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Student turns teacher overseas



Northeastern undergrad Krupa Asher (second from top left) plays a game with students at a school in Bangalore, India. *Courtesy photo.*

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Working on co-op to teach poor teenage students in Bangalore, India, has inspired Krupa Asher to explore nonprofit management and pursue a master's degree in social entrepreneurship upon her graduation this spring.

"The experience helped me clear my mind a little bit about where I see myself in the future," said Asher, who is pursuing a dual major in **international affairs** and **human services**. "I arrived at Northeastern undecided on what I wanted to study, but even after deciding on a major, I was still unsure of which direction I wanted to take it in. This co-op helped me figure that out."

Asher connected with Northeastern's student group Social Change through Peace Games (SCPG) to get the co-op with the Parikrma Humanity Foundation, a nonprofit organization that educates

children in India's poverty-stricken urban areas. SCPG teams with campus organizations, local schools and global NGO's on initiatives aimed at eradicating youth violence.

Together with Northeastern alumnus and peace games founder Alex Alvanos, Asher developed a school curriculum approved by the Parikrma Humanity Foundation's CEO. Alvanos, AS'08, had developed a similar curriculum before embarking to Palestine two years ago to serve underprivileged youth.

From July through December of 2009, Asher worked with a group of 20 students at one of the Parikrma Humanity Foundation's four centers in Bangalore on projects ranging from cleaning up their communities to transforming their attitudes toward school and home life.

Many of the teens' homes—made of metal, wood and straw—are surrounded by raw sewage, said Asher, and students had to be taught to clean up after themselves. "You walk out the door and there's your garbage pile," Asher said of many of her students' living conditions. "Because they see it at home, they think they can throw papers on the ground instead of in the trash can."

For one project, a team of five students hoped to address their community's overabundance of trash by creating "garbage collection and separation" boxes for recyclables and food scraps. Students said placing collection bins throughout the school would encourage their peers to clean up after themselves.

On Saturdays, they played trivia and handed out prizes to those who remembered the most about cleanliness, and their markedly improved habits inspired them to come up with an idea for creating handbags out of recyclable materials.

Another project addressed the importance of respect—in the classroom and at home. Members of Asher's class agreed that appointing a classroom leader would make sure students treated their classmates—and school property—with respect. Older students, they envisioned, would prepare their younger peers for the school years ahead by educating them about the responsibilities of fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders.

Asher also showed her class the film, "Invisible Children," a documentary chronicling the lives of children at war for Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army. She led fieldtrips to NGO's in the area, including a hostel for young women who were victims of domestic violence or who worked as child laborers.

Lessons learned extended beyond the school walls, Asher said. Her students' mothers told Asher their kids were helping to cook and clean up, "things they didn't do before," she said.

For Asher, a big change begins with a small step—even if it's picking up a candy wrapper from the floor. After

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six months, her students were more aware of how global issues impact their lives. "They're now able to act on problems they see around them," she said.

Since returning to Northeastern, Asher has kept in touch with people at the school, and she could see herself returning to Bangalore after she graduates.

The co-op "really helped me figure out what I want to be," she said. "I'm really lucky Northeastern supported me (she received grants totaling \$2,250 to help her fund the trip). I think international co-op is something every student should experience."

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