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VisionSpring
Final Report

Hello, I'm Rae Hatfield. I graduated from Belmont University in December 2015 with a degree in Social Entrepreneurship. Right before graduating I received the Lumos Travel Award from the Lumos Foundation and Belmont University. This award allowed me to spend my first six months (February-July) after graduation living and volunteering in New Delhi, India with VisionSpring. This experience is truly a dream come true. I first heard about the Lumos Scholarship during my orientation at Belmont. I remember thinking that it was an amazing opportunity but not one I could achieve. Fast forward fourteen months, I was graduating and had achieved the award.

People often ask why I choose India; the truth is, I didn't choose India but India choose me. For me, the work I was doing and the difference I was making was more important than where I was located. My sponsoring organization was VisionSpring which is a social enterprise domestically headquartered in New York City and internationally headquartered in New Delhi, India. Before moving to India I did not know much about the country other than their religion. I studied Eastern religion during my associates degree and have always been interested in other cultures and how religion plays a big part in their makeup. Because of my previous experience in this area I was thrilled to go to India because such a large percent of the population is Hindu and it defines almost every aspect of their country. I had never lived in a country like this before.

Before living in India I had never lived in a developing country. I had no idea what to expect but I was naive enough to take the plunge anyway and I am so glad I did. I read everything I could about living in India on the internet and talked to as many people as possible who had lived, worked, volunteered, or traveled to India. It was impossible for anyone to explain

India to me which I didn't understand until I was there but now it makes perfect sense. India is like nowhere else in the world. India was the most immersive and life changing experience I have had to date. Before traveling I knew a lot of facts about India through my own research and from the experiences of others. It is impossible to imagine a worldview that is so different from your own by only doing research. I really had to see it to believe it.

I landed in India at 2:00 am New Delhi time. I left New York in the dark and arrived in the dark so I was pretty confused and so so tired. I remember groggily walking off the plane and then under the "Welcome to India" sign on my way to customs. It finally it me, I was in India. Part of me couldn't believe it and part of me was still in awe that we can just hop on a plane and fly literally across the world. What an amazing time to be alive! My family friend Suren picked me up from the airport and brought me to my accommodations. It was so nice to have a familiar face picking me up. It was hard to fall asleep those first few nights because I was overwhelmed with excitement, the unknown, and a little nervous for what was to come. I had been alone in a foreign country before, but never one as foreign as India.

My first morning in India

The first things I noticed about India were the subtle differences of living in a foreign country. Outlet adaptors, not being able to drink the water, everyone's different definition of danger, not knowing my surroundings at all, etc. I can only sum it up as being insane. I think the most shocking part for me was the immense scale of everything in India. The amount of people, the poverty, the spiciness of the food; it was all bigger and more extreme in India. It definitely

took a while to get used to but one of my goals in India was to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and I think I really started to achieve that during my first few days.

My work in India was with a social enterprise called VisionSpring. VisionSpring's goal is to provide affordable access to eyeglasses everywhere. My role in achieving this goal is was in retail technology operations. I went to India to build the technology side of VisionSpring's retail operations. Building tech operations has a lot of moving parts. I spent the first month or so working in different retail stores learning the ropes and observing employees. After the first month, I revised and updated the standard operating procedures (SOP) for our retail locations. Each of our retail stores is in a different city and sometimes in a different state so unifying these practices was difficult. Each state is almost like it's own country. They are all very different. This was a really fun challenge for me. I spent the next three months researching, designing, and implementing a retail point of sale system for our retail locations. I worked with both internal and external teams on this project. I learned so much! Building a point of sale system is a pretty slow process so I worked on many parallel operational and marketing campaigns at the same time.

The view in front of my office

    I am still really excited about and proud of my silent mornings campaign. Our office in India is basically one pretty small open floor plan with about thirty people working in it. Because of this if one person is distracted everyone is distracted. This greatly reduces productivity. As a result of reduced productivity, we work on Saturdays. To help increase productivity, I implemented silent mornings two days a week (Tuesday and Thursday). I am happy to report that this campaign greatly reduced distractions and increased productivity!

    My last two months in India went by super fast! I spent this time working on summer marketing campaigns based around sunglasses and implementing more productivity and operations frameworks! My favorite additions to the VisionSpring retail team are Google Docs and Slack (a team messaging app). Because the retail team works across many states, they

greatly needed a way to store meeting minutes, SOPs, procedures, etc. This is where Google Docs came in. Slack is a team messaging app that allows individuals and teams to communicate via one channel. Both of these products are widely used in the United States but are not widely used in India.

There are 624 million people without affordable access to eyewear in the world. This results in the loss of 202 billion dollars annually. VisionSpring serves to reduce this gap by providing affordable access to eyeglasses everywhere. My work at VisionSpring enabled our teams to do their jobs better and more effectively to reach more people. The total impact on my organization is ongoing. After my work in India our teams are now connected all over the world and have a much easier time staying connected. As a result of being connected, communication is easier and more effective.

I gained a ton from this experience. I have only been back in the United States for a couple of weeks so I am still processing my experience. I have a tendency to take calculated risks and I spend a lot of time researching and weighing my pros and cons before taking a big leap. India was different. I could only research so much before I just had to take the plunge. India can't be imagined, it has to be experienced. I wanted to feel 100% out of my comfort zone in India. I definitely achieved this. This lesson will help me in my future endeavors because I have learned to trust myself and others more than I have before. I learned countless lifelong lessons in India that I will take with me for the rest of my life.

To future Lumos travelers: you are about to embark on an amazing and unforgettable experience. You will be stretched in ways you can't imagine yet and learn lessons that are only learned while abroad and out of your comfort zone. Trust your gut and you will go far. I am endlessly thankful to the friendships and lessons I learned while on my Lumos trip. None of this would be possible without the Lumos Foundation. Thank you again.