

WOW! 1st Overseas Community Service Trip - Chennai, India

After 6 months of hard work, we have seen our India trip plans turned into reality. This is thanks to the more than 200 people who have worked in one way or another to make it happen! I am glad to report that all who went felt that the trip has been fun and fruitful.



Arriving in happy spirits at Chennai Airport

This project took off after WOW! volunteer Hemma (pictured above) came back from India with video-footage of the Annai Fatimah Children's Welfare Home where she did a voluntary stint. That began a journey which became a little story in itself. Yes, there were moments that were discouraging but all the more, it required a steady sense of focus and direction from all of us.

When our small group of 6 finally set off from Changi Airport on 02 June 07, it was not without an element of disbelief. Was it really happening? Still, you can't help feeling exhilarated!

We were going to Chennai (formerly Madras) to check on the library for the Annai Fatimah home that we'd been raising funds for. At the same time, we were going to paint a mural there as well as to share some knowledge and skills with the residents of the home on mural, t-shirt silk screen and pebble painting.

As you can see, we were all smiles on arriving in Chennai but the weather was uncomfortably 40-degrees hot! Well, at least it wasn't humid like back in Singapore... MacDonald's was hard to find (yeahhhh!). Road traffic was frenetic and jarring at times. Traffic can come at you from all directions and sometimes, a little traffic jam held up

the vehicles because of the ubiquitous cattle (they're pretty gentle creatures who try hard to keep out of everyone's way actually, haha....) Certainly, a lot of give-and-take is required on the roads there. An experience for our youths used to things being orderly!

Our trip was, nevertheless, very much pleasant overall, people were warm and friendly, food was spicy but good!

But now – to the main focus of this article, our work in Chennai....

As planned, we headed immediately to the Annai Fatimah Children's Welfare Home headed by Mrs Rani Krishnan (below).



This home was co-founded by Mrs Rani more than 25 years ago and many of the residents were babies abandoned outside its gates. The home has a school for the smaller children and located beside it is the library that we'd been working hard to raise funds for.



By the time we finished our work at the home, the workers were already into the roofing of the library....For the entire costs (126,000 rupees), the library will come complete with book shelves, lightings and fans.

After checking on the progress of the library, we launched into our mural work with the main theme being butterflies. With only 6 days to do the mural, we put in 7 to 8 hours of work daily and I must say, our 4 WOW! youths and Hemma (also the **Volunteer Project Organiser**) have done well with the trying heat and insects! Lunch was either a quick cup noodles or oats and it certainly wasn't fun with the enamel paint sticking to us daily!



(Washing up after the day's mural work, WOW! Youths Rajveer, Qyisti and Jun Jie)

Although unplanned, we taught the boys of the home balloon sculpturing. So with the girls, we taught them t-shirt silkscreen painting.



The smiles and enthusiasm of the kids when learning were priceless...

After we'd finished our work at the home, Mrs Rani extended her kind hospitality by taking us for some sight-seeing around the city. This includes visiting St Thomas Hill Shrine, associated with St Thomas, an apostle of Christ who is believed to have been martyred there in AD 72.

We also paid a courtesy visit on Mr G K Vasan, a minister in the cabinet of the Government Of Tamilnadu who presented us with certificates for our work at the Annai Fatimah home.



WOW! youth Rakesh Kumar with Mr G K Vasan

After a few other interesting places including a film studio where we also met an Indian movie star...



...we returned to the home to say our goodbyes to the boys and girls. The girls in particular surprised us by actually taking the trouble to dress up for the photo shots with us.



Our work in Chennai wasn't done as yet as we had planned to visit a 2nd orphanage as well. There, we taught the boys silkscreen t-shirt printing....



See how proud they are of their design?

And the girls, pebble painting. This was what the girls produced...



We also presented the boys and girls with gifts of stationeries from well-wishers back in Singapore.

For this trip, we'd like very much to make the following acknowledgements and say a huge **"Nandri!"** to all who have helped, in particular ...

The National Youth Council
Deyi Secondary School
Kent Ridge Secondary School
Mr Illam and Family
Mr R T Sekar

WOW! Volunteer Ricky Tay

The SMU undergrads we worked with this year, Mr Julian Heng and friends
All who took part in the 6 recyclables collection drives especially the St Andrew's
Junior College students

Mr Morris Lee

Mr Tay Teng Hoon

And last but definitely not least,

Our Pathi (Grandmother, haha or Hemma's Grandma) and Hemma's relatives in
Chennai who helped to make our trip [in India](#) so much smoother.

And of course, the actual participants in the trip : Qyisti, Rajveer and Jun Jie (all from
Kent Ridge Secondary School) as well as Rakesh (ex-Kent Ridgean and now, ITE)
and Hemma.

What did they think of India? Against some of the feedback we had received before we
left for India, they thought **India's "cool, fun and it rocks!"** and **"it's not what you
think it is!"** **And they wanna go back!**