Neha Mistry in Gujarat, and Vinay Krupadev in Karnataka, among others, will give you a sense of the authentic commitment of our fellows to live their values and to appreciate the struggles in their journey.

Also included is a peek into Indicorps’ local experiments with action — Volunteer Ahmedabad and Ahmedabad Ultimate — which keep our team grounded in service and our local community. We are constantly innovating with new programs such as the 2009 Young Professionals Initiative and creative expressions of youth for service (“Do Nothing” video to promote Volunteer Ahmedabad’s local Joy of Giving Week Contest). Further, a number of programs inspired or started by Indicorps have helped spark the beginnings of a revolution in public service across India. It is a great time to be serving others.

We firmly believe that the secret is in the way: the richness of the journey far outweighs the joy of reaching the final destination. I am certain you will find stories here that leave you inspired by the promise of a new form of leadership in the journey ahead.

With Love in Service,

Roopal Shah
Indicorps Co-founder and CEO

Join as a fellow, applications due 15 March (apply.indicorps.org).
Apply your skills as a Young Professional (www.ypi.indicorps.org).
Capture the energy, release the potential with Ahmedabad Ultimate’s development through sport (ultimate.indicorps.org).
Help local Ahmedabad youth build the city of their dreams (www.volunteerahmedabad.org).
Donate (http://www.indicorps.org/donate).
A Note to Prospective Partner Organizations

Since innovation and creativity are an integral part of Indicorps, we are constantly expanding our network of partner organizations and seeking new partnerships for upcoming Fellowship cycles and other Indicorps initiatives – the Young Professionals Initiative, Volunteer Ahmedabad and Ahmedabad Ultimate. Through partnerships with grassroots level organizations, we seek projects that have the potential to positively impact India’s development. The Fellowship project creation process largely happens between the months of September and December.

The Indicorps project development process goes beyond preliminary discussions over phone and email. A member of the Indicorps staff team visits the prospective project site(s) and spends at least two days at the prospective partner organization, understanding its work, vision and philosophy, interacting with various stakeholders and spending substantial time in the field with the staff to understand its impact. In 2009, we successfully piloted a group model that places 2-4 Fellows with an organization on multiple diverse projects. In recent years, our projects have ranged from setting up a food processing unit, to building HIV/AIDS peer educator programs, to strengthening youth development through sports.

The Fellowship is a tripartite process between the partner organization, the Fellow and Indicorps. Indicorps bears the expenses for all orientation, workshop and Indicorps-related travel costs. The partner organization provides basic lodging and boarding to the Fellow. The Fellow arranges for her/his own health insurance and travel costs from her/his country of residence to India. The nature of this tripartite agreement enables each stakeholder to recognize and respect what each one of us brings to the table.

For more information please contact: projects@indicorps.org
Service for the Soul
If you could pursue a passion without any social or financial constraints, what would it be?

Purpose
To engage the most talented young Indians from around the world on the frontlines of India’s most pressing challenges; in the process, we aim to nurture a new brand of socially conscious leaders with the character, knowledge, commitment, and vision to transform India and the world.

The Fellowship Program
The Indicorps fellowship is a profound personal experience and an opportunity to understand participatory development through intense voluntary service. The structured program encourages participants to leave their comfort zones, place others’ interests before their own, test their own potential to affect change, explore their relationship with India, and understand what it means to lead by committing themselves to innovative grassroots projects. Indicorps believes that giving one’s time and energy, without any attachment to the outcome, regardless of the circumstances, is an unparalleled personal experience in service. At the same time, it is a chance for fellows to address their own identity, recognize their personal boundaries, and understand how to produce change in their environments. The fellowship is a deeply rewarding, transformational and challenging personal journey, and part of Indicorps’ collective experiment for change.

The first month of the fellowship involves an intense, physically and mentally rigorous, month-long orientation to India, the Indicorps philosophy, and practical living. In conjunction with grassroots fieldwork, Indicorps also requires fellows to attend periodic workshops that encourage participants to deepen their understanding of Indian development, to reflect, to share progress, to collectively solve problems, and to re-energize. Some fellows opt for a second year to broaden their understanding of development and take leadership in managing projects or Indicorps programs.

Approach to development
Indicorps’ approach to development involves a total investment of body, mind and soul into the process of “being the change.” Fellows take individual personal responsibility to execute and complete projects, defined in partnership with local development organizations, that address particular community challenges. Recognizing the project as a foundational cornerstone or platform for change, Indicorps pushes fellows to actively test themselves and creatively explore the possibilities of community-oriented leadership.

The fellowship has stringent documentation requirements and promotes self-accountability. The program is carefully crafted to consider long-term impact and to defy common critiques of both international volunteers and the organizations with which they work.

Indicorps provides a nominal stipend to enable fellows to live simply and work in India for the duration of their fellowship. Basic room, board, and fellowship-related travel are covered by Indicorps or the local project partner organization. Indicorps is a total immersion program and encourages fellows to be a part of their communities to the greatest extent possible — including attempting to live within the means of their location.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Lila Watson
"A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history."

Mahatma Gandhi
In three words my fellowship year was: tough, demanding and invaluable. My time in Kumaon was the most challenging year of my life. I stepped into the unknown with a determined focus to be an active part of my surroundings. It was challenging because I attempted to live my ideals. Challenging because I wanted to make a difference by immersing myself in the culture and communities I was living and working amongst. Challenging because the process of change and rural development is one that takes time and requires immense dedication.

Coming from an upbringing in the Washington, DC suburbs, a background in social justice activism, and a B.A. from the University of Maryland I thought I had a clear idea of who I was and where I wanted to go. A year out of college, and dissatisfied with the lifestyle I was living, I knew it was time to follow my goal of engaging with India and building a relationship with the country outside of family visits and family privilege. It was time for something real. While orientation mentally prepared me for an intensive year of service and challenges, this year demanded more of me than I knew I could give, and widened my understanding of my true capacity.

I arrived at CHIRAG in rural Uttarkhand (at the foothill of the Himalayas) last September. My task was to engage local governments (Gram Panchayats) on public and preventive health issues, which included forming health committees, training these committees on their roles, rights, and responsibilities, facilitating the creation of yearlong health action plans, coordinating with the local government health system and helping to implement yearlong action plans. I walked eight, ten, twelve kilometers up and down hills, everyday. I learned about public health and rural India. I learned about the Panchayati Raj system, the salient health issues in the area, and the history of past efforts to address public health. With this information, I set out on my mission to facilitate the creation of effective Gram Panchayat health committees. Even with the limitation of time, I feel like we made some progress on building the capacity of Gram Panchayats, and communities, to effectively organize on public and preventive health issues. Building capacity in the Gram Panchayats to manage the public health of their communities has been a slow, yet steady process. In some places, we simply provided a venue to discuss health issues. In others, we focused on empowering communities through local governance institutions at the most grassroots level. There is much potential in the continued efforts of Gram Panchayats to further improve the health services in this Himalayan region.

This year I have learned a lot about myself, about rural development, and about this country that has become an increasingly larger part of my identity. I have struggled, overcome my own limitations, and grown. I have tried to live simply, and learned what is actually necessary, and what really isn’t. I found myself capable of things I previously would never have even believed I could undertake. I fully understand now that process is as important as product and progress and development is a slow, and not always pretty process, but it happens. I have seen the value of pushing myself and stepping far away from any sort of comfort zone. I’ve learned that while there is much to be done, there is no better way of going about it, other than doing it.

As I move on from rural Kumaon, and CHIRAG, I cannot help but question what the impact of my work here has really been. Answers may only come with time and perspective, and in some cases I may not ever be able to see what the effects of my work have been. What I do know is that this fellowship year has re-sparked my commitment to working for social justice and social change. My experiences at the grassroots level have grounded me in the realities of this type of work and will undoubtedly stay with me well beyond this year. As I look to the future, I look forward to applying the lessons that have been a result of this intensive, unique year in rural India. Indeed, I am excited to continue my own pursuit of action-oriented engagement in social change and the communities that surround me through creative participatory measures.

As an August 2008 fellow, Gaurav Madan helped to bridge the gap between national health schemes and local needs through a public health project with partner CHIRAG in rural communities of Uttarakhand. He graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2007 with a degree in Government and Politics. His undergraduate experience included a semester abroad at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Gaurav has been active in a number of social justice and activist organizations focused on addressing issues of human rights, war and conflict, workers’ rights, and economic justice. Prior to joining Indicorps, Gaurav was a substitute teacher in Montgomery County Public Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Gaurav Madan
Project: Citizens Health Initiative
Field Partner: CHIRAG
Location: Simayal Village, Uttaranchal
Partnered with Samveda Training and Research Center in Davangere (STRC), Karnataka, my Indicorps fellowship project aimed to build awareness about learning disabilities (LD). Although a mechanical engineer by training, I chose this project because I have a family member with a learning disability and understand its impact firsthand.

In my first month at Samveda, I stayed in the hostel with the students. The hostel houses 18 students (ages 8-18) with learning disabilities ranging from Dyslexia to ADHD. I awoke, ate, rode the bus, went to school, played sports with them. I shadowed the teachers to understand their teaching methods and overall approach to building self-esteem in these children. Eventually, I moved to a working women’s hostel in Davangere town, which had other advantages in allowing me to spread awareness of learning disabilities in a larger population.

I focused my year on three projects: (1) a hands-on science curriculum with the LD students themselves, (2) parent support groups to encourage parents to understand LDs, and (3) awareness campaigns for LDs in institutes for higher learning.

**Science curriculum**
My first project was to improve the science curriculum. Since it is very difficult to use ordinary books and methods to teach science, I wrote several short books in subjects such as Biology, Physics, Chemistry and The Universe. The books I created used minimal written language, since many of the LD children have difficulty reading and writing. The books focus on teaching science via demonstrations, experiments, and activities. I created a teacher’s manual for each of the subjects as well, which include homework assignments and other teaching tips. The books and all the experiments were a huge hit with the kids.

In one class, I demonstrated the functioning of a lung and diaphragm using a balloon and half a water bottle. After I showed them the model, many students went home, made their own, and brought them into class. It was so refreshing for the kids to do something educational on their own. I also enjoyed the spark of excitement to learn science. On a different occasion, one of the students in the hostel, Sunil, asked for my help with his science project. We decided to make a volcano from paper mache. The project brought the community together as many of the younger children got involved and were interested in learning more about volcanoes and the process of building one. Sunil recruited two partners for the science project and ended up winning first prize in the science fair.

