Workforce mobility adventures from all walks of life, and all parts of the world

Photos courtesy of Robin Gurin

Jean Hunt helps young people in India gain access to education.

Some people go on vacation to relax, some to explore, and some to experience new cultures and customs. For Jean Hunt, a licensed Dwellworks real estate agent and relocation specialist, what began as a vacation trip to India changed her life—and the lives of many in Jaipur— by granting them access to education.

How did you first learn of the education situation in India?

In early 2009, I visited Delhi and Rajasthan on a group tour. Caught off guard by the kindness and joy of its citizens, I also wasn't prepared to find out that India did not [then] have laws to provide for children to have the right to attend school.

Although the vacation as a whole was a remarkable experience, that one fact haunted me. I thought I might go back someday to do volunteer work, but life in Manhattan picked up its hectic pace, and those good intentions faded away.

But you did go back to India?

A major disappointment in my life in late 2011 forced me to re-examine my priorities. I arranged to do volunteer work for a small nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Jaipur, a city in Rajasthan, about five hours southwest of Delhi. There I worked with women and girls to help master some basic computer skills and improve their English. I knew these earnest young (and some not-so-young) women were getting a lot out of the program. But these were people who already had a good degree of literacy, which would carry them to the next step in their lives.

Aware that little to no progress had been made improving the public school situation, I thought about helping children from poor families attend school. I decided to start by asking my auto rickshaw (aka "tuk-tuk") driver about his struggle to educate his children. When I heard that he had not had enough money to keep his two sons and a daughter in school on a regular basis, I asked to meet the family. They were wonderful people. I asked him whether, if I offered to put the two boys in school full time for the following year, he would also agree to send his daughter back to school full time. He agreed. Then I offered to help another cousin, a girl of 11, return to school. That led to meeting two more families that were even less well off, one Hindu, one Muslim, where none of the children—a total of six—had ever attended a school.

I negotiated the tuition—everything in India is negotiated! Prices ranged from $80 to $240 per student per year. When I returned last February, I was blown away by the progress the children had made. Before leaving the States, I had raised money. While there, I added another 21 children in three private schools. So now, there will be 31 children attending school full time starting this July. It's exciting! Since my return, I have created the Jaipur Education Project (*jaipureducationproject.org*).

What path do you see your project taking from here?

Good question! During my most recent visit I was able to recruit a retired local teacher to visit the schools and report to me about how the children are doing. I want to see how feasible it is to manage the progress of a larger group of children from afar. Another way I would like to help is by supporting the efforts of one struggling headmaster. He took four of the children last year who had never sat in a classroom before and did extraordinary work with these young people. This headmaster—I call him Om for short—would like to build another floor on his school. I was particularly impressed by his work with girls.

I have a lot of work ahead, but I wake up each day and am inspired by my favorite quote from Ghandi: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." **M**