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INTERNATIONAL FIELD EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL WORK: OUTCOMES OF A SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM TO INDIA.

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the development of an accessible, short-term (two-week) international field experience program for distance education and on-campus social work students at a regional university in Australia. Pre-program and post-program evaluation surveys were undertaken and results indicate that the international study experience had significant positive impacts on student learning, student group cohesion, professional commitment and motivation as well as an enhanced appreciation of international social work, grassroots community development work, cultural diversity, human rights and social justice issues. Other positive impacts included ongoing relationships with social justice projects in India and positive, practical contributions to placement agencies during the active phase of the program. The need for adequate academic preparation, reciprocity, as well as ongoing academic support and facilitation of short-term study abroad programs is reinforced.

(125 words abstract)

*Key words – study abroad programs, international social work, short-term international programs, global social work, distance education, student evaluation of international practicum*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In November 2010, the authors led a group of eighteen students on the inaugural Social Work India Study Program from Charles Sturt University (CSU) in the state of New South Wales in regional Australia. This paper describes the rationale for and content of the program. Using qualitative data from pre-program and post-program student evaluations, impacts of this international social work study experience and implications for teaching and social work education are discussed.

Before describing the program, it is useful to consider the literature on international social work to outline the program's conceptual framework and the value of such programs in social work education along with their potential to contribute to the profession and its emancipatory aims more broadly.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Definitions of 'international social work' generally include some reference to social work action at local or global levels to redress inequalities in a global context (IFSW, 2005; Cox & Pawar, 2006; Healy, 2008; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Hugman, 2010). Cox and Pawar (2006) note that social work in the twenty-first century should reflect its global responsibilities and they reinforce the need for the profession to respond to global challenges at all levels of practice from local to global levels. Further, Payne and Askeland (2008, p.9) advocate for greater efforts to globalise the social work profession so that 'economic, political and cultural relationships between people across the world are enhanced' and 'contextual knowledge' creation is encouraged.

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The need for more curriculum content on international social work is quite well established in the literature (Panos, Cox, Pettys & Jones-Hart, 2004; IFSW, 2005; Cox & Pawar, 2006; Lyons, 2006; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Wehbi, 2009; Dominelli, 2010; Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal & Monnickendam, 2011). There is a consensus that Western social work in particular, must maintain the effort to truly globalize the profession in order to enact the core values of empowerment, social justice and human rights and to fulfil the mission of social work and its emancipatory aims (Cox & Pawar, 2006). However it is also imperative that Western social work traditions and standards are not imposed on non-Western social work traditions and that indigenous social work knowledge is validated. Indeed social work as a global profession stands to benefit from the conceptual richness of a critical, post-colonial approach to diverse social work traditions (Author 1, 2001; Staniforth, Fouche & O'Brien, 2001; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Wehbi, 2009; Hugman, 2010; Author 2, 2012; Dominelli & Hackett, 2012).

Social work educators thus have a key role to play in internationalizing social work curricula and specifically, to ensure that social justice and human rights principles are central in social work education (Engstrom & Jones 2007; O'Brien, 2011). Funge (2011, p.81), Lough (2009) and Mukherjee (2011) encourage social work educators to focus not only on the development of students' professional competencies, but also on the 'active cultivation' of an educationally 'transformative experience' to 'promote social change' and mutually beneficial relationships between the host country and the source country; international field

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experiences have the potential to provide transformative learning and teaching experiences.

Along with the desirability of incorporating content on meaningful international social work theory into curricula, the incorporation of international experiential learning opportunities such as placements and study abroad programs into the curricula is well-supported in the literature. Cox and Pawar (2006, p.360, citing Caragata & Sanchez, 2002 and Johnson, 2004) note that many schools of social work in Canada, the United States of America (USA), Australia and New Zealand have links with international agencies and have 'quite often placed a few students abroad' but sometimes 'very little' was done to effectively integrate international learning into curricula. They go on to note that in the USA, there have been positive developments and professional support for the integration of international social work as per the Council for Social Work Education 'Education Policy and Accreditation Standards'. Panos et al. (2004) note that since the mid 1980s, international study experience, as a component of Western social work degrees, has steadily increased with India being one of the most popular destinations for practicum, short and longer-term study tours, conferences and exchanges. Mukherjee (2011) describes how the number of USA students engaged in international programs has doubled from the 1990s to early 2000s.