**Parent Support Group**
As part of my own learning, I visited many of the LD students’ homes. I wanted a better understanding of the students’ home life and an opportunity to meet the parents. I learned that many of the parents were supportive of their children, but did not know how to get involved with Samveda and further assist their children in the education. To help facilitate peer learning and help parents’ grapple with common issues, I started a parents’ support group. We focused on providing more information on learning disabilities, encouraging different ways to support their children, and overall empowering them to take a different approach. I also wanted to give them a voice in the school and to build a network with the families. We had meetings on the specifics of learning disabilities, homework tips, improving Samveda, common problems at homes, etc. These meetings were based on the needs of the parents; I set the agenda based on the issues they identified. During the meetings we had some great discussions; many parents were grateful for the realization that they were not alone.

**Engaging doctors**
During the summer holiday based on a chance encounter with Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, I realized that medical professionals could be quite helpful in identifying children with potential learning disabilities and referring them to a specialist for further evaluation.

I conducted a survey with the medical students on the basics of learning disabilities. Of 78 students surveyed, none answered all the questions correctly. They averaged in the 50th percentile. The misconceptions were high. For example, 85% of the medical students surveyed assumed that children with learned disabilities have an IQ of below average or that of children whom are mentally retarded. I used the survey as an opportunity to raise awareness of LDs. I had hoped to have LDs incorporated into the college curriculum, but ran out of time. I will leave the survey results with Karnataka Health Promotion Trust in hopes that they can carry forward the charge. At the local B.Ed (Bachelor’s in Education) college, I delivered a few lectures on learning disabilities. These future teachers were engaged...
and enthusiastic. The professors were also receptive to suggestions I made. Overall, the awareness campaign in both the medical and education colleges was powerful . . . both of these groups can have tremendous impact on the future of children with LDs.

Re-defining Fun
Community immersion was my favorite part of this fellowship year. Whether it was playing games in the hostel to visiting families’ homes or even going to a local scouts and guides function. I loved meeting new people and learning their stories. I have made so many new friends, especially in the working women’s hostel. As I look back, I am proud of my interaction and involvement in the Samveda hostel. I planned a sports competition, an egg drop test, Carom games, and hide and seek. Also, I showed movies, directed drawing and painting activities, and celebrated birthdays with posters and fun party games, like hot potato and musical chairs. For me, the activities and games were designed to build an atmosphere of creativity, teamwork, patience, team spirit, good sportsmanship, persistence, etc. This process was as fun for me as I hope it was for them.

Conclusion
While my mandate was to create community awareness, I ended up creating something bigger – a much more vibrant close-knit community. I slowly started to develop the Samveda community with the teachers, parents, and students. I have built school spirit at the Samveda hostel. I have seeded more plans, including the plans for a week-long Samveda Spirit week. I am excited that I could engage so many different stakeholders in the school and create a more nurturing environment for these children with LDs. While I can point to some activity-based highlights, I know that my what I learned from this “learning disabled” community was MUCH higher than anything I contributed.

Gouri Tawady has a BS in Mechanical Engineering from University of Maryland, College Park. Prior to her fellowship, Gouri was an SAP consultant for a large technology firm. While in college, she participated in the College Park Scholars Program, tutoring young students and assisting them with their science fair projects. She was also selected as a RISE fellow for excellence in science and engineering. As an August 2008 fellow, Gouri was based in Davangere, Karnataka, partnering with Samveda, a school for children with learning disabilities. Sports have always been a part of Gouri’s life, so she appreciated sharing that passion as part of her project.

I entered Cohesion Foundation Trust (‘Cohesion’) with hopes of creating a science program to encourage curiosity among children. Cohesion runs residential hostels for the children of migrant laborers that use education to improve the lives of families in Kutch, Gujarat. Many families in Kutch are forced to migrate for labor and in the process are forced to take their children out of school, denying their children a chance for education. Our hostels were a structured effort against illiteracy perpetuated through this cycle. When I arrived, the hostels had been running for only about three years.

I entered my project excited to teach science projects and get the hostel children interested in science, a subject that was one of my favorites. After the first several lessons however, I was disappointed to find that my lack of fluency in Gujarati was simply too big a handicap. I began to panic and feel like my presence was not useful. I was overwhelmed by all of the problems I thought I saw: The people I worked with seemed unable to achieve anything, parents seemed narrow-minded about education, and the children seemed defiant and unmotivated. Finally four months into my fellowship year, I had an “AHA!” moment. I suddenly realized “The project is not about science or about children or about education. The project is ME!” Until that point I had only been focusing on the shortcomings of those around me. I finally saw that the problem was not external; I lacked the will to persevere through external roadblocks. From that point on, my project was to persist through discomfort, despite challenges so I could serve best.

With a renewed willpower, I set out again to teach despite the external conditions. I expanded my vision and decided to focus on improving education at several levels in the hostel. This new vision included education that we hoped would serve the children for life. To improve the hostels in this way, we began to hold daily meetings between the four hostel coordinators of Jangi, the village in which I mainly worked. We brought a level of accountability to the tuition classes in our hostels and more powerfully, we brought feedback and sharing into the education process. These simple tools have gone on to aid the hostel coordinators in becoming reflective and well informed educators.

One Indicorps alumni-inspired idea I pursued was to create a learning center in the hostel. I had observed that children in the government

Hemang Srikishan
Project: Inspire Curiosity Through Science

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schools had no outlet for creativity. The main work consisted of learning by rote and there was no room for activity in the government school lessons. Initially, my own lack of organization prolonged the process of building the activity center. However after finally acquiring the materials and getting prepared, we were again slowed by the fact that the hostel coordinators did not understand the concept of the activity center. Nevertheless, we started the center and in time the hostel coordinators began to embrace the concept.

I still remember the first time that we let children simply build without instruction and rules. They created so many amazing pictures and designs out of simple waste materials that we were able to gather. Seeing the potential within the children manifest physically in artwork, the hostel coordinators and I were more motivated to give all our effort. Unfortunately, we were unable to use the center during weekdays because of demands on both the children and coordinator’s time. However, after seeing how excited the children were when using activities, the coordinators began to implement activity-based lessons into their classrooms even more effectively. This was a great example of learning through field-testing.

While implementing the activity center, the hostel education process was further improved through a quality education initiative pushed by our funding agency, America India Foundation (AIF). The project was a pilot program run in only five hostels. Our goal was to bring all students up to the second grade level of Gujarati language and Mathematics. To launch the program, I worked closely with the team and stressed the initiative as an experiment in quality education. The project was a chance to try new ideas in the classroom. We created a three-month plan outlining all the concepts we would teach the children and created assessments to determine how much children were benefiting from the program. Within three months, we were able to get about 65% of our students up to the second grade level. I was excited that in my final months, the team was highly motivated and capable of giving trainings to others.

Looking Back

Reviewing my first project plan, I had been unrealistic in my timeline and methodology. Many of the large goals we set were accomplished. I was able to improve the hostel education quality and teaching methods in Jangi and one other village. We created a model hostel in Jangi via a focus on the quality education team and AIF’s continued involvement in training the coordinators helped to make this initiative more sustainable. Furthermore, these changes continue to influence surrounding hostels simply by example of the gains of the hostel children.

It is ironic that my project was to inspire education curiosity in the children, because in the process curiosity was inspired within me towards education in the world today. I entered my project just following others and having set guidelines for what to do in life. However, throughout the year I pushed myself to be creative and try out my own original ideas without fear for whether they would fail or succeed. By practicing this for a year, I have changed my own habit of relying on boundaries. Though I must constantly work at it, I am able to work more independently and as a result, have become a better leader.

Through all the challenges of the year, I learned that despite the best planning, problems arise. When I entered, I believed that life should run according to a sound plan. But through all my experiences with Indicorps, I realized that the twists and turns of life that are uncomfortable are not bad, they are necessary for the journey- they are necessary for growth. Having successfully completed a year of service has definitely been one of the most influential parts of my life to date. However, I do not intend for this to be the only time for service. In my year serving in India, I experienced the joy of working towards the betterment of a community rather than self interest, the bliss of having a purpose for myself and for others. While I hope to start a strong career, I know my mindset about work has changed drastically. Now as I look to the future, I see with a little more wisdom and know that whatever I do, I want to live a life of service.

In January 2008, Hemang Srikishan joined the Cohesion Foundation Trust for a hands-on science project with children of migrant laborers outside of Rapar, Kutch. Before serving with Indicorps, Hemang was an interfaith youth activist on the University of Illinois campus and taught as a short-term science teacher in middle and high schools outside of Chicago. His love for being with youth led him from his B.A. in psychology towards youth education. Hemang collaborated with his community in order to devise teaching methods and applications of science relevant and beneficial to all students.
Beginning the Fellowship
Having served for nine months in Nepal immediately before my Indicorps fellowship, I believed I already had all of the skills necessary to connect and “give back” to India. I was ready to skip orientation and head straight to my project site. However, I chose to take Indicorps staff advice and trust the process. I am glad that I did. Indicorps orientation revived my outlook on life. My fellowship year would not have been nearly as successful without the understanding and practice of doing things the “Indicorps way” (that is, with love and understanding). This year was initially meant as a chance for me to give to India, but now I believe that India (and Indicorps) has given me the wisdom, strength, and growth necessary to live with greater happiness and a sense of purpose.

Observation and Needs Assessment
Originally, my project was slated to focus on sanitation and civic engagement with youth. As I learned more about my community, I refocused my project on building life skills and improving livelihoods. In development speak, I spent the first two months conducting a needs assessment. In Indicorps lingo, I simply looked, listened, and learned. I immersed in the community and learned about Mahiti, the organization’s previous efforts with youth, the youth themselves, and the impact of the global recession. Based in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, Mahiti serves to bring social and economic empowerment to marginalized groups through various development projects focused on saving and credit groups, water infrastructure, social justice, and health.

In 2008, a global recession impacted India’s economy. Before the recession, the Mahiti youth earned a good income polishing diamonds. Despite their limited education (most were school dropouts) and the one-dimensional nature of their skills, these young diamond polishers had a steady income. In the recession, thousands of diamond polishers in India became unemployed. Many committed suicide due to the shame that comes with being unable to provide for their families. To make matters worse, the majority of the youth who continued to polish diamonds failed to grasp the concept of saving (since their expenses are as steady as their earnings), and are ill-prepared for any future periods of unemployment. After assessing the situation, I determined that the life skills and livelihood skill development was a greater pressing need. We conducted monthly meetings, workshops, and other livelihood initiatives.

