Marian Prince, adjunct professor of mathematics, training a group of teachers in Nepal on the use of TI calculators. (Photo by Submitted by Marian Prince)

In 2010, Marian Prince, adjunct professor of mathematics at Andrews University, began an effort to spread calculators around the world to students in need. Her organization, a nonprofit called Charitable Calculators, distributed used and donated TI calculators to schools in need and trained teachers to use them in order to make math easier to teach and learn. After its founding, the group made deliveries to international locations such as the University of Korce in Albania, Epping Forest Primary School in Jamaica, Université Adventiste d’Haïti and Gostivar High School in Macedonia, as well as domestic venues such as Porterville, California, Syracuse, New York, and Wimauma, Florida. Although Charitable Calculators closed in 2015, Prince has made four trips to schools in Kathmandu, Nepal, in order to donate calculators and provide instruction in their use.

Prince came to the Berrien Springs campus in 1989 to renew her teaching certificate. “I missed the non-renewing certificate by one semester,” she laughs. “It must’ve been a God thing.”

A passionate supporter of education from the start, Prince remained in the area after getting recertified to teach at an alternative education program in Niles.
Prince smiles as she reminisces on a particular experience with a student and a calculator. “He looked at me with these wide eyes and said, ‘Ms. Prince, I’m doing algebra!’ Calculators are a lot faster than spending an hour with paper and pencil, and it helps kids to visualize the math.” These experiences combined with her time with TI³, the educational arm of Texas Instruments, marked the start of what would be a longtime collaboration with calculators.

Prince began her calculator initiative domestically through Charitable Calculators, taking calculators around the country.

“I got involved in Nepal because a graduate student from New Mexico State University, Deepak Basyal, requested 250 calculators. I had 12,” she chuckles. This summer, Prince was asked by CHOICE Humanitarian, a non-profit working in communities with extreme poverty, to raise funds to buy 50 TI-Nspire CX handheld computers for the villages in Lamjung. The Lamjung District is just outside of the Kathmandu Valley, one of the major population centers in Nepal. Despite this proximity, most of the residents of Lamjung live in small communities subject to extreme poverty. Because of this reality, many Nepali children in these villages do not have access to the same opportunities provided to those in the city.

“This project creates a way to engage with and bring math alive for these village students,” Prince says. Through the programmed lessons and games found on the TI-Nspire and the other types of calculators she takes to their classrooms, students are able to experience tangible representations for the mathematical concepts they are learning. Interactive examples such as calculating densities based on properties of liquids and games such as Parabolic Angry Birds provide them with an in-depth educational experience and a much more straightforward communication of concepts.

“Training the teachers in 50 middle and high schools how to use the TI-Nspire CX graphing calculator to teach difficult topics in mathematics will be a big task,” says Prince.

Prince not only has to ensure that the actual mathematical concept is understood, but also teach an audience relatively unfamiliar with the calculators. Many teachers in Lamjung District have not interacted with an interface even remotely similar to the Nspire calculators, creating quite a challenge. But Prince is confident that despite the physical and academic challenges, God can and will provide.

“I’ve met so many incredible people, and I see God’s hand in everything and every person I meet,” she says with a smile. “I trust him to work out the details and as he opens a door I will do my best to take steps toward that door.”

Although we cannot all travel overseas, or even around the country, to provide instruction to teachers and students in need, Prince is convinced there are actions that can be taken, regardless of location.

As a volunteer, Prince teaches an after-school STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) Club at River Valley High School, and is currently tackling projects such as programming robots using calculators and helping to encourage young students to find a love for STEM. She is
open to individuals willing to observe and assist in this project. Anyone interested in getting involved should contact her at m.prince@andrews.edu.

In addition, if anyone is interested in traveling to Nepal, the Himalayan White House International College, Himalayan White House World School, Samata School and Scholars’ Home Academy are looking for students to assist in training and instructing others in the use of calculators. Prince hopes to return to Lamjung as early as January 2018 if the necessary $7,000 is raised before the end of 2017.

For more information on how to get involved, email m.prince@andrews.edu, or donate to the Nepal Calculator Initiative at gofundme.com/Nepal-calculator-initiative.

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