

**International Volunteer Feedback**  
Sarah Ruttan, Tucson, AZ, U.S.

I had the pleasure of volunteering for the Relief Foundation during July of 2009. As an experienced educator with a Masters in Reading Instruction, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Relief staff members on curriculum for teaching English to standards two and three. During my time in Chennai, I helped to write a unit plan consisting of ten lessons for teaching beginning readers basic skills and strategies for learning the English language. While working on the project, I had the opportunity to interact with students and teachers at the Relief center as well as the local school that they were partnering with. This collaboration allowed me to grow as a professional as I learned about an educational system very different from the one in which I work.

Perhaps the biggest realization I came to during the course of my work and numerous conversations with colleagues at Relief is that the issues that schools and educators here in India face are in some ways very similar to those in the U.S. We are both struggling to understand how we can better reach underserved students and make curriculum relevant to the lives of children so that they are engaged in their studies. Both systems face the struggle of how to best deliver English instruction to second language learners. We have much to learn from each other's successes. I am looking forward to sharing the work happening here with my colleagues in the U.S.

I am grateful to the staff of Relief Foundation for the opportunity that they gave me to engage in dialogue and collaboration on their important work. I am leaving India impressed with the dedication that this organization shows in its mission to ensure that ALL children are educated - regardless of where they were born. I don't think I would have had nearly as enriching of an experience had I come to India simply as a tourist. I am grateful to Relief Foundation for the opportunity to engage in this professional exchange and dialogue and would highly recommend the experience to educators like myself who are interested in school reform movements. The schools and children that I pass now on the street have a face and name for me and I am leaving with a deeper understanding of the complex social issues that face contemporary India.