Livelihood and Life Skills Meetings
I initiated monthly meetings to gather the youth, help them take ownership of the situation, share information on training opportunities, and foster a sense of unity. The Livelihood and Life Skills Monthly Youth meetings covered current and relevant topics. For example, we spoke at length about macro-economics, the global recession and how it related to their lives. We used this sessions to encourage the youth to diversify their skills and discuss unemployment.

In November 2008, I organized a life skills workshop focused on interpersonal skills, communication, decision-making, self-management, etc. Of those who attended (between ages 20 and 30), 85% of them polished diamonds, while the remaining were unemployed. The workshop was designed to empower the youth, increase their self-reliance, and help them with long-term life planning. Additionally, the life skills workshop gave the youth an opportunity to confidently speak about themselves, to share their thoughts on individual/community development, and to articulate how Mahiti could play a positive supporting role in their lives. For me, the life skills workshop reinforced the talent and capacity of these young people. I see their potential not only in improving their own lives, but as the future leaders of the nation.

Livelihood Initiatives
Simply communicating vocational training opportunities to the youth was not enough. The youth needed guidance, support, and understanding. So we undertook a few initiatives to promote new livelihoods. First, we conducted a round of surveys to find where vocational training opportunities existed and to determine which opportunities would be most suitable. Second, we conducted exposure visits to vocational training institutes to demystify the process. Third, we built a network with various vocational training institutes that would train Mahiti youth and helped facilitate the process. From January - July 2009, we sent over 40 youths to different vocational training institutes in the country. We provided support pre-training, during training, and post-training. We helped the youth overcome pre-travel anxieties and supported them through various development projects focused on saving and credit groups, water infrastructure, social justice, and health.

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issues during the training course. In addition to strengthening the Mahiti core relationships, the process of communicating, preparing, and sending these youths to the vocational training institutes has created a phenomenal effect. The youths returned with more confidence in themselves and their ability to utilize their new skills to improve their livelihood. They have also interacted with other youth from diverse backgrounds and have a greater appreciation for what is possible.

Previously, youth from this region had never spoken to an audience. For many of the Mahiti youth, standing up in front of their peers and sharing their learning from the previous days’ lesson was a landmark achievement. After completing the course many youths shared with full confidence that they were ready to start their own businesses once they graduated.

After completing his training, one Bhil youth shared how “Prior to the course I had no confidence or hope towards what I can do now with my life. While taking this course I have gained the confidence to not only start my own business but to look at life in a different perspective. I have learned to treat everyone with respect, to know the power within, and to love all my peers. Outside of the technical skill that I have learned, I have learned to live life with a better approach! It is this skill no matter where I go in life that I will hold close to my heart and practice daily.”

Continued Guidance and Follow-ups

Mahiti realized that simply attending vocation training may not be enough, so we created systems to provide continued guidance. We offered guidance counseling, and bi-weekly follow ups on their new business initiatives.

In my final weeks, I focused on training members of the Mahiti team on the various roles I performed in the livelihoods initiatives. I found the process of training Mahiti staff members incredibly valuable as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on the purpose of each of our activities and articulate the value of my year.

Personal Growth

India (and Indicorps) has taught me life lessons that can only be understood through experience. Prior to this year, India was a place where my ancestors resided. I look at India now as my second home. I have grown to love and respect other cultures without the judgment that often comes from a western perspective on such matters. I see the beauty in all things, whether bright and shiny or ugly and rusted. With this understanding and the love that I have gained from my fellowship year, I am able to connect to individuals at a deeper level, which leaves me in a state of bliss. This is a feeling so wonderful that I can confidently say that if there came a time and place where I had no material possessions, I would be genuinely happy, because I have learned the secret to life and that is to love all and serve all. Thank you Indicorps and thank you India.

Leaving her days of consulting behind, Neha Mistry traveled to Nepal in 2007 in search for a deeper understanding of the power of prevention. As a volunteer with Student Partnership Worldwide, Neha created a Youth Club in the rural Sankosh, encouraging and empowering youth to identify issues in their community and take action. She conducted workshops, trainings, and dramas through non-formal teaching methods around topics of health, governance, livelihoods, and life skills. As an August 2008 fellow, Neha partnered with Mahiti Rural Development Center in Dholera, Gujarat to engage local youth to creatively educate their community about health issues. Prior to her travels abroad, she was a counselor with Planned Parenthood and an active volunteer with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Prajapati Samaj of Washington, DC. In 2004 Neha graduated from University of Maryland, College Park.

Prerna Seth

Project: Alternative Energy and Livelihoods

Field Partner: Jansamarth

Location: Budhakedarnath, Uttaranchal

The Beginning – Project Background and Vision

The journey to my project site was one of the most de-motivating since I started the fellowship. The travel was full of tears, anxiety and despair; I reached Agunda, put down my bags in my room and realized that the village didn’t have any electricity! At that point, something snapped. Inwardly I couldn’t stop laughing. This was way outside my comfort zone... it was even way outside what I had imagined would be way outside my comfort zone. And yet I was here. I loved it. I was ready for it and I so knew I was going to be doing this for the next year – 18th September 2008.

In September 2008, as part of my Indicorps fellowship, I joined a Delhi-based organization Jansamarth in the remote Himalayan regions of Uttarakhand. My project site was located in Budhakedarnath in the Tehri Garhwal district, 400km from Delhi. Jansamarth has developed micro hydro power plants in six villages around Budhakedarnath as a means of generating electricity to improve livelihoods and community. This project was funded by UNDP. I was based out of Agunda, the first village to get electricity from the micro-hydro process. I was there to celebrate Agunda’s electrification in December 2008.

Jansamarth had planned to hand over the ownership of the power station, once constructed and installed, to the community. The daily running, care, and maintenance were the responsibility of the village. As a part of the income generating activities, Jansamarth organised two trainings for the community: 1) A grassroots engineer training in
which two men from the village were trained in basic electrical work and running and maintenance of the power station. 2) A wool work training held in Panipat during which three men from the village were trained in making felt rugs (nammadas).

When I first came to Agunda, I was excited and overwhelmed by the task that lay ahead. Partnered with a small organization with restricted resources, I soon realized that the task of building relationships in the community, gaining their trust, and understanding their needs lay almost entirely in my hands. During the first few months I emphasized immersing myself in the community; understanding the culture, traditions, daily work, agricultural practices and sources of income in the family; and understanding the driving force and philosophy of my organization. I soon discovered that even though my organization was trying to work for the benefit of the community and help the community help themselves, the villagers did not properly understand Jansamarth’s intentions. I decided to put my energy into bridging this gap. I organised regular meetings with the women to explain Jansamarth’s philosophy and to motivate them to participate in the Jansamarth activities. I also took the opportunity to understand the lives of the women, the problems they face, their expectations, and what mattered most to them. I lived by Indicorps’ philosophy of Look, Listen and Learn as the guiding light for me in the beginning few months of my fellowship.

**The Process – Activities**

Despair, anxiety and disappointment… It’s not as if these emotions are absent. I still feel them every now and then. But my attitude towards them has undergone a significant change. I am not disappointed, I am not sad. I am happy and grateful. At this point I realise the value in each and every thing I am going through, especially the value of struggle – 25th March, 2009

As my project progressed, my understanding of the community and the prevalent problems deepened. In the beginning, it was difficult to cope with this understanding. I was on a one year fellowship with grand plans of how I wanted to help my community. I was on a limited time schedule, with fierce passion and dedication. It took me time to realise that my community was not on the same limited time schedule for development. I slowly began to accept that I needed to move at the speed at which my community could comprehend the development and, at the same time, accept that I might not be able to witness the results of my efforts during my year.

I stepped up the community building and development activities I had been pursuing; I concentrated on the women. I tried to mobilise the women informally by spending time with them in their houses, assisting them in field work, and talking to them about the importance of an empowered women’s community. I identified some of the key women who displayed leadership potential and let them take on a lead role in some of my activities like pickle making and women’s meetings. I also encouraged women to form a Mahila Mangal Dal (MMD) – a collective of all the women in the village – to discuss problems in the village related to land, water, and forests (three main areas of daily work for women).

**The End – Achievements**

One thing I have learnt from Agunda is not to have any regrets. So even though I feel like I owe more to this community… I am confident that what I have to give to Agunda does not end here, but continues through the impressions that I leave behind in these people – 30th June, 2009

As the time for me to leave my community came closer, I spent a significant amount of time reflecting on what I thought I was leaving behind. It has always felt like I am taking away so much more than I am giving, but my resolve (from sometime back) to disconnect myself from the results led me to view my accomplishments in a very different light.

When I think of my accomplishments this year, I remind myself to keep the environment in mind. Agunda was a village absolutely new to the social change movement; there were no attempts in recent memory for community-led development or change. My arrival and constant push for the collective good was completely alien to them. They must have wondered why I, a girl from Delhi with no prior connections to them, would be so interested and invested in their growth and development. This proved to be a big challenge for me because it meant that it took longer for me to gain the community’s trust. At the same time I also consider this to be one of my biggest accomplishments, for I was able to introduce the concept of selfless service to the people of Agunda. And even though all of them might not be able to comprehend what this means, I know I have left a seed behind in their minds that could shape their thoughts and actions in the future, especially for the younger generation.
Another significant accomplishment over the course of the year was getting to know the women, both formally and informally. At their homes or in meetings I organised, I constantly emphasized the strength women possess when they are united together. A few days before I left Agunda, some of these women took a lead role in forming a Mahila Mangal Dal in the village on their own initiative.

**Personal Growth**

I have spent a lot of time thinking about the legacy I leave behind in my community. But as I leave, what strikes me as more significant is the legacy of togetherness I take with me — 22nd July, 2009

When I started with the Indicorps fellowship, I expected myself to be a changed person at the end of the year. One year later as I try and process everything that has taken place I realise that the changes I have undergone are a lot more subtle and underlying in nature than I expected. This makes it more difficult for me to talk about my growth process.

This year has not only initiated my journey in the development sector, it has also initiated my journey of self development and growth. The emphasis laid on reflection, introspection, journaling and meditation has helped me understand my thoughts, emotions and feelings more deeply. It has enabled me to delve deeper into my mind and heart to understand myself better, which in turn gave me the ability to handle difficult situations far better than I could have done a year back. It has also strengthened my resolve to continue this process of self realisation and analysis beyond this year.