International field experiences can broaden participants' perspectives on core social work values, ethics and purpose by taking students and staff from familiar to unfamiliar contexts of practice (Lyons, 2006). The international field work experience is a critical component in globalizing the profession as it directly

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exposes participants to cross-cultural issues as well as diversity in theory and modes of practice (Cleak & Wilson, 2004; Panos et al., 2004). Student participants in an international field experience describe it as ‘as challenging as it is rewarding’ (Pawar, Hanna & Sheridan, 2004, p.223).

The literature establishes a rationale for experiential, international educational opportunities to enhance social work students’ global citizenship and commitment to informed action towards social justice and human rights. International programs can offer students a transformative experience that goes beyond social work education based on instrumental competencies (Abram & Cruce 2007; Lough 2009; Funge 2011). Opportunities for students to experience international practice also encourage the development of contextual knowledge (Payne & Askeland 2008) and reinforce the profession’s commitment to responsible global citizenship (Cox & Pawar 2006). These aims, combined with the host university’s desire to expand its range of international study programs, motivated the authors initiate a study abroad program for distance education as well as on-campus social work students.

### **THE SOCIAL WORK INDIA STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM**

Following is a description of the context of and rationale for the program, its aims, overall structure, recruitment of participants, evaluation methods and phases of activity. Outcomes from the pre and post-program evaluations are discussed in chronological order to provide a sense of the development of the program from initiation to completion.

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### **Context and rationale**

CSU is a multi-campus university located in regional New South Wales, Australia. The university has a student enrolment of just over 32,000 domestic students. Approximately one-third of students study on-campus and the remaining two-thirds study by distance education mode (off-campus/flexible learning). There are approximately 1500 students in the Social Work and Human Services program at CSU, with most students studying by distance education (DE). DE students in social work are required to attend intensive residential teaching programs on the main campus for at least one week each semester of their degree (CSU, 2010a & b). The on-campus and DE cohorts generally differ in some key ways; most DE students are mature-age, study part-time and many have some relevant work experience while on-campus students are typically younger, school leavers with little or no relevant work experience who study full-time.

In terms of international social work curriculum content in the CSU social work course, there is a distinct international social development (elective) subject available within the degree as well as some dispersal of international social work content in core subjects in the degree. CSU has placed students in overseas practica with India, the United Kingdom and South East Asia being the most popular destinations. Each year, a small number of students (<5) engage in semester-long student exchange, with Canada being the most popular location (CSU, 2010b).

In developing and expanding international opportunities, it was very important that DE students have equitable access as these students are a significant part of the Social Work student cohort. Equity of opportunity - regardless of study mode - was a guiding principle along with a belief that a short term study abroad program could prove more practicable and accessible for mature age, part-time and DE students.



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### **Aims of the program**

The program was developed as a transnational partnership (Mukherjee, 2011) between the university and the India Study Abroad Centre (ISAC), based in Mumbai. ISAC representatives visited CSU in April 2010 and met with social work academics to discuss the program. The challenge was to develop an international experience that was practicable and equitable for DE students with family and work commitments and who otherwise would be unlikely to undertake study abroad via semester-length or full-year exchange programs. Informed by the literature, the overall aims of the program were to provide students with a transformative experiential learning opportunity in an international setting in a developing country and to encourage responsible global citizenship and social work practice.

From the outset it was anticipated that an international program for social work students would assist student learning, particularly in terms of core professional values and knowledge relating to human rights, social justice and cultural sensitivity and to thereby encourage graduates to consolidate their commitment to these values in ongoing professional practice. It was hoped that student activities while on placement would contribute in meaningful, ongoing ways to the host agency and community. The program also provides an opportunity for students to experience group work, community work and residential living in another culture as well as an opportunity to consider how international social work may be incorporated into their professional knowledge base. The program also offers a chance to observe and consider indigenous approaches to social work in working towards global social work practice education and frameworks.

