

Zoe Schlag
Fundación Gente Nueva
Personal Statement

Before beginning my fellowship in Argentina, I had several expectations for the year ahead: I hoped to perfect my conversational Spanish and expand it into a business context, I hoped to gain personal and professional experiences that would serve me following the end of my time in Argentina and I hoped to make meaningful contributions to my organization and community.

Almost a year later, I am happy to report (and equally surprised, given that my past experiences abroad have taught me that expectations are rarely met) that I have succeeded in meeting each of my objectives. I am confident enough in my Spanish to write reports and host conference calls. I have gained experience in the field working in microenterprise, microcredit and social impact, which are all fields of human capital development that I have long wanted to gain experience in. Most importantly, I was able to leave knowing that I had made a meaningful impact on my organization. Since PETISOS began 10 years ago, it has always organized itself around 5 central tenets. On my last day in Bariloche as my boss drove me to the bus terminal, my boss turned to me. She looked at me and said, “I want you to know something. The work you have done this year—it has given us a *sixth* tenet. It’s something we can never let fall by the wayside.” Given that I had been studying the theory and practice of social impact measurement for the last several months, it was something constantly occupying my thoughts. Unsurprisingly, toward the end of my fellowship, I began to question myself what *my* impact had been. To hear those words from my boss—that my presence there had been likewise as meaningful to them as it was for me—was the type of confirmation of my work’s worth that I had never expected to truly find out.

When I look back on the year that I spent in Argentina, I will see it’s worth in two places. First, that I was able to contribute something meaningful to the organization. But second, because it allowed me to launch my career in social entrepreneurship. It is not uncommon for young professionals to decide to ‘take a year off’ doing international volunteer work. When I committed to the position in Argentina, it was different for me: it wasn’t to be ‘a year off,’ it was to be ‘the beginning.’ As I sit here writing, I am pleased to say that my experience in Argentina has in fact launched my career in social entrepreneurship: following my fellowship in Argentina, I will be moving to Mumbai, India to begin work with a non-profit incubator that offers start-up support to social entrepreneurs looking to solve India’s social problems. I am incredibly enthusiastic for the opportunity not only because it will allow me to continue the work that I love, but because I will be able to support high-impact changes in the position and continue to contribute to the field of social entrepreneurship. Although I write this at the end of my fellowship, it is truly the beginning.

And for that I am infinitely thankful.