In India, communities go out of their way to take care of an outsider and make them feel comfortable in a new environment. Concepts of private and personal space are quite alien to Indian communities, especially in rural areas. Coming from a city, this proved to be somewhat of a challenge. The constant questions about my background, family, age, marital status etc. were nerve wracking at numerous occasions. But I had come with the resolve of working with this community and that involved being patient with them on all fronts. In the process of developing this patience I have over time begun to cultivate a feeling of compassion towards all human beings.

I made an effort to understand their lives and backgrounds and why they persisted in questions that I initially believed were none of their business. Developing this understanding enabled me to try and approach each situation from a space of love. Responding to my community with love helped me develop compassion towards them, and eventually led to the understanding that my community isn’t only restricted to one village but encompasses all of humanity.

Today, love and compassion are two very important qualities when dealing with people, and even though I am in the process of cultivating and developing these, I know they will help me form a stronger bond with all of humanity — one person at a time.
Indicorps has been successful in running a one year fellowship program that has attracted an eclectic group of accomplished recent college graduates and young Indian professionals with remarkable credentials (PhD in physics, architect, management consultant, electrical engineer, masters in public health) and amazing talents (singer/songwriter(s), hip-hop artist, spelling bee champion, football players). However, Indicorps has not been able to attract certain demographics - young Indian professionals in their late-20s and/or early 30s that have a substantial interest in giving back and might have some flexibility in their careers/jobs.

As an August 2008 fellow, I was responsible for understanding how we could best tap into the skill sets of young professionals in the US/abroad workforce, while still having some impact on their outlook to India. My vision for the project was to help Indicorps pilot a Young Professionals Initiative (“YPI”) in mid-2009. For YPI 2009, Indicorps partnered with organizations (government, non-profit organizations, socially responsible businesses) that had a need for people with specific professional skills (i.e. finance, legal). YPI provides an avenue for young Indian professionals with significant professional experience to contribute that expertise to the land of their heritage in a meaningful way.

Orientation

The one-month long Indicorps orientation provided me with the opportunity to adjust to India, learn about different facets of life in India, as well as challenge myself. Upon arrival, I was taken aback by the actual challenges we would face during the orientation. We had numerous days, entitled Hunger Day, Livelihoods Day, Amazing Race, – all to plant the seed of what it would take to understand and appreciate India while at the same time making us more aware of what was surrounding us on a daily basis. Going through orientation, I was resistant, even skeptical of “trusting the process.” I was closed to learning what was offered to us during the entire time. Yet, looking back I realized the full impact orientation had on me – starting out as intangible concepts that soon sprouted into what my year has become.

Mozda

After orientation, I left to live in a village in Southern Gujarat with an Adivasi (tribal) community. I worked with the Mozda Collective under the supervision of Michaelbhai and Swatibhen. My role was never formalized while I was volunteering at the Collective, but I spent close to two months helping out in any capacity I could. I was fortunate enough to spend a significant amount of time interacting with the community and learning how 70% of India lived.

To put into words what I walked away with was beyond immeasurable. Michaelbhai, an engineer by background, has dedicated his life to helping this Adivasi village for the past 18 years. Even though he could easily turn his education into a high-paying career, living in Mumbai, he has chosen the path that he wants to live. He chose the path less traveled and followed his heart. Nightly, we took walks and discussed different issues about India, Indicorps, etc. and I walked away learning something new each time. I will be forever grateful for the life lessons Michaelbhai imparted, most likely without the knowledge he was doing as such.

Project Progress

In Ahmedabad, I spent the first few months meeting with different organizations, attempting to understand ways to contribute short term and to find appropriate project partners. During this time, some of the many organizations I met with included E-Gram (E-Government), Heritage Department, Gujarat National Law University, Samvedana, Sarvajal, and American Cancer Society. After numerous discussions, we made a conscious choice to focus the Young Professionals Initiative on government and social enterprise. After finalizing the project partners, we posted the projects and developed an application and selection process for potential candidates (See www.indicorps.org/ypi) Despite only having a few weeks to publicize the YPI pilot program, over twenty people started the application. Two participants matriculated: Rupa Chilakuri is placed on a legal reform project with the Gujarat National Law University and Nidhi Odedara is assisting with increasing adult literacy with the Department of Education in Gujarat.

Reconnecting to India

Before coming to the fellowship, I had not traveled to India for 15 years. As I progressed through the year, I slowly started to see India for what it was – a spectacular country with much to offer to the world. Meeting people during my year who have dedicated their lives for the betterment of India has changed my perception of this land and what makes it special. With my family and friends in America, I am likely to continue to make that my home. However, I am eager to continue helping bring about positive change in India in whatever capacity I can.

Personal Growth

Having finished four years on Wall Street and traveled extensively for business, I came to Indicorps thinking I had great life experience.
I had interacted with CEOs, transacted deals, and developed relationships with numerous finance people. Yet, this year has opened my eyes to things I would never have seen.

For most of my life, choices were made by inertia – study hard so you can go to a good college, get a good job, have a good house, etc. India was a transition point. Now I realize the power of making my own choices and the effect I have on the rest of the world. Towards the end of my year I was asked by a new acquaintance “What project are you working on right now, and how has your experience been?” How do I answer that or will I answer that in the future? Yes, I realize this is what I will be getting for the next few months, especially after the 1,001 introductions I will have to do at graduate school. What I want to really say is: “my project is me - my life.” Because that’s what I truly did.

After twelve months in India I have discovered several things about myself. When I walk down the street, I am conscious of the vibrant informal economy (street sweepers, rag pickers, etc.) and completely at home interacting with them. These people are what make day-to-day life in India (and around the world) run. I have discovered that I can change any situation as long as I am willing. I need to take control and ownership of whatever is present and try to bring about positive change. I now know that I have two choices in any situation – treat the people around me as objects or as connected individuals. I can change my own environment and have no one to blame aside from myself when things do not go the right way. Finding my passion is the key to finding a ‘career’ that will make me come alive and make my greatest contribution. Sometimes the journey is more important than where you end up. I have learned that keeping an open mind throughout the journey is important. In summary, I truly believe this past year completely transformed who I am and that I will only see the full impact years down the road. Indicorps has provided me with a better sense of who I am and how I can best contribute to the world.

Neil Jain quit his finance job on Wall Street to return to India after 15 years. As an August 2008 fellow, he partnered with Indicorps-Ahmedabad to create a Young Professionals Service Initiative to encourage other young professionals to join him in serving the country. Born and raised in central New Jersey, Neil has lived primarily along the east coast of the United States. He graduated from Georgetown University business school in 2004 with a BA in accounting and finance, and a minor in computer science and math. He spent four years as an analyst on Wall Street: two years at a bulge bracket investment bank and two years at a hedge fund. While working, he volunteered with the GO Project, tutoring eleven third grade students from public schools in New York City. In his free time, Neil spends time with friends and family, reads, watches college basketball and aspires to visit 100 countries.

Ranita Mann
Project: Maternal Health Initiative
Field Partner: HMF
Location: Solapur, Maharashtra

Background and Project Vision
Halo Medical Foundation aims to empower rural and urban communities through health awareness. In 2006, HMF launched the Sure Start project to provide maternal and newborn care through Self Help Groups (SHGs). Initially, Sure Start focused exclusively on SHG members and expecting mothers. My mandate was to assist HMF in expanding the scope of Sure Start to reach adolescent girls. The mission was to provide adolescent girls with various life skills (leadership development, confidence building, etc) and holistic health knowledge in order to make better decisions in their lives, with special emphasis on sexual and reproductive rights. The goal was to educate these young girls to empower themselves and to be active, vocal advocates for their own rights. The advantage of creating an adolescent group within the Sure Start program is the ability to promote peer education and healthy family knowledge.

Initially, I shadowed one of the Sure Start facilitators in Maddi Vasti, a low income, transient housing area of Solapur. I slowly developed a network of adolescent girls and was eager to get started on some of the activities. However, I quickly learned the need to earn trust when none of the girls were granted permission to join us on a field trip we had planned. So I embarked on a series of in-depth interviews to get to know the girls, their backgrounds, and their dreams for the future. From the interviews, I learned the importance of providing an opportunity for the adolescents to talk about their lives and explore issues they normally do not have the chance to discuss. I used the information obtained from the interviews to coordinate an adolescent girls session. This session used media to discuss issues of eve teasing, child marriage and the dowry system. The second component of the session was a body mapping exercise to teach the adolescents about the female reproductive system. I assisted the facilitators with logistics and administrative tasks; they conducted the session since my language abilities were inadequate.

I realized from that experience that I was better suited to train the
facilitators to conduct sessions. I could still help structure sessions and support the facilitators in their efforts. I began a training of trainer’s (TOT) program for the facilitators at HMF. I also created a training manual that included sessions on gender equality, puberty, HIV/AIDS, leadership and confidence building. This manual followed my progress in creating the TOT program from inception to conducting the sessions. Each written session included background information on the respective topic, along with various activities and games. The purpose of the activities was to educate adolescents on these topics in a fun and informative way. The topics for the training manual were based on a survey I conducted with 50 adolescent girls in three local communities where Sure Start operated.

I found the training sessions valuable forums for the trainers to explore their own opinions and learn from each other. We had selected relatively controversial topics such as gender stereotyping, gender in the media, the LGBT community (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered peoples), sexual harassment, rape, and the stigma around HIV/AIDS. We ended up creating a unique space where each person was able to express themselves in an environment free of judgment; for me, that in itself was incredibly powerful and potentially life changing for the facilitators.

**Personal Growth**

There were countless times this year where I wanted to leave my project, this city, the country and the fellowship. But there was always something that kept me here. For the better part of the year I did not know what made me stay; only now I am beginning to discover the reason why. There is no great sense of accomplishment from things that come easily to us. I stayed because it was difficult and from this difficulty I knew I was learning and growing as a person. This year allowed me to confront myself, to really truly look at who I am, my strengths, my weaknesses and why I make the choices I do. I believed that I was someone who had spent a lot of time with myself and my thoughts. I realized in the past what I had been doing was wallowing in my emotions rather than taking ownership of my destiny. I never questioned why I felt the way I did in situations or why I reacted to situations the way I did. This year has caused me to examine these and various other questions about myself.