### **Structure of the program**

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The duration of the active, on-site (India) phase of the program was two weeks.

The pre-departure program commenced in June and ran until departure in mid November 2010. There were three formal meetings (via teleconference) during this time and additional individual consultation between staff and students as required, usually via telephone and email. Pre-program evaluation surveys were distributed in the week prior to departure and post-program surveys within a week of returning from India. Data from these surveys provides an indication of student perceptions of the program. While this is useful information, it is limited and not generalisable given the small sample size and response rates.

Week one of the on-site program was devoted to orientation and observation.

Group visits to community agencies to observe grassroots development programs were organised along with general familiarisation in the local area. In week two, student placements were planned with the aim of making some contribution (even if modest) to the work of the agency in meaningful, negotiated and mutually beneficial ways. Academic staff facilitated reflective workshops at the end of weeks one and two and provided extensive daily support, debriefing and consultation to students for the duration of the on-site program. The two-week program does not currently count towards the practicum hours required for students to meet professional accreditation standards. As the program develops over time, meaningful ways of acknowledging this additional field experience will be negotiated.

### **Recruitment of participants**

The program was promoted to on-campus students during class time and to DE students during the April 2010 intensive on-campus teaching block and via online course sites.

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Interested students were required to complete an application form and eligibility criteria included a sound academic record, current passport and motivation to actively participate in the pre-departure preparation program. Signed consent was also obtained at this stage so that aspects of students' participation and feedback could be used by the University for publication and promotion purposes.

Twenty-two students applied and twenty were selected; one student later withdrew for health reasons and one student was excluded in the week prior to departure for disciplinary reasons (failure to participate in the pre-departure program). There were seventeen female students and one male with an age range from early twenties to late fifties. Students came from both DE (13 students) mode and full-time on-campus mode (5 students) and in terms of level of study, there were students from second, third and fourth years (full-time equivalent).

Seventeen students were enrolled in the undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work degree and one student (female, DE mode, mature age) was enrolled in the Master of Social Work, postgraduate degree. Sixteen students had travelled abroad before (two had previously travelled to India); two students had not travelled outside Australia (one student had never been on an aeroplane); no-one in the group spoke the local languages.

### **Pre-departure phase**

A great deal of care and attention was devoted to the pre-departure phase of the program with students and staff engaging with international social work literature as well as discussion and reflection on professional values, models of practice and generic orientation to social justice and human rights issues in India. The academic facilitators and students alike were keen to emphasize the potential value of educational opportunities offered by the program and to avoid it becoming a 'tourist trip' (Hugman, 2010; Lough, 2009).

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With these aims in mind, and in consultation with university administration and the partnering provider in India, planning commenced in April 2010 for the inaugural program scheduled for November 2010. All parties worked on building sustainable multilateral relationships with the aim being that the program should be mutually beneficial to the university and its students and staff as well as to the partnering agency (ISAC) and the host agencies and the communities in India (Mathieson & Lager 2007; Lough, 2009; Mukherjee, 2011).

In addition to the preparatory work with our transnational partners, a dedicated 'Social Work India Study Program' site was established within the university's existing online study environment. The online mode of delivery ensures that geographically dispersed students have easy access to the pre-departure program (Quinney, 2005). This was well utilized for student-staff communication, distribution of forms, resources, audio-visual information, readings, web links to journal articles, synchronous and asynchronous messages and student 'chat'. In the period July to November, staff and students also engaged in a series of three pre-departure orientation sessions (via teleconference) to prepare for the experience. These sessions covered academic, administrative as well as practical aspects of the program and enabled the group to build cohesion and identity.

