

University School Junior Changes Lives in India



Alexandria Persad, a junior at University School, recently went on a trip to Gujarat, India where she volunteered at Mamta School, a living and learning environment for 67 deaf and disabled children. Persad visited Mamta School nearly every day for the month that she was in India. She played with the children, read to them, and practiced English with those who were trying to learn the language. Prior to the trip, University School's .edu club members wrote "pen pal" letters to the children at Mamta School. Persad said, "One of the highlights was when the children read the letters aloud to practice their English." Persad also

got to experience the students practicing their singing and dancing for a small show they would be presenting and was able to observe some of their academic classes. She said, "When I took pictures, the children were really excited and some of them wanted to give it a try, so I let them use my camera or phone to take a couple of pictures!" While in India, Persad also visited various NGOs (non-government organizations) and slum areas throughout the area.

Persad traveled as part of a small, non-profit organization called Aahana (aahanaindia.org), which provides education, healthcare, and vocational training to transform the lives of India's women and disabled youth. Alexandria joined Aahana in December of 2013 as the Director of University Relations and is the youngest member of their core team. Persad says, "My experiences with Aahana and the Mamta School have been life-changing. They have opened my eyes and showed me a lifestyle unlike my own. In some ways, those experiences have helped me appreciate what I have at home even more. Persad plans to return to the Mamta School in December, 2015.



Her passion towards educating and empowering women and children in India arose early on in her life. About six years ago, Persad visited India with her family, and was approached by a young homeless boy selling handmade necklaces in the market area. Persad and her mother talked to the boy for a while and he told them that he learned to speak English by walking up and down the streets while selling jewelry to tourists. Persad was amazed by how quickly and easily he learned to speak another language. She recognized the potential the boy had, but felt he was never going to be successful due to his lack of resources and education. Persad says, "Since that day, I told myself that I would try and help children like that little boy receive a formal education and take advantage of opportunities that would help them thrive and develop. Aahana has allowed me to help children like that boy I met in the market."