This year has been about the power of perspective. In the last two weeks at my site I discovered it was only difficult because I made it difficult. I became incredibly focused solely on my project and its outputs. I constantly felt that I was never doing enough or accomplishing anything. This seeped into my personal interactions to the point where I even felt I had to try just being with people, trying to ‘immerse’ and ‘build relationships’. I put a lot of pressure on myself for never learning to speak Marathi and I let that hinder a lot of interactions I had with people. Towards the end of my fellowship I stopped viewing things as quantitative interactions that could further my project goals and instead rediscovered the simple joy of being with people. This joy came from feeling and connecting with people in a way much more powerful than words. This change in perspective made everything seem incredibly effortless. I realized that my entire year could have been just as effortless had I freed myself of this pressure. I learned that it is my perception of a situation or circumstance that makes it such and I have the power to decide how I perceive these circumstances.

As an August 2008 fellow, Ranita ("Tina") Mann brought her skills in women empowerment and knowledge of development concepts to her Maternal Health Project at the HALO Medical Foundation in Maharashtra. Tina recently obtained a post-graduate diploma in International Project Management and came to India with a passion for travel and development. She spent a year abroad living in Ireland and traveling throughout Europe. She has volunteered with various women’s organizations and co-founded a grassroots organization for South Asian women against male violence in her hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia.
He hands me a bag of rice and a packet of biscuits. As a reflex, some words of thanks come to my lips, but Ferozebhai knows me by now.

"Are you going to say thank you again?" He breaks into a smile as wide as the countertop in front of him. I smile. I shrug. A shared laugh later I am on the road back to Sakad. I pat the goat on my way out. There are no thank yous here, just relationships.

Somewhere far away, 14th century Venice to be precise, double-entry bookkeeping was invented to explain interactions. It now forms the basis of modern accounting practice, of which, until not too long ago, I was a part. The theory is simple - Every give has a take, even gifts and ideas in the ether.

In that other world where small patches of farmland do not stretch into the horizon, there are no technical ways to account for everything, the old lady who fed me because I “looked hungry” on the train to Guntur, the stranger on the bus in Hyderabad who cradled me when I fell asleep, the man who gave me a ride to the Fort in the dead of night when I had no money, no phone and the only word I knew was ‘fort,’ the list meanders into hazy recollection. But the suit-and-tie me I know from photographs has no explanation. Lungi and slippers me, bag of rice and biscuits in hand, knows these acts of care as simply the daily course, ordinary love, the only way things that have ever been done.

It’s because India makes you part of her family whether you know it or not. Universally attaching ‘uncle’ to male names doesn’t seem so preposterous when the bonds are so real. And just like all families, not all is perfect. Some children are favored over others and sometimes even the playground seems unfair, but something tells you it will be all right in the end. Gandhi slowly begins to look different, a lot less mystical. ‘As old as the hills’ is what he called his ideas of truth and non-violent social action. Here, with old hills stretching out southward, punctuated by trees and small communities, I don’t see his person so much as the possibility he saw. And he wasn’t alone. 200 years ago, local leader Khajiya Naik rallied the people of these hills of southwestern Madhya Pradesh to do something together to build a better, freer community. Some distance eastward 150 years later, Shankar Guha Neyogi brought people in mining communities to imagine a richer future together. And then, in these valleys, when hundreds of villages were submerged to make way for an irrigation system a decade ago, people came together to decide how to heal collective wounds of loss.

In local Barela adivasi (lit. “first people”) tradition, someone in every village always kept a fire burning so there would always be a source of warmth the community could share. Every house had a drum to warn the other houses when lions were out. This idea of working with a community to find solutions—the idea that drew me to Indicorps a short year ago—seems even older than these hills. My year of work, like the rice and biscuits I am carrying, are simply my contributions to something bigger than any single person or idea.

Sakad, where I have spent most of my year, is a village in the Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh home to the Adharshila Learning Centre. Through an education that links rich local history, tradition and knowledge to science, the centre aims to mold a generation that can contribute tangibly to an alternative rural future. The Barela have been an agricultural community for centuries, organic farming, reforestry and animal husbandry share time with Mathematics, Science and Social Science. All subjects are taught in ways that make them relevant to the local context. For example, when festival season saw melas (carnivals) roll through the area, they became a way to frame percentages and ratios (prices and profit margins), economics (Where do melas come from?) and social science (Has the mela changed in previous years? Why?). Students are encouraged to experiment, survey and prove for themselves what they learn in the classroom. Using song, dance, plays, and crafts as learning tools help build the child’s creative skills while learning, while making school fun as well.

For most of the year, I taught and helped develop curricula for Math, English and Social Science classes, but mostly, I attempted to become a part of the residential school family where every member has something unique to contribute. Such a firm basis in education is all the more important when one considers the context—a society rapidly changing in reaction to a variety of forces: Commercial farming has replaced subsistence farming in an area with a barter economy 50 years ago. Land was lost to several groups of developers, and broad inequalities have begun to appear in a heretofore fairly equitable society.

As I began to learn what questions to ask, I began thinking about answers to them. After meeting with several farmers, we decided to try a ‘farmer’s alliance’. The intent was to guarantee city prices for
food crops (around 200-300% more than local market prices) to make them a viable option for farmers who had shifted to resource intensive commercial crops, often at the cost of sustenance food crops. The idea was to start a discussion about what changes had happened, and how to react. With malnourishment on the rise, and the specter of suicides sparked by commercial crop debt spirals in nearby districts, every conversation is a step in the right direction.

Being a part of the family on campus also means doing whatever is needed. This was sometimes discussing world affairs with the older students, sometimes cooking for 10 guests and often brainstorming for new ways to approach learning. In my last week, the year-long discussion on energy saving finally translated into the design of a hyper-efficient barrel stove we found online. True to our tradition of education, we combined it with many experiments on heat and cooking and the basics of metalwork to make it a useful learning experience. I had not aimed for physical monuments to the time and love I had invested here, but the unexpected stove (now named ‘Yuganda Chullah’), and the steaming rabri (corn soup) re-established my belief in the power of good ideas to inspire. Personally, work on the farm and the discipline of a routine helped me to gain perspective.

My learning began before I arrived in Sakad. Initially based in Hyderabad and coastal East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh, I worked for three months with the Byrraju Foundation, which explores how technology can impact rural life and livelihoods. Helping to design a life skills training program at a rural call center, I first met Gandhi’s hills and the vast Indian family. There too were questions I did not know to ask, and answers I did not know I could find. The inward and outward search that resulted helped to form the basis for my year-long focus. A visit from a nearby college service team also helped re-establish my belief in the power of good ideas to inspire. Personally, work on the farm and

In every interaction, the journey from being a “visiting American novelty” to “friend” to “family” has taken me past introductions and hot tea to the overwhelming kinship of being invited into and navigated through someone’s life as if it were their home. Laughter, tears, loss and bounty are all measured in the vividness that only clasp someone’s hand in yours can tell. Here, our theoretical frameworks, based on my arcane suit-and-tie constants make no sense. Growth and development seem like laughably-meaningless terms when you are listening to someone’s story under a seemingly eternal sky. There is only what was, what is, and what could be. This latter realm, I have learned, is the only ‘third world’ where we all must work. Since at its heart, labor toward any goal is a journey to a future re-imagined, the most daunting task is convincing people – family - that something better is not only possible, but worth re-imagining together. This is what I see as the efforts of my year.

I turn off the road past Sakad to the gravel track home. The power cut must have ended while I was out shopping. A single near-amber bulb hangs glowing by a wire over the door. Someone has left the fire burning for me.

“As this idea of working with a community to find solutions – the idea that drew me to Indicorps a short year ago – seems even older than these hills.”

As an August 2008 fellow partnered with Adharshila, Roshan Nair used alternative education methods with village youth. Hailing from Dubai, United Arab Emirates and Austin, Texas, Roshan served as the chief operating officer of a medical supply startup company, on the board of an environmental non-profit, and did a stint in public accounting before his fellowship. Roshan is passionate about community empowerment, engaging discussions and delicious food – and is returning to India to seek all three. Roshan holds a BBA from the Business Honors Program and an MPA in Accounting from the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas, Austin.
Tushar Kansal
Project: Bagar Drinking Water Institute
Field Partner: GDL
Location: Bagar, Rajasthan

Start-Up
Applying to be an Indicorps Fellow, I saw the project description for the “Bagar Drinking Water Initiative” and I thought: that’s perfect. Over the previous couple of years, I had become increasingly conscious of the long-term challenges that India, and the rest of the world, face in accessing clean, safe water and the grave health consequences associated with drinking contaminated water. And this was an opportunity to work on the ground in rural India, finding solutions to this basic development challenge that imperils the health and lives of so many millions across the globe. Furthermore, this project had real potential: in contrast to so many other government and charitable efforts that have relied on a limited and fickle stream of funds to tackle the drinking-water crisis, the Bagar Drinking Water Initiative was a start-up based on a social-enterprise model—that is, an organization with a social mission that relies on selling a product to earn an income to operate and to grow—that would allow it to create a public health revolution across India.

Within a couple of days of my arriving in Bagar in mid-September 2008, I realized that the project had evolved far beyond the project description that had been written eight months prior. In fact, the very day that I showed up, I attended the inauguration of the company’s third outlet—one of the sixty-odd that exist as I leave at the end of my Fellowship term one year later. I learned that what I had known as the “Bagar Drinking Water Initiative” was initially piloted at my project site in Bagar, Rajasthan in response to health problems caused by fluoride contamination in the local drinking water. I also learned that the Bagar Drinking Water Initiative was incorporated as Piramal Water Private Limited in July 2008, at which point the Sarvajal brand name (meaning “water for everyone”) was introduced. Sarvajal, at 25 paise per liter (about one-half of an American cent), is priced cheaply enough for India’s poor to afford.

Immersion—into the deep end
Three weeks after arriving in Bagar, I was asked to manage the Sarvajal outlet in Jhunjhunu (JJN), the district headquarters located fifteen kilometers from Bagar. I threw myself into my job in JJN, working long days and involving myself in every aspect of operations at the JJN site. I went out on delivery, carrying twenty-liter cans of water; learned how to operate the water filtration machine; cleaned the store; oversaw accounts; etc. For a period of time, I was the first one to arrive in the morning and left with one of my co-workers when we locked up the store at night. I spent these weeks working as hard as I could, learning as much about the store and its operations as possible and building relationships with my employees, Shivratan and Sarjeet.