### **Pre-program evaluation and results**

Pre-program evaluations were undertaken using voluntary written student evaluation surveys; only non-identifying information was collected. Students were advised that their information would be used for future planning purposes and potential publication. Surveys were completed by email and sent to an administration assistant who ensured each response was indeed non-identifying before returning collated data to the academic facilitators. Forty-four percent of students chose to complete the survey. Students were asked to describe their general expectations of the program, as well as to use a seven-point scale to rate their

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understanding of social justice, human rights, community development, international social work and cultural diversity.

### *Expectations*

When asked to identify their hopes and expectations of the program, eight students stated that they hoped to gain increased cultural appreciation and understanding; seven hoped to gain a broader view of social work and international social work in particular; three wanted to increase self awareness and gain a different perspective on their own context; two wanted to challenge their assumptions and world view; three wanted to increase their knowledge and understanding of community development; and two wanted to increase their practical knowledge and skill base. Qualitative comments included:

Professionally, I wish to work overseas as an international social worker. I expect that this trip will provide me with a foundation to develop professionally in this way.

I think it's important to experience, firsthand, the complexity of social development and its implications, to broaden my own perceptions and understanding when addressing international social work issues.

These comments reinforce the value of experiential learning in general in social work and in relation to international social work in particular (Cox & Pawar, 2006; Lyon, 2006).

### *Motivations*

Students had varying motivations for participating in the study tour. Some wanted the opportunity to travel with other social workers and share learning experiences; some wanted to connect with other social work students; some wanted to engage in non-tourist travel; others wanted to engage in more in-depth learning; some wanted to experience international

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development work; some wanted to pursue special interest in community development; some wanted to pursue a specific interest in India; and, some were interested in contrasting developed and developing countries.

Qualitative comments regarding motivation for joining the program comments included -

To give me the confidence to use my social work degree, if I choose, to its widest applications – locally, interstate, nationally, and now, internationally.

I want to know more about the strategies that could bring about human rights and social justice at the grass roots level.

*Understanding of human rights, social justice and international social work*

Students were also asked to describe their current understanding of ‘human rights’ with six indicating that they had a general understanding of human rights and three indicating that they intended to research human rights issues further prior to leaving for India. One student commented;

I have strong views that social workers throughout the world should work to promote social justice, human dignity and human rights on a global level.

For this student, the imperative for social work to consolidate itself at a global level is clear. Other students were also generally appreciative of the international study opportunity with comments such as:

I will be studying ‘International Social Development’ over summer. This subject will enrich my experience overseas.

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The degree that I've nearly finished will ... open so many doors, including internationally.

### **The active, onsite phase of the program**

For the duration of the two-week program, the group lived in the rural village of Malavli, a two-to-three hour road trip from Mumbai in the state of Marahastra. In week one, the group engaged in community orientation activities, visits to community welfare agencies in the local rural area as well as in the major cities of Mumbai and Pune. Agencies included an HIV/AIDS program, a women's empowerment program, a micro-credit/grassroots community development farm, a leprosy community and child welfare agencies. Students were asked to reflect upon the communities and agencies; understand service delivery contexts; understand the unique challenges of international practice in a developing country; appreciate the wide variety of opportunities for social work in rural and urban India; and engage in daily facilitator-guided sessions for reflection, de-briefing and discussion held in-transit and in the evenings.

Experiential learning was a central feature of the program with students completing short placements in week two in six agencies including two orphanages, two disability services and two mobile health vans. All agencies were under-resourced and operating in conditions unfamiliar to most Western eyes such as extensive 'slum' areas and remote rural villages with very little basic infrastructure (roads, clean water, etc).. Students were asked negotiate with their placement agencies to deliver a service or task of value to the agency. They were also asked to focus on theory and practice integration in their efforts to relate their studies in community work, group work, casework and social development to

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real situations in an international context. Students were also asked to reflect on diversity, poverty, human rights and social justice issues in the context of cross-cultural practice as they engaged in the daily facilitator-guided sessions for reflection, de-briefing and discussion each evening.

