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Women complete an auto rickshaw driving course in Quilon, Kerala.

I received more than I gave . . .

SAFP supporter Noah Porter shares his experiences in India

After being connected to the work of Save A Family Plan in India for the past eighteen years of my life, I finally had the opportunity this past year to take an incredible journey that has changed my life forever. Since I was a young boy, I have always supported a family through funds that I either worked for doing jobs on the farm where I lived, or from birthday or Christmas gifts. So it was a real dream of mine to meet some of these families in person and see for myself how they lived and experience their culture. Nothing could have prepared me for the many new sights, sounds and smells of India! It was both a beautiful and sad country to visit...with extreme wealth and extreme poverty. I had many great and moving experiences such as arriving at the home of a family that I supported in *Cochin* for six years and walking into their small home and seeing a framed photo of myself on their table. To think that they cherished that photo and really did think about me all the way back in Canada brought tears to my eyes. It was amazing to see how well they were doing.



Despite the simplicity of the homes that many of the families that I visited lived, they were always so hospitable with providing me with tea, biscuits and even a chance to try traditional foods such as green mangos with hot chilies. They invited all their family and neighbours to come and see me.



I traveled north to Delhi to visit the SAFP Canadian Government supported program SPED III. This took me to Faridabad, Haryana where I visited the *Sanjoepuram Children's Village* (for physically and mentally challenged children); *Daleelgarh Village*, where they were doing many projects including: legal awareness classes on domestic violence and dowry; special programs for drop-out girls; adult literacy program; first aid kit distribution and awareness on first aid measures; medical camps; model toilets; non-formal education; pesticide free kitchen gardens; awareness program on safe drinking water; spoken english course, tailoring & beautician course; and youth clubs. We visited the *Village of Arua* where SAFP was undertaking a non-formal education program for the local children who were not attending regular school. They were so happy to be learning!

I then traveled back to Kerala and had the privilege of visiting the tomb of SAFP's founder, Monsignor Augustine Kandathil in *Vaikom*, who continues to inspire so many. After a long winding drive up through the mountains filled with tea plantations in *Munnar* (Western Ghats), we drove to a remote *Muthuvan Tribal settlement* to visit the *Girijothy Lower Primary School* and had a wonderful day interacting and sharing a simple lunch with the staff, students and parents. This project is done with SAFP in partnership with the *Diocese of Idukki*.

Another experience I will cherish was spending time at the *Don Bosco - Sneha Bhavan* - home for street boys & the *Valsalya Bhavan* - home for street girls located in *Pallurathury, Kerala* with Director, Fr. Joe Fernandez. While it was shocking to hear some of the stories of the children and their experiences of living on the streets, bus shelters and train stations, it was great to see what new opportunities they had through education, sports and a living in a family atmosphere with loving and supportive staff and volunteers.

For the final part of my trip, I travelled to the northern part of India, starting first in *Kolkata, West Bengal*. There I had the opportunity to visit the *Missionaries of Charity - Mother House* to see Mother Teresa's tomb. Kolkata was a difficult place to be - with so many families living on the streets and so much congestion and garbage. Our simple accommodation at *Seva Kendra, Diocese of Calcutta* was a refuge at the end of the day.

My trip would not have been complete without the unique experience of being on a train! We made our way to Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh where the Director, Fr. Gyan Prakash of the *Diocese of Varanasi - Purvanchal Gramin Chetna Samati - Centre for Rural Development* met us. By jeep we then travelled on a rough road for approx. 5 hours to reach *Raghopur, Ballia*, where we attended the inauguration of the food ration program for the *Nagar Block* and representatives from 20 villages and government officials attended. Our next stop was the *Village of Jetwar* where we saw a street play and learned of the other SAFP supported projects such as income generation; improvement of sanitation facilities, drainage, and roads.

I will never forget the local animators and coordinators of the programs and the dedicated staff at the Save A Family Plan India office. More importantly, I will cherish my time that I had with some of the most courageous and hardworking families that I have ever met in my life. Despite their many challenges and issues, they were making a difference in their lives. It truly was a once in a lifetime experience that I hope one day will be an inspiration for others.

Noah is presently in the Pre-Service Firefighter Program at Lambton College, Sarnia, Ontario

"I will cherish my time that I had with some of the most courageous and hardworking families that I have ever met in my life."





Villagers meet with a local elected official to submit a memorandum to address the issues of the village in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. SAFF's programs strive to foster and strengthen relationships between communities and the local government to help ensure that resources reach those in need.



These women near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, have received job cards from the local government and will now be able to participate in the national rural employment guarantee scheme, which ensures participants 100 days of paid work per year.



Children near Balasore, Orissa attend classes organized through SAFF's Community Development Program.



Children near Kochi, Kerala participate in an Environmental Awareness Rally organized by one of SAFF's partner organizations, Cultural Academy for Peace.



An Inspiration to the Community - Overcoming Disabilities

Irfan Salim is from the Puthenjunn village in Bathery, Kerala, South India. He is a shy but determined man who was born physically disabled and has no use of either of his legs. To help earn a living for the family, his wife Hafsa cleans houses. They have two children; an elder daughter, Tahseen, who is studying fifth grade and a younger daughter, Asifya who is studying second grade.

Both daughters suffer from tuberculosis and need expensive medicine and treatment, which the family cannot afford. The Family Development Program staff members have worked with the family to find a suitable income generation project for Irfan that would give the family more financial stability.

Irfan was able to attend a bicycle repair workshop and was motivated to begin a small business using his new skill. As he gained momentum and excitement, he expressed his desire to start a small snack shop near

their house as well, as there were none in the neighborhood. Now he is successfully operating both of his businesses and has accessed a government resource that provided him with a three wheeled motor bike, allowing him to complete his tasks more quickly.

He is not only an example of how this program can allow a family to become self-reliant, but he is a source of inspiration for others in his community. He does not allow his disability to limit him.



Save A Family Plan

If you have questions, would like to make a donation, or inquire about

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