This time that I spent at the outlet kick-started my year and shaped my subsequent work for Sarvajal in many ways. This was my first real immersion into the local culture, hearing Marwari and speaking in Hindi all day; dealing with customers friendly, curious, and irate; and receiving a crash-course in local business practices and work-culture. Working hands-on at a Sarvajal outlet gave me an intricate understanding of a core part of the business and encouraged me to really get to know Shivratan and Sarjeet, who became my first two friends in Rajasthan. These weeks at the Jhunjhunu outlet also laid the groundwork for the rest of the fellowship year.

Irrigating the Grassroots
Seeing that Sarvajal’s operations in Rajasthan primarily served well-off city folks provoked me to reflect on what had inspired me to come to rural India and to join Sarvajal in

“Sarvajal, at 25 paise per liter (about one-half of an American cent), is priced cheaply enough for India’s poor to afford.”
In order to support these pilot projects I also created a grassroots outreach and awareness campaign towards the end of my time in Bagar. The Jal Mela or “Water Festival” campaign expanded the message beyond safe drinking water to water conservation and sanitation. The Jal Melas included matka races (running with a half-full earthenware water pot on top of one’s head), water and sanitation trivia, demonstrations on the importance of hand-washing, and children’s drawing competitions. Deepak and Vikas, Sarvajal’s two marketing associates in Rajasthan may incorporate some of these grassroots outreach efforts into the company’s marketing work.

### Beyond Water

Halfway through the year, Rahul and Pulkit—two other Indicorps Fellows also assigned to projects at the Grassroots Development Laboratory (GDL) —and I started taking increasing amounts of responsibility for leading GDL. GDL was established in 2006 as a partnership between the Piramal Foundation and Indicorps in order to engage talented and committed young people to find solutions to some of India’s most pressing development challenges. After some turmoil in GDL’s management, Rahul, Pulkit, and I were asked to take the lead in molding a positive, productive culture at GDL. I focused on building the organization’s culture and encouraging community involvement among the staff and volunteers. We hosted an evening-meeting series in which groups presented their projects for discussion. We also organized team-building activities, and coordinated visits to local villages and cultural events.

A personal goal for my year was to immerse in and come to understand members of the local community. While I struggled with how to do this early in the year, I started by playing with kids (almost always the easiest route), spending many hours helping to keep shop at a local kirana dukan (general store), and drinking tea with families in Ashok Nagar, the village where I held the lemonade stand. I worked in the fields for the wheat, barley, and mustard harvests; accepted families’ dinner invitations and in exchange invited myself to help cook; attended an all-night wedding where I served dinner and exchanged riddles with fifteen adolescent boys while hand-making laddoo (a local sweet) at two in the morning; and taught English to two particularly-dedicated teenage girls in the summer heat under a thatched roof and the whirling fan in their home. I gradually became accepted as a welcome guest in the homes of Ashok Nagar and cherish greatly the friends I’ve made during my time there.

### Growth and Learnings

I am amazed that an entire year has elapsed since I arrived in India. While sometimes time seemed to crawl interminably, somehow days and weeks and months have gone by without my even noticing that they add up to a year. My time as an Indicorps Fellow is akin to an earthquake that has struck my psyche—I can hardly fathom the magnitude, let alone being able to sift through the rubble to digest the changes that have been wrought.

That being said, I would like to share my reflections on agency,
willpower, and initiative, interrelated themes with which I have struggled greatly this year. I have, for many years now, been a believer in my own sense of agency in shaping my reality and, more abstractly, in the importance of agency in shaping human lives. That is, I have long believed that the effort and attitude that I put into how I live will go a long way towards shaping the outcomes that result. The opportunities to work, to contribute, and to grow that Indicorps afforded me in India this year have made the importance of agency and of willpower vividly, and even frighteningly, clear. I struggled tremendously during my time here to define a project and to move forward with it, to be accountable to myself. I am still surprised by my having spent an incomprehensible amount of time this year, weeks and months, not accomplishing very much at all. Conversely, however, these feelings of unproductivity place in sharp relief the periods of time when I did focus on something and, almost purely on the basis of my own initiative, accomplished something quite significant, something that may even outlast my time here and have a tangible impact.

Simultaneously, my experiences in Bagar have impressed upon me the importance of context in a much more visceral way than ever before. I have met so many people this year whose opportunities are heartbreakingly limited due to the class, caste, or gender into which they were born. Sarjeet, who is brighter, harder working, and more honest than most anyone who I met during my time in Bagar, but who could not afford a college education and who struggles to support his whole family at the age of twenty-one. Surendra, the low-caste Sarvajal franchisee, from whom entire sections of his town refuse to purchase water. Anita, who wanted to go to school and eventually go on to college, whose ambitions were cut short because her family married her off at sixteen.

And then, there’s the intersection of agency and of circumstance, of willpower and of the reality that life creates for us. As I mentioned above, I taught English to two girls in Ashok Nagar—Anju, eighteen years old and Sushila, fourteen years old. Surprisingly forwardly, Anju had chased after me a few times, asking if I would teach her. While I met many people who claimed that they wanted to learn English during my year in Bagar, she was one of the first to show real enthusiasm and initiative. And so I asked Anju: what’s the deal? She replied that she wanted to study to become a nurse; she comes from a poor family. After failing her 10th grade board exams, Anju had studied another year and recently taken the test again (similar to getting a GED in the United States). She told me that, if she passed, she wanted to enroll in a one-year prep course to take the nursing entrance exams, if her family could afford the fees. Learning English would help her with the entrance exams. I cannot emphasize enough the significance of her even expressing that she wanted to do something, that she had ambitions and dreams. Most local youth who I met during my year did not seem to have much of any idea what they wanted to do with their lives. So I agreed to teach her and her friend, Sushila. They were both working hard, doing their homework, trying to be agents and to take control of their lives. Three weeks before leaving, I received a call from another friend in Ashok Nagar on a Sunday morning telling me that Anju had died an hour earlier. I walked with most of the men in the community as Anju was carried on a bier. I watched as she was cremated. She was eighteen years old. Her exam results came out a few days later; Anju had passed.

Ultimately, I find it difficult to draw a neat line around my time in Bagar, difficult to untangle the innumerable threads and strands and knots that I stitched together to create my experience. Having lived and worked in a place where so much needs to be done and having contributed comparatively so little, and reflecting on the importance of agency and initiative after having seen it thwarted so brutally, I will close with a quotation that is sometimes attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: “Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

As an August 2008 fellow, Tushar Kansal assisted with a project to install a system of water filtration units across Rajasthan. This social enterprise project provides clean, safe, and affordable drinking water while being self-sustaining in operating costs. It serves as a model for replication across India. Prior to coming to India, Tushar lived in New York City, where he served as a Coro Fellow in Public Affairs. Before that, he worked at the Center for Court Innovation, a nonprofit criminal justice agency, while also volunteering for Grassroots Initiative, an election consulting firm. While in college, Tushar co-founded the Alliance for Progressive South Asians, a student organization focusing on social and political issues affecting the South Asian Diaspora. Tushar is a 2005 graduate of Wesleyan University.
A Long Walk for Truth & Two Business Start-ups

In my first two weeks at the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM) I walked 50 kilometers as part of the Jagruthi Yatra, or “awareness walk,” to educate people about the Right to Information Act. The yatra began in Sargur, Karnataka and lasted for one month, ending in Bangalore on Gandhi Jayanthi. Based on Gandhian principles, the Jagruthi Yatra was both inspired by and inspirational for the power of truth. The walk was about showing people the power of truth; making the people powerful, and making the powerful truthful. Walking alongside the doctors who founded SVYM and had devoted decades to uplifting local communities, I began to understand the philosophical underpinnings of our efforts.

Immediately after the walk, for the next two months, I helped launch and grow two social enterprises: a renewable energy business called Jnana Jyothi (Light of Knowledge) and a handicrafts’ start-up called Jenukurba Files. Both were designed to provide rural employment. With Jnana Jyothi, I helped rural youth understand economic principles and apply them to their business. With Jenukurba Files, I helped tribal women strengthen their file-making enterprise by creating a website to sell files and raise awareness about tribal issues in the H.D. Kote taluk.

Community Immersion and Early Education

In December 2008, I explored local hadis (tribal villages), trekking from village to village for three weeks. I lived with families for 3-4 days each, learned about their hopes, goals, dreams, and life, and made many friends who supported me throughout the year. I learned that village development is not just about villages, but about each household and each person therein. I came back with many project ideas, from starting a community newspaper to “microinvesting” with local self-help groups — but ultimately I decided to focus my efforts on early education. There seemed to be a gap in the functioning of the village anganawadis (government daycare centers) and the community’s need with pre-school children. I saw great potential in the youngest members of each hadi; the hope and enthusiasm of these children was infectious.

Early Education in the H.D. Kote Taluk

Most people think that if children cannot talk, they cannot learn. In fact, 95% of human brain development occurs before the age of six, and neural plasticity (the ability to learn) is highest during this time. In the H.D. Kote taluk in southern Karnataka, most adivasi (tribal) villages are isolated and have no system of early education. Understanding early education and its connection to broader tribal issues, I believe, has the power to transform a new generation of adivasi learners and give them the foundation to pursue their dreams.

Anganawadis in four villages seemed to better understand the state of early education. I spoke to teachers and parents about the value of education and its role in child development. After building relationships with the community and anganawadi teachers, I helped facilitate basic lessons (about numbers, alphabets, reading, and hygiene) in each of these four villages.

With a piece of chalk and a ball we designed activities for children to practice numbers and letters, develop their creative side, and be physically active. Over time we introduced other learning materials like puzzles, books, and blocks into two anganwadis. We also consulted Montessori teachers and staff from SVYM’s Vivekananda School of Excellence, to learn more about preschool education. I encouraged a promising anganwadi teacher from Maldahadi to get trained by SVYM teachers in the basics of the Montessori Method and to adapt Montessori principles into her daily routine.

“I struggle to find the simplest words to describe this place. There is something special here, and it has changed my life.”

Vinay Krupadev
Project: Adivasi Early Education
Field Partner: SVYM
Location: Sargur, Karnataka
Over the course of six months, I encouraged the teachers to take more and more responsibility over their daily curriculum. Teacher attendance remains a problem in two villages, while the remaining two villages showed a more positive response. Overall, the children improved their social skills, became more talkative, and showed moderate academic performance, and greater independence than when we began our efforts.

Moreover, we encouraged community members (mostly mothers and youth) to get involved in the early education process; men generally went to work during the anganwadi school hours. Student attendance rose quickly after establishing a positive relationship with the kids; the parental response improved gradually with time.

