

Hackney is one of the most diverse places in the UK. In this regular feature, we profile the borough's great & good or just plain interesting

# hackneypeople

By Harriet Worsley

**I** GOT on a flight from Delhi to London with the name of my future manager and a telephone number in my hand. That was it," says Purvi Gupta.

Today, the Hackney resident seems every bit the Londoner. But in 2009, coming to the UK for the first time to take up her first ever job, she was lost.

"I'd go to the supermarket and be absolutely baffled," she says. "Or speak to someone from Scotland on the phone and understand nothing, not a word."

Meanwhile her "super welcoming" colleagues at the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline faced their own hurdles: "No one could pronounce my name," she laughs. "And 'Pervy' is not a pronunciation you want!"

Therein lay the challenge faced by so many migrants across the ages: "How to adapt to new ways, while keeping in touch with who you are and where you come from," says Purvi.

Purvi, however, has always been up for a challenge. As a child, her father's job for the Indian Railways company took the family to six or seven different cities as she grew up. "It made me open to new experiences and opportunities to learn."

Perhaps that is why, at the start of next year, Purvi will board a ship with 80 other women – most of them strangers – and journey to Antarctica, "living, eating, sleeping and learning at close quarters for three weeks".



Purvi Gupta has been selected to take part in Homeward Bound, an elite women's leadership programme, which will travel to Antarctica

She is part of a project called Homeward Bound – a women's leadership programme that, each year, selects just 80 women with science and technology backgrounds from across the world to take part.

"I never thought I'd make

the grade," says Purvi. "When I got the email I thought, yay! And then, immediately, I thought: Oh my God, what have I signed up for?"

The project's aim, she explains, is to increase the number of women in leadership positions around the world. Globally, only 22.8 per cent of all parliamentarians are women.

The management consultancy firm McKinsey & Co – for whom Purvi now works – estimates that advancing women's

equality could add \$12 trillion to the world's economy, roughly the size of the Chinese and US economies combined.

Homeward Bound is also based on the belief that increasing women's global influence – particularly in science and technology – could have a positive

impact on the planet.

Before undertaking their Antarctic adventure, the project's participants spend a year learning both about their own leadership potential and about the science of climate change. They are also encouraged to go out into their communities, give talks and

raise awareness both about the programme and the issues that empassion them.

"Women are not good at shouting loudly about what they're doing," says Purvi. To that end, she is keen that local organisations, schools, colleges and social groups should contact her.

"I've been interested in the issues surrounding healthcare and developing economies ever since I began work at GlaxoSmithKline," says Purvi. "And I'm also intent on making the issue of advancing women in leadership and science a big part of my life."

"I want to try to inspire and motivate girls to get into science and technology, because it's going to become a bigger and bigger problem in this country and across the world."

As well as talking to as many Hackney groups as possible – "I want to give back to the country and community that have given me so much" – she also wants to go back to the schools where she studied in India and France.

For Purvi, part of the programme's appeal is the cross-fertilisation of ideas that come from meeting women from different scientific fields and cultures.

"If women are going to contribute in a positive and powerful way," she says, "we have to sort out the issues that, across the world, are preventing them. Like healthcare, sanitation, education..."

"All these ideas that have been floating around for years are coming together for me now," she says. "I can't tell you quite what direction they will take me in yet, but I know it's a lifelong commitment."

**“ We have to sort out issues preventing women from contributing, like healthcare, sanitation and education ”**

## Curriculum Vitae: Purvi Gupta

- 1985** Born in Bhopal, India
- 2009** Graduated from IIT Madras
- 2009** Moved to the UK to work for GlaxoSmithKline
- 2013** Studied an MBA at INSEAD, France
- 2015** Began working for McKinsey & Co
- 2017** Picked to take part in the Homeward Bound project

## MORE INFO

To follow Purvi's journey through the year and to Antarctica, visit: [www.facebook.com/purvi.gupta](http://www.facebook.com/purvi.gupta). TeamHB2018