

Kathryn Fortune

Summer of Service in Kolkata, India 2017



For my Summer of Service trip, I went to Kolkata, India to serve with the Missionaries of Charity, a religious service organization started by Mother Teresa.



The culture in India is a very vibrant expression of life; its home to spicy food, bright colored clothes, and incredibly busy streets that are heavily populated! On our way to and from our service locations, we would frequently get street chai, a popular drink in India.



Every morning, we would start off our day by gathering with the other volunteers at the Motherhouse. After our breakfast and catching up with the volunteers, we would be led in a prayer by the sister in charge of volunteers and then meet with our group to head off to our service location.

It was incredibly humbling to serve where Mother Teresa started her organization. Her tomb is a frequent stop for pilgrims and the door outside the Motherhouse always says that Mother Teresa is “In.”



In the morning, I would volunteer at Kalighat, the home for dying and destitute. This was actually the first home that Mother Teresa set up in 1952.

While there, the other volunteers and I did laundry, served meals, and provided much companionship and love to the women. Back and hand massages were a common request from the residents as well as painting their nails and coloring.

One of my favorite parts of the day would be doing the morning walks with the women around the beds with music on to get their spirits up. Unfortunately, many residents were very ill and the other part of our morning was spent taking care of them in their weakest moments.



The volunteer community was great in Kolkata. People came from all over the world to serve for as short as a few days to many months. This is a picture of us outside of Kalighat.



This is a picture of Shanti with whom I became close to during my time in Kolkata. She was such a beautiful and amazing woman. Every day I would help her with her physical therapy exercises in her legs to build her strength and recovery from a previous injury that left her immobile. Hopefully, she will one day be able to walk again!

While it was frustrating at times, I realized that I didn't necessarily need to speak the language in order to care for the women and children. More meaningful than the use of language to connect was to simply be there and listen to them. Shanti and I relied on more than language to communicate with each other and build a friendship.



In the afternoons, I volunteered at Shishu Bhavan, a children's home down the street from where we lived. The children's ages ranged from just a few days old to around 7 or 8. The group that I worked with was the little toddlers around 1 or 2 years old. While there, we played with the children and fed them dinner.





Sometimes, families on their birthday would bring in treats or cakes for the children which they loved.



This little baby had cleft palate surgery and is doing great!



Play time!

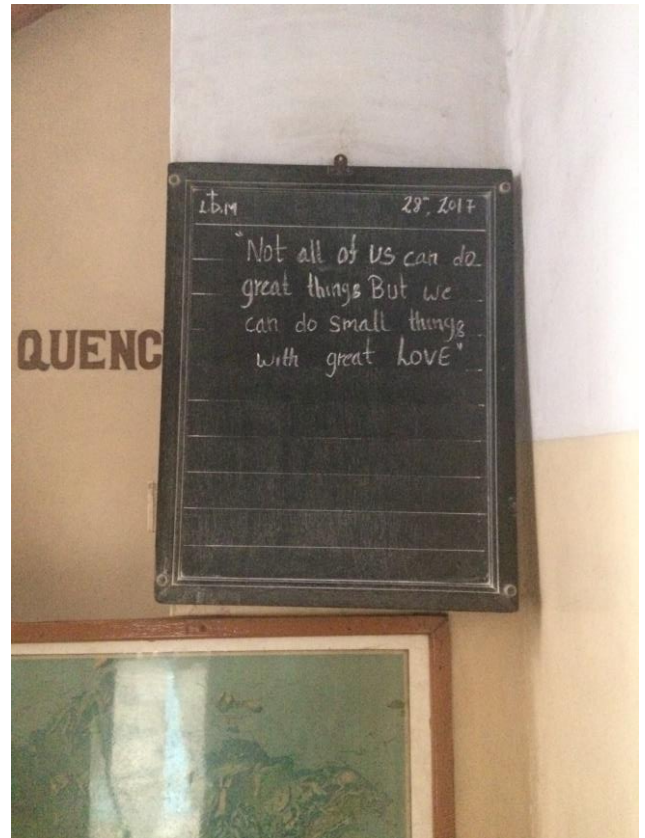


While we were there, we were excited to see a few children get adopted!



Thursdays were the volunteers' days off. One Thursday, we visited the Leprosy Colony run by the Missionaries of Charity Brothers. It was an entirely self-sufficient community: they raised their own animals, cooked their own foods from the gardens, and made their own clothes. Despite their physical limitations from leprosy, each had a job including making the saris for the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity all over the world!

Another Thursday, we visited Freeset, a clothing company that hires women who were formerly sex trafficked and offers them employment and support.



Overall, I am so grateful to have served in Kolkata. Every day, I was inspired by the resident's unwavering trust in God and hope amid their despair. I have never met such pure women or joyful children who were some of the kindest, most compassionate, and people of faith that I have ever met.

While my time in Kolkata has come to an end, I am endlessly grateful for the time I spent there and to the women and children that I met as well as the amazing volunteers and Sisters who work tirelessly to help those in the impoverished community.

As Mother Teresa said, "You can find your Kolkata all over the world, if you have the eyes to see." I plan to continue to do just that.