

Continuous Giving

We profile Shyam Young and Luke Owen in this look at life after Hale.



Shyam: Building a proper school

Would you give up your job, your house, your western-style life - to go and help underprivileged children in India? Shyam Young (1993-00) has done just that.

On leaving school, he joined the exodus of graduating students who enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce course at UWA. He studied, qualified and began a lucrative career in finance which saw him crunching numbers with one of the 'Big-4'.

Shyam was born here in Perth but has family in Singapore. His mother is Singaporean, so it is perhaps not so surprising that following an internship with Ernst & Young in Singapore, he stayed on to work for both E & Y and Citibank for some six years. He met and married a Singaporean girl and came back to Perth where Shyam eventually took up a Business Relationship Manager's position with ANZ.

"I was always a numbers person but what attracted me to relationship management was being able to help business owners with a part of the business that they didn't necessarily have a lot of expertise in. I felt I could add a lot of value."

Shyam and his wife holidayed in India in 2013 and a chance meeting with the friend of a friend over lunch changed the course of their lives.

After crunching some numbers of their own, Shyam and his wife Dora decided to sell their house and take up a six-month assignment with the Golden Avatar Foundation in the rural town of Nabadwip, West Bengal, not far from the border with Bangladesh.

Golden Avatar was established by a young Indian woman named Dalia who made a promise to give back to her community after struggling to fund her own education. She told herself that even if she could help

just one other student she would be happy and after she graduated she set about turning her dream into a reality, starting Golden Avatar in 2009.

She knew from her own upbringing just how important books and education were, especially in her area which is one of the poorest and most neglected parts of India. Many of the families are Bangladeshi refugees who had little or no education themselves: their children are growing up amongst crime, abuse, alcoholism and addiction with little prospect of employment. Almost the whole Nabadwip area is well under the world poverty line, with families of four struggling to make AU\$1.50 a day.

Golden Avatar currently looks after over 100 children aged between grades 5-12. Shyam is the Treasurer of the Foundation and uses his skills from the corporate world to help with matters pertaining to banking, accounting, legal issues and any administrative tasks that come up but he also teaches English, helps with feeding and preparation of food and the myriad of other tasks that present themselves on a daily basis.