In two villages, the focus on early education also led to greater civic awareness. The parents of Matakeri Colony and Kalala hadi jointly drafted and submitted a letter to the Community Development Program Officer (CDPO) to demand more accountability from the anganwadi teacher (whose attendance was poor) and information regarding the rations for meals to be provided to each child. We visited the CDPO once a month to provide project updates; the CDPO was responsive which bolstered the community’s confidence in seeking greater accountability.

**Personal Growth**

A fellow once said if you spend a day in India you can write a book, if you stay a month a page, and if you live here a year you can hardly write a sentence. I find myself in that predicament. I struggle to find the simplest words to describe this place, but there is something special here, and it has changed my life.

Swami Vivekananda once said, “India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy.” My India is defined by potential. My India is an India of promise. My India is a place of peace, equality, and freedom, of ahimsa, sarvodaya, and swaraj. I got a glimpse of this India in H.D. Kote taluk. I know it can exist. I would like to be a part of making my India of promise and potential into everyday real India.

Vinay Krupadev hails from Devola, Ohio. As an August 2008 fellow, he partnered with the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement to develop educational enterprise opportunities and to strengthen pre-primary education for tribal youth. In college, Vinay studied biology and math. While studying, he performed academic research in three biology labs, co-founded the student-run Healthcare Without Borders, and served as a radio host for his college-run station. Upon graduation, he served as a news correspondent for a local newspaper, an intern for the Obama campaign, and a congressional intern. An avid sitar player, Vinay is also passionate about education and economic development.
At Gandhiji’s Ashram in the middle of eastern Maharashtra, I filter through it all to try and reach brief moments of clarity, understanding, and salience. What does it mean to be here? Decades removed from Gandhi one must go beyond the surface of philosophy and the legend of a man who is still worshipped. In the peace, the quiet, and the beauty of dawn glimpses come of what it was all about. Simplicity. Mindfulness. An unbelievable sense of purpose and self. These were the grounds where his experiments with truth were tested. Here is where people gathered to plan, organize, and officially declare that the colonial oppressors of the past few hundred years had to leave, a declaration on the behalf of several hundred million people. It was at Sevagram in July 1942 that the “Quit India” movement was drawn up. Standing in this place invokes a wave of sharp emotion and solidarity. Many people continuously question the relevance of Gandhi today. There is plenty we can extract from his message, but at times I struggle with trying to understand the relevance practically, in trying to go beyond the aesthetics of it. At Sevagram, one sees the “simple living” philosophy of Gandhiji, embodied in action. Each day is focused towards reflection and self-sustainability. Each day includes a few hours of shramdaan, which literally translates to “gift of labor.” As Vinodji, one of the acharyas at the ashram explains, Sevagram is meant to be a diya to light the flame within others.

A significant part of Gandhi’s message feels like it is missing in regards to today’s India. What happened we know, but what about now? Gandhiji’s beliefs were certainly of simple living, sustainability, inner meditation and mindfulness, but it also asked us to go beyond ourselves. Gandhiji believed that your life is your message, and that message includes engaging in our communities and the larger communities of village, country, and world. Today we can still see the divisive nature of caste through the country, we see terrible displays of fundamentalism while the state stands impotent. While we consume magazine articles and 24-hour news channel specials on the development of India, many within the country still struggle with access to the basics. If we strive to understand the holistic approach Gandhi took, it requires, at the very least, to be prepared to address not only our personal weaknesses but our societal ones as well. It’s not about always being “activists”, but actively acknowledging the very same challenges that continue to face this country, just as they did back in Gandhi’s time. And it doesn’t mean simply following Gandhiji’s ideas, or mine, or anyone else’s for that matter, but genuinely engaging in a process that seeks out our own questions. I suppose I just feel that it’s not simply about looking at Gandhi from the lens of the 1930s and 1940s, but from 2009, acknowledging the very same challenges that continue to face this country.
and beyond. Sevagram is only one diya to draw light from. Spending some time at Anandwan and Somnath, two projects of the Maharogi Sewa Samiti, showed us the incredible potential of people working together under the motto of “Work Builds, Charity Destroys.” People who are shunned by society proudly living, with dignity, alternatives to the status quo. Visiting Vinoba Bhave’s ashram (a contemporary of Gandhi) also shed some light on collectives living alternatives to the status quo. Amongst other things Vinoba Bhave is known for his leadership in the boodan movement, a campaign of voluntary land reform aimed at redistributing land from zamindar (landlords) to landless farmers. Throughout this year, I have encountered many others across India that are working for change against what many would say are unfavorable odds. Where the passion doesn’t overtly strike claim to your heart, it’s quite clear it’s right there beneath the surface being kindled. And that list of those who are also sparking the flames of social change includes my fellow fellows at Indicorps.

The idea of Gandhiji’s teachings, this idea of “living with purpose,” is about not only what we do but how we go about doing it. Which are the paths we will have courage to take? How strong are our own limitations, the ones we place upon ourselves within our minds? How will we react in the face of distraction? The sunlit sky creeping golden, overhead blue. The peepul trees are huge, magnificent. The huts remain, and retain peace. If there are images to try and capture these are them. Green and stillness. A disturbed mind colliding with what it cannot fully grasp and digest at Gandhiji’s Ashram.

— Gaurav Madan, (August 2008 Fellow)
In September 2009, to promote Volunteer Ahmedabad’s (VA) ‘Design for Giving’ Youth Contest, the team produced a short film encouraging locals of Ahmedabad to “Do Nothing.” The spoof film recommends a passive stance to societal problems. With the aim of encouraging dialogue, the film did just that. “The Do Nothing film made people take notice of the prevailing attitude(s). Whether or not people participate in the contest, they are more aware that attitude is part of the problem and the solution,” said VA Coordinator Vijay Ramchandani.

Launched in October 2004, VA promotes the spirit of volunteerism and self-initiative at Indicorps’ home base in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Its methods are fourfold: experiment with fresh ideas for action; give local youth a platform for dedicated service; seed the idea of ‘Yes You Can’ do something; and harness the potential of Amdavadi (people of Ahmedabad) youth.

Fresh Ideas for Action
In July 2009, AU re-defined the classic ‘treasure hunt’ by providing an opportunity for city youth to interact with everyday heroes. With nearly one hundred participants, attendees bicycled around the city discovering new local heroes. Each local hero provided a unique perspective and a living example of individuals committed to tolerance, patience, and education. Some of the heroes included: Miyan-Mahadev, neighboring shopkeepers in the Old City promoting the message of love and harmony among all; Pravin Patel, a designer who cycles 35 km at 4 am every morning with Gandhi’s favorite bhajans (songs) emanating from 8 mounted speakers; and Dr. Rajal Thaker, who feeds dozens of stray dogs in her neighborhood. Not only did the cyclists discover local heroes, but they also realized that in each of us lies the power to do something.

Platform for Dedicated Service
During the summer, twenty-five Amdavadis came together as a part of VA’s annual Youth Leadership Course (YLC). In its third year, YLC actively encouraged young people to bring about positive change in their own city. Participants engaged in a six-week course focusing on their own leadership development, as well as active engagement in the community. In line with VA’s commitment to collaboration, project teams partnered with the Ahmedabad Traffic Trust, the Heritage Department, Young Experimenters and others. The VA alumni served as project leaders, produced sessions, and were instrumental in rallying the spirit of the program.

VA Presence and Networking
For Gandhi Jayanti 2009, Volunteer Ahmedabad co-sponsored a celebratory event at the Gandhi Ashram featuring peace games, a children’s art corner, a Sufi music concert, street plays on khadi (home-spun cloth) and the importance of taking small actions for change. With thousands of visitors in attendance and over 800 students for the evening program, the Gandhi Ashram was bustling with activity. Gandhiji would have been most happy with the spirit of collaboration and the involvement of young people in promoting his message of self-reliance and non-violence.

‘Yes You Can’
An offshoot of a Give India Foundation and Riverside School initiative, Volunteer Ahmedabad sponsored its own local ‘Design for Giving’ Youth Contest to encourage city youth to create and implement projects for community development. The contest provided a platform for young people (ages 18-25) to share and implement their own ideas to help make Ahmedabad into the city of their dreams. The best ideas received prizes and were eligible for a grant of up to Rs 50,000 for long term implementation of the project.

Always seeking opportunities to help direct the energy of young people towards social good, VA’s core team remains nimble and responsive to local needs. VA is eager to find more partnerships with individuals, organizations, and corporations willing to invest in youth leadership and provide learning opportunities that help strengthen core values and life skills.
Ankit’s dream highlights Ahmedabad Ultimate’s (AU) emphasis on sportsmanship and service. For Ankit and his classmates at the Ashramshala (Gandhi Ashram Ahmedabad), AU practices have fostered stronger teamwork, focus, and personal discipline.

An Indicorps initiative focused on development through sport, AU hopes to impact hundreds of potential young leaders such as Ankit to inspire a culture of grassroots sport: a culture that transcends the boundaries of the field in a way that permeates into the lives of the AU community. By inculcating values of honesty, mutual respect, and personal discipline from a young age, we seek to nurture a stronger sense of personal responsibility and civic duty.

In 2009 alone, AU has initiated 6 new teams, nurtured 6 new local coaches, hosted 2 frisbee gala events, and organized 2 summer tournaments. The youth teams are comprised of 10-16 year olds from all parts of Ahmedabad irrespective of class, religion, and caste distinctions. In this time AU has also partnered with local papers and radio stations to raise awareness of the initiative. The return of AU veterans, Jaidip Patel and Dharmesh Mistry, sees a renewed effort to take Ahmedabad Ultimate and sports to a new level in Gujarat. In September 2009, the AU team expanded to include 3 Indicorps Fellows who come with a wide array of sports management experience, grassroots development ideas, and innovative skills.

**Continuing Challenges**

While AU has initiated many new teams we still face tremendous resistance from parents who see sport as time-pass. Our goal this year is to establish AU as an integrated activity, where young people can build strong bodies and strong minds to brighten their futures. We are actively tackling limitations in field/office space, outreach, and local disc availability. Up till now donations of equipment and funding have come from the international Indicorps network and Ultimate Frisbee community abroad. Our greatest asset has been all the positive energy from international volunteers offering their time selflessly in Ahmedabad.

