



# Community Development in Chennai, India



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## Chennai, India

India is a country in South Asia with a population of over 1.3 billion people. India is extremely diverse, being made up of 29 states and 7 union territories, with 22 different languages being spoken across the country. Hindi and English are the two most common languages spoken in India.

Chennai is the capital city of the state of Tamil Nadu, with a population of over 8 million people. The primary language spoken in Chennai is Tamil. Fun fact: Chennai has been nicknamed, "The Detroit of India" due to its growing automobile industry!

## Irular Tribe

The Irular tribe live in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. Their local language is called Irula and is related to the Tamil language. Traditionally, the Irular would hunt and collect forest resources. The Irular are known for their impressive ability to catch snakes!



## Madras Christian College (MCC) & ActionAid

I completed my global field placement at two different agencies. Two days a week I worked at an NGO called ActionAid India. ActionAid works with marginalized communities across India to fight poverty and injustice. ActionAid (Chennai office) works primarily with women and tribal communities.

The other 2 days I was placed in Thirukalukundam (TK) with 3 other MCC social work students to assist the Irular tribe reach self-sustainability after the 2015 Chennai floods. This program was started by the Social Work Department at MCC and is called the Field Action Program. We called ourselves Team TK!

## Field Placement Responsibilities

At ActionAid, I was responsible for participating in field visits to observe various trainings organized by ActionAid. I would write reports of these events and would also conduct interviews to develop case studies for several of ActionAid's programs. Lastly, I helped write and edit proposals to provide flood relief for victims impacted by the Kerala floods.

In TK, I helped conduct needs assessments of several Irular communities in the district. In addition, I helped organize a livelihood program for the Irular women, and a traditional folk and dance program for the Irular men and children. Lastly, I developed a business model to identify local and international markets for the Irular women to sell their hand woven bags.

## Skills Developed

Due to my global field placement, I now feel more confident in the following skills:

- Taking initiative & being a stronger leader
- Writing reports and grants under tight deadlines
- Building meaningful relationships with community partners and members

## Classroom Connections

SW 683: Evaluation in Social Work

This course taught me different research designs as well as data collection tools that can be used in evaluating a program.

SW 648: Issues in Global Social Work Practice

This course provided me with a basic understanding of what global social work entails and provided some basic insight into the type of work I might complete in my placement. It was also a great opportunity to engage with other students who were also completing global field placements.

## Lessons Learned

- Don't assume you know what's best for a community and do take the time to understand a community's needs
- Communication is critical in community organizing
- Being an effective social worker requires patience
- Self-care is essential!



## Career Connections

As I begin my career as a social worker, I want to continue working with multicultural populations, either in the US or abroad. I hope to find a job that will allow me to work closely with communities, accurately assess their needs, and conduct data informed evaluations.

## Advice

- Connect with former U-M students who were placed at MCC as well as current MCC students
- Research MCC and ActionAid as well as Tamil Nadu's history and culture
- Stay hydrated! Chennai heat is no joke!

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