

Last year, a group of young people from around New Zealand took a trip to North India, where they learned about the history of Presbyterian mission and immersed themselves in Indian culture.

Going Global is a project between Global Mission and Presbyterian Youth Ministry, which aims to introduce young people to churches overseas and provide opportunities for them to participate in mission. In previous years, groups have visited Myanmar and Vanuatu. This trip explored our Church's mission history in India, and the 11 participants learned about the changing mission context and visited projects that the Church is currently supporting.

"We have a long mission history with the Church of North India (CNI) — more than 100 years — so it was appropriate to take a team there," says Global Mission Coordinator Rev Phil King. "New Zealanders have been serving in the medical, educational and pastoral fields, and have made significant contributions. Their legacy is still very much alive. We don't want the story to die; we want to encourage, inspire and motivate a new generation."

The first stop was Delhi, where the group interacted and worshipped with the CNI Synod. They were shown around by the Delhi Brotherhood Society, a non-government organisation that bases its mission on Christian principles. The team visited social programmes that the Brotherhood runs such as a boys' hostel, a technical training institute, and a school for children of commercial sex workers. "The Delhi Brotherhood have so many projects," says Kylie Windle of Somervell Presbyterian Church in Remuera, who was a senior member of the team. "They work with young people, old people, the homeless, children, and they offer vocational training. The breadth of the support they're offering, and not just to Christians, blew me away."

"It was enlightening and challenging," adds Brian Rowley, one of the co-leaders on the trip. "We were confronted by the reality of how different life is in India. We saw it through the young people's eyes, which was very interesting."

Mana Leasi, who attends Porirua Pacific Island Presbyterian Church, was one of those young people. "I applied to go on the trip after Phil came to our church to talk about the mission," she says. "It really grabbed my attention, and wasn't something I had known much about before."

For Mana, the high point was being part of the lives of the people and building connections. "We met with the locals and were a part of everyday life for them for that two and a half weeks," she says. "It was great visiting the nursing school at Jagadhri, seeing the staff and children at St Thomas's School and visiting the leper colony. We got to take part in people's lives, see the challenges they live with and how they overcome them. I would definitely love to go again, but I came home feeling much more appreciative of what we have here in New Zealand."

Mana says she was expecting to face a few challenges on the trip. "I knew there would be a culture shock, especially because of the busyness of life there, and the realities of the caste system. There was all that and more. It was a real eye-opener. Facing the poverty was one of the hardest things — seeing how real and extreme it is."



GOING GLOBAL IN INDIA

"The group saw Indian culture in its rawest form," says Phil. "We were hosted by people locally, we saw people in slums, a leper colony... it was very confronting, but also very inspiring and humbling to see how they cope in a culture that shuns them and keeps them separate. The team learned about Indian religion and culture, and how the caste system is still very prevalent. We had a really good session about that and its impact on society."

The team was encouraged to think about how they could give back in some way. "It doesn't have to be in India," says Phil. "It's about the Kingdom of God and spreading the good news to people wherever you are in the world. We have great wealth at our fingertips and should give back. It was a spiritual journey for each member of the team, and part of a discipleship process. It really touched their hearts."

A training day in Auckland helped the team prepare for the trip. The young people were briefed on cross-cultural relationships and were given other useful information, says Phil. "The team came together really well. Everyone shared and respected the others, which was a key reason for the success of the mission."

There were several team members with medical backgrounds, and the visits to Indian hospitals supported by the Church were of particular interest to them. "We visited the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Ludhiana," recalls Brian. "Our medical team members got to see how different things were. It was a good facility and well equipped, though other places we saw had 50 patients to a room and were far more basic. One striking thing was how holistic the care was. They treat the whole person,



The Going Global team were welcomed by students from the School of Nursing at Jagadhri Christian Hospital.

physical and spiritual, and that's a very different approach from the New Zealand one."

They also had the opportunity to talk and pray with patients and their families. "We were interacting with mostly non-Christian people, but they were very open to being prayed for," says Brian.

The whole team was amazed by the warmth of the hospitality they received wherever they went. "We were put on a pedestal and treated like royalty," says Kylie. "Everywhere we went we were given gifts and performed for! One thing that struck me was how happy a lot of the people we met seemed, when they have so little. They're so spiritually welcoming and accepting of Christianity."

A particular high point for Kylie was visiting the Avalon Girls' Hostel, where 15 of the girls are directly supported by Somervell Church. "I took pictures of all the girls and wrote down their names and ages to share with the church. If people can see who they are, it makes it a more direct relationship rather than just a financial one."

The group took a bus trip to the Himalaya foothills with the girls. "It was so exciting for them, and was real quality time," says Kylie. "The next day we saw them at school, which was lovely. It was an intense time as the girls were emotionally needy and we were pulled in lots of directions. They wanted to make an impression on us."

Brian took his group to the St Paul's Hostel School for boys. He had visited two years back, when the hostel was really struggling, and was delighted to see how it had improved and

become more home-like. "We got to know the boys there, which was meaningful for them and for us," he says. "We taught them frisbee, and really related to them despite the fact that they had quite limited English. They never get Western visitors, and they told us they'd never forget our visit. It really cut you to the heart to hear that."

Most of the boys are from small villages where there is no hope of education. The parents and the local church put some funding toward the school, and the CNI Synod also supports it. "It was fantastic how the boys cared for one another," says Brian. "Their ages ranged from five to 18, and the five-year-olds would sit on the older ones' knees. They gave each other huge support, and the leadership there was fantastic."

"To see the legacy of what the Church has established in North India was amazing," he adds. "People's lives have changed phenomenally through Christian mission, and not just through physical activities. It has impacted people's lives for the long term. The children and grandchildren of people who were down-and-out are now educated with decent jobs thanks to Christian mission and education. It's had a phenomenal impact across generations."

"Going Global India was a great success," concludes Phil. "It was a challenge to put together but was a great privilege to travel with the team, who were so open to learning and sharing, and respectful of the culture we went into. We learned a great deal, and the trip really developed our relationship with the CNI too."

Kate Davidson [Spanz](#)