

India Partnership

An insightful trip to a beautiful but challenging environment where the warmth of the people makes you see beyond the difficult physical conditions. You smile, share experiences and recognise the importance of being part of a community. India is a colourful place that touched the 12 upper 6th formers and 3 members of staff on this annual Partnership trip.



The journey began early as we sleepily made our way to Gatwick Airport, backpacks filled with clothes ready for the 35 degree heat we had been told to expect, a few goodies that we may crave and teaching resources to help us once we reached our destination. Before that we had a 36 hour journey ahead of us so we piled into two planes and then what was to become a well known cosy bus, diving between traffic beeping incessantly as we looked out on 'real India'. We stopped for our first taste of authentic Indian cuisine, remembering to use only our right hands, as we picked food off a banana leaf. As the journey continued the day warmed up turning the bus into an oven! Luckily we were heading to the cooler mountains and whilst the roads were narrow we could take in the stunning views over Tamil Nadu before we reached Thandigudi Goodwill home. Here all traces of tiredness quickly evaporated and the journey was forgotten when we were welcomed by children running and cheering, they could not hold back their excitement at our arrival.



Thangiudi is a charming set of buildings where the young children have their 'family homes', and their own school a short walk up the hill. Nearby there are several villages and we soon wandered through the coffee plantations to visit one. Whilst curiously observed by the locals we saw how people lived and the type of places some of the children we would get to know really come from.



There was however work to be done to reach our aim of teaching the orphans and so once we had been given some tasty curry, dahl and much more we met to plan the next days activities. A daily routine was to develop as the Canfordians would work in pairs to plan their next days lesson, teaching English, Maths and much more through a series of active lessons that ranged from acting out stories in the playground to shop roll playing. The Canfordians showed not only willing and ability but also inspired some of the local teachers who sat and watched or at times couldn't resist but give the answer!



When not in the classroom more energy was called for as the children thrived on the additional attention, wanting to play or at times tricking us with a new kind of handshake. They showed off their memory skills as they remembered our names better than we could theirs. They have a good work ethic, seen especially as they grow older, moving to either the girls or boys homes, a separation legally required, once they reach secondary school.

Another highlight of our trip was taking the bus to visit first the teenage girls at Pattiveeranpatti and later the teenage boys at Sarnapatti down on the planes. Dance performances were held by locals and us and time was taken to simply chat and play games. It seemed several of the Canfordians were touched by how similar these teenagers were to themselves yet whose surroundings and opportunities would lead to such a different way of life in this beautiful but challenging country.



We experienced many more projects as we stayed at another, smaller orphanage, Awake, where a single family have built on their prior experience at Goodwill and opened their own home to more children. We also stayed at TORP a local 'Tribal Outreach Program' center that focused on helping people in their homes rather than at an orphanage. Helping those who ask to improve their homes or holding informative meetings for women in the area so that they may play a stronger role in supporting their families. We were invited to teach in a local village school, an opportunity we have promised to build on in future visits before learning about the innovative health system (very different to our own) that has been set up through local generosity of spirit.



Finally this partnership is also about building long term relationships. Highly valued by locals this has opened many additional doors and we were honoured with many blessings, invitations into people's homes and even took part in a local festival which led not only to dancing but also ringing in our ears from the loud music. We took part in the annual sports day where the atmosphere built on already strong feelings of attachment. Humbling experiences that I would recommend as in the end we were the ones being taught about life in a caring community.

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