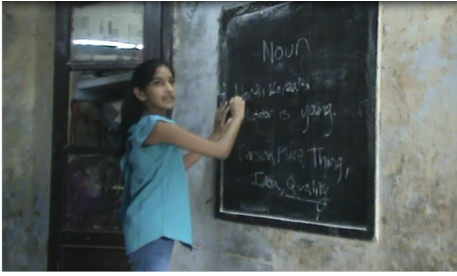


Written by Christina Tetreault



Arizona Foothills Magazine and Azfoothills.com are proud to support local students and young entrepreneurs in our valley who are out to make a difference. Here is a personal encounter and letter from Desert Mountain sophomore, Aakanksha Saxena, the Founder and Director of Literacy Spree, a 501C3 non-profit organization to raise funds and sponsor educational programs for underprivileged students in America and beyond. We ask that you kindly and mindfully seek to support these local young heroes in any way that you are able.

"It was July 2009, I had just turned 10 years old, and I was spending my summer in India.

"It will just take a moment," my aunt assured me as our *riksha* came to a stop. "I want to make a quick donation to this girls' orphanage."

Throughout my life, I had been showered with opportunities to thrive in stimulating educational environments and had assumed that everyone had the same luxuries as my suburban friends and me. It was a given to me that every student was provided the resources and opportunities to academically excel. However, my short riksha stop at one of the all-girl orphanages in Lucknow, India transformed my understanding of youth educational opportunity forever.

As I made my way through the dilapidated building of the orphanage, I found scores of young girls, clustered on the floor, scribbling into workbooks and homework sheets. I knelt down beside a pre-teen, dressed in an Indian shirt and jeans, and cleared my throat.

"Why don't you study at your desk? You will be able to focus better," I suggested in my broken Hindi, flipping through her workbook.

She laughed, looking up at me, "This isn't America, *didi* [sister]. Considering that they don't have enough money to pay our college tuitions, I don't think buying us desks is a top priority."

Long after I left the orphanage and had returned to America, I found myself, repeatedly, asking the same question, "Why do they not have the option to go to college and pursue higher education?" Upon talking further to the girls and orphanage staff, I learned about the lack of financial and emotional support available to the students. The orphanage did not have sufficient money or resources to fund most of the students' college education and was forced to "give them out for marriage" when they turned 18. The lack of opportunity available to these girls galvanized me to work towards female youth empowerment.

I returned to the same all-girls orphanage in 2013 and organized a three-week long educational summer program session for the girls, tutoring them in everything from conversational English to basic trigonometry. The students' collective improvement over the short span of time was remarkable and I quickly realized the potential of making my efforts more scalable: my work didn't need to be restricted to one orphanage or to summer programs. Thus, I founded Literacy Spree, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the goal of raising funds to empower underprivileged female youth through education.

We are currently running a fundraising campaign. **All of your donations are tax deductible and will go to higher education opportunities for these underprivileged females.** The relevant links follow:

Link to our donation page: [click here](#).

Link to our Facebook page: [click here](#).

Additionally, if you would rather donate by check, you may make a check payable to "Literacy Spree" and send it to the address below. We would greatly appreciate any donations and support that you may be able to pledge towards our cause. Thank you!

Yours Sincerely,

Aakanksha Saxena

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