**Looking forward**

Ahmedabad Ultimate envisions a robust citywide youth league, where children invest in themselves and each other. By 2010, AU aims to establish 25-30 youth teams all over Ahmedabad; each team will have its own coach who can progress the skills of the team and mentor players off the field. In addition we aim for each team to have its own kit-bag containing discs and cones, access to a playing field and team sponsor. All of this will eventually lead to creating an international presence, the possibility of starting similar leagues in other Gujarat cities (and possibly other states), partnering with schools and colleges to create scholarships for outstanding players and coaches, and spreading the ‘spirit of the game’ to other sports in Ahmedabad.
**Staff: One part of the Indicorps core**

Indicorps would like to especially thank Monika Goel and Nidhi Chaudhary, who both served on the staff team from August 2008 to August 2009. This year we are also welcoming (and welcoming back) new staff members Dev Tayde, Prerna Seth, Pradyumna Gupta, Jaidip Patel, Adam Ferguson, Terry Levine, and Lakshmi Eassey.

**Roopal Shah** currently serves as the Executive Director of Indicorps (which she co-founded with siblings Anand and Sonal) and is based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. A graduate of Harvard University and the University of Michigan Law School, Roopal practiced law for almost a decade - clerking for a federal district judge, practicing at a law firm in DC, and serving as a federal prosecutor. Fun highlights from Roopal’s journey include coordinating the Bollinger fun run and movies on the quad as the president of the University of Michigan Law School Student Senate; assisting Federal District Court Judge Ezra to draft judicial opinions; joining the core trial team at Shearman & Sterling for the Orthofix $150 million verdict; twice completing the Marine Corps marathon (with a worse time for the second run), and surfing South Garbage (San Diego) in the rain with 4-6 foot waves as part of a 400+ day surfing streak.

**Jaidip Patel** first joined Indicorps in the summer of 2005 as an intern on the Ahmedabad Ultimate (AU) Project. He graduated with a Masters in Chemical Engineering from Imperial College London, then drilled for oil as a field engineer in Gabon and Angola for almost four years (with extra time to explore the world). In February 2009, Jaidip returned to Indicorps full-time as the lead on the Ultimate initiative. Having first discovered Ultimate Frisbee in his last two years at Imperial College, Jaidip instantly became obsessed by this fast-paced, energetic and humbling new sport, taking part in regional and national tournaments all over the UK. His craziest excursions have included bungee-jumping (most exciting yet scariest thing ever done), skydiving, ice-climbing and sea kayaking.

**Vijay Ramchandani** joined Indicorps in June 2006 in a Project Development role. Currently Vijay is coordinating Indicorps’ domestic volunteer program, Volunteer Ahmedabad, promoting the spirit of volunteerism and encouraging civic engagement in Ahmedabad. A proud Sindhi, born and brought up in Gujarat, Vijay completed his Bachelors in English Literature in Ahmedabad. Before joining Indicorps, Vijay served for three years as an administrative executive for Motif Inc., a business processing outsourcing firm in Ahmedabad. In addition, Vijay also has a Diploma in Interior Designing. In his leisure time, Vijay enjoys painting and other art related endeavors. The latest addition to Vijay’s family, Keya, not yet a year old, is already in training to become a changemaker.

After living in the United States for eight years, **Pradyumna Gupta** returned with a PhD in Material Sciences (Lehigh University) and a tremendous capacity for reflection. As part of the Indicorps staff team, Pradyumna launched IndiJournal as a framework to publish Indicorps green papers. Pradyumna was also instrumental in launching Speak 4 Change as part of the local Volunteer Ahmedabad initiative (to engage college students and citizens in constructive action for their city). Born and raised in Kanpur, India, Pradyumna graduated from Banaras Hindu University (BHU), India with a Bachelor in Technology. While at BHU, Pradyumna co-founded Kashi Utkarsh, a social service organization to channel student’s energy to social causes. As a Co-Founder and President of Lehigh University’s India Club in 2005, he helped bring the Lehigh Indian community together to create programs like ShantiChoir. Most recently, Pradyumna served as a Senior Research Engineer at Saint-Gobain R&D in Boston.

**Dev Tayde** joined the Indicorps team in January 2006 and has ambidextrously juggled roles in Project Development and Fellowship Support. Armed with a Master’s in Social Work, Dev brings a decade of experience in the social service sector spread over low cost housing and sanitation, community development, governance, education, youth development and capacity building. His professional and volunteer stints with numerous organizations across India have enabled him to channelize his passion for service. Dev is currently also associated with UnLtd India. He has helped co-found Down To Earth and Jagruti, non-profits engaged with children and youth from humble backgrounds and rural development respectively. Dev loves his time with earthworms as they collectively dig deep to make the world greener and with young adults in workshops and on sports fields. During his time at the Akanksha Foundation he was voted “Most Hardworking Team Member” for two successive years. The award was discontinued in the third year.
Monika Goel joined the Indicorps staff in August 2008, fulfilling her long-term aspiration to come to India for service. Prior to joining Indicorps, Monika was a consultant for BearingPoint in McLean VA, where she focused on the firm’s business development in the Middle East and North Africa. Brought up in Maryland, Monika completed her undergraduate degree in Finance & International Business from the University of Maryland, College Park and later, a MSc in Development Studies from The London School of Economics and Political Science. In her free time, Monika enjoys Indian classical singing and dance, traveling the globe, engaging in self-development work and discovering music. She is excited to be part of a dynamic group of leaders trying to transform themselves and the world!

Nidhi Chaudhary joined the Indicorps team in August 2008 with a focus on project development, fellowship support and outreach. In the non-profit sector for the past 8 years, Nidhi’s passion lies in early and higher education, policy and interdisciplinary research. Nidhi has a certification in non-profit management and extensive training in development and governance. Nidhi has dedicated her energies to developing programs and creating partnerships between the public and private sectors, bringing together stakeholders to combine forces on critical issues. She has also created media outreach materials, supported large-scale public awareness campaigns and built capacity within organizations. Nidhi has experience in the health policy sector. Immediately after college, she spent several months in India partnering with NGOs focused on special education. She has been actively involved with Asha for Education since 2002. She is humbled and excited to support young changemakers in India.

Adam Ferguson joined the Indicorps staff in May 2009 as part of the fellowship support team. He was born and raised in James City County, Virginia and studied history and art history at James Madison University in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. Adam has worked in the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s research library assisting with the digitalization of archived materials, taught English for two years in the village of Koneurgench, Turkmenistan with the United States Peace Corps, and served in the Alabama state government supporting various non-profit social service providers and assisting with disaster response and recovery efforts. Adam enjoys long journeys as much as, if not more than, reaching the destination. He hopes that over the course of his time with Indicorps he is able to help fellows through as many difficulties and challenges as possible to find lasting experiences and memories, and hopes they will help him do the same.

Terry Levine joined the Indicorps staff in August 2009 as a member of the Fellowship support team. From July 2008-July 2009, he was part of the Congress-Bundestag Exchange for Young Professionals (CBYX) a scholarship program providing young Americans with an understanding of Germany. Prior to this, was in Washington, DC at the Aspen Institute, a think tank committed to enlightened leadership and timeless values. His role included planning leadership and seminar programs specifically focusing on curriculum development. In 2006, he graduated from Tufts University with a BA in International Relations and Philosophy and is a proud resident of perhaps the most beautiful (yet mocked) US state, New Jersey. Terry has been to all continents (except Antarctica) and has a goal of having extra pages added into his passport. He completed the Philadelphia Marathon in October 2006 and hopes to complete a triathlon in the near future.

Lakshmi Easssey joined Indicorps in August 2009 and currently serves as the Media and Communications director. She is a graduate of Pitzer College with a Bachelors in Global Communication Studies and a minor in Studio Art. During her time at Pitzer College she studied in Gaborone, Botswana and Bristol, England. Lakshmi has served as a Field Organizer for the Barack Obama campaign in Lakeland, Florida, and taught English and Computer Science in Ladakh, India. In 2008 she received a Fulbright Fellowship to teach English in Hamburg. Most recently, she was a Program Director for the National Student Leadership Conference on Journalism & Mass Communication, a summer high school leadership program. Lakshmi chose Indicorps because she would like to use convergence media as a medium for change. Finally, Lakshmi enjoys playing basketball, reading newspapers, writing articles, learning languages and teaching art.

“The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.”

John Buchan
Renewing Commitments
Panchgani, Maharashtra (May 2009): Outbound Panchgani hosted the first ever Indicorps NGO workshop attended by nine partner organizations. The challenging physical activities and team games provided a platform for introspection and teamwork discussions. Similarly, the participants gained greater insight about one another’s motivation for service as well as each organization’s theory of change.

Aligned Values
Ahmedabad, Gujarat (February 2009): Former U.S. Senator Harris Wofford (who was instrumental in launching the Peace Corps) met with Indicorps at the Gandhi Ashram. He shared that after his first trip to India (which was focused on studying Gandhi), he returned to the U.S. with a sense of urgency to bridge the racial divide within his own country. Wofford also emphasized that while Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged non-violence, they valued struggle and inspired others to take continuous constructive action.

Celebrating Global Service
Washington, DC (January 2009): Indicorps and the Indian American Leadership Initiative (IALI) hosted a post-US presidential inauguration celebration “to honor and empower a new generation of leaders as they engage in public and civic service in the U.S. and around the world.” IALI board member Shamima Singh rallied for Indian-American leadership: “It is time for all of us to come together… to step up now, step in to the leadership position, because now it is here for the taking.”
Indicorps is a non-partisan, non-religious, non-profit organization that encourages Indians around the world to actively participate in India’s progress. Indicorps’ programs are designed to build principled leadership, empower visionaries, inspire collective action, and unite India towards a common vision for the nation by productively engaging Indians around the world with the development of the country that defines their identity.

The core fellowship program aims to inspire a new generation of global Indian leaders through structured one- and two-year grassroots service opportunities in India. Indicorps firmly believes that contributing to the development of India at a grassroots level will help Indians around the world better understand their heritage, explore ways to strengthen the global Indian community, and encourage civic responsibility at home in their respective countries. Indicorps projects embody a firm and demonstrated commitment to promoting peace, inclusiveness, secularism, and the empowerment of India’s people by encouraging action and understanding at the most grassroots levels.

Further, Indicorps aims to strengthen non-profit organizations in India. Indicorps recognizes that building capacity within local Indian organizations is essential to sustainable change. By placing fellows with small, high-impact grassroots organizations, Indicorps aims to bring new skills and perspectives to our partners. During their fellowship, Indicorps participants dedicate themselves to understanding the beneficiary communities and developing the strength of local partner organizations that have a long-term stake in the projects.

To read the stories of all 2008-09 fellows please visit blog.indicorps.org