### ***Student Placements***

Students were assigned in groups (of three) to one of the following six placement sites:

- 1 & 2. ***Sadhu Vaswani Mission's Mobile Health Van and Samparc Mobile Health Van*** - Mobile health vans visit remote rural and tribal villages. Students observed rural communities and households at close quarters and documented the village health profile.
3. ***Natural Buddha School/Orphanage*** – The school accommodates 74 children who have been rescued from the railway lines or destitution on the streets. The orphanage consists of three rooms where by day, the children are taught and by night, they sleep on floor mats. Students re-wrote a funding brochure and an application for additional funding. They updated some of the children's case files.
4. ***Kamshet English School/ Boarding Orphanage (KESBO)*** – KESBO provides shelter and education to war-affected boys from the Kashmir region. Students participated in the activities of the school and learnt more about issues of child protection. The students completed an assessment of the health and sanitation needs of the orphanage, using internationally accepted standards.
5. ***Society for the Education of the Crippled (SEC)***: This centre works with children who have physical disabilities. It has a workshop for making prosthetic aids and a training centre for people with a disability. It also has a school and dormitory



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living for many of its students. While on placement, CSU students assisted SEC staff in taking students on an excursion to Mumbai.

6. *Samwad Shala* - This school also works with children with an intellectual or developmental disabilities. CSU students locally sourced and donated a range of teaching aids and engaged in activities with the children.

### ***IMPACTS ON STUDENT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT***

#### **Post-program student evaluations**

Using a format similar to the pre-program survey, students were asked to rate various aspects of the program on a seven-point scale as well as to provide a qualitative account for six survey items: the overall value of the experience; level of understanding of human rights and social justice; appreciation of international social work; experience and understanding of cultural sensitivity; understanding of community development; and, appreciation and understanding of the social work profession.

The response rate for this voluntary survey was 39% - slightly lower than for the pre-program survey (44%) however this is still within the expected rate of response for voluntary surveys (Alston and Bowles, 2003). A higher response rate would have been preferable to provide a stronger indication of the range of student experiences and it is possible that the responses are biased in the positive.

#### ***Overall value of the program***

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Overall, students described their field experience in India as valuable with 71% of respondents assessing a maximum rating of 7 and 29% with a rating of 6. The qualitative comments included:

Without a doubt, one of the most valuable things I have experienced... I will treasure it and continue to reflect on it in years to come. I feel as though the trip was life-changing.

It has honestly been the most worthwhile part of my education. I would recommend that all social work students have a similar experience.

It was more valuable than I even realise at the moment. I am still processing the experience. I have gained a global perspective... and witnessed creative, innovative interventions to address human need.

Valuable, life-changing, thought-provoking and I am still learning through this experience, long after I have left the country... experiences which cannot be accessed on the 'tourist trail'.

I have travelled widely but the experience of being embedded with workers and meeting people in context has been very rewarding. I feel the experience will impact on the way I practice as a social worker.

These comments indicate a range of positive outcomes for student engagement and retention as well as to re-motivate and re-focus social workers' efforts towards broader social justice issues. Some of the comments also indicate the prospect for ongoing reflection and the potential for transformation (Lough, 2009) and an appreciation of the value of indigenous approaches to social work and for building social work as a global profession (Cox & Pawar, 2006; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Lough, 2009; Hugman, 2010; Funge, 2011). Some comments

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also indicate that there is a clear distinction between international tourist travel and international field experience.

### *Impacts on understanding of human rights and social justice*

Students were also asked about their understanding of 'human rights' and whether the study program had increased their understanding of human rights and social justice with 43% assessing the maximum rating (7), 29% rating 6, 28% rating 5.

The qualitative comments are illuminating and are testament to the influence that innovative opportunities for intense experiential learning can have in complementing theoretical knowledge in the process of developing a sound professional knowledge base beyond technical-rational competency-based approaches to teaching in social work:

Sometimes it is easy, especially at the end of a 4-year degree, to see the role of the social worker as defined by the agency from which they practice. My trip to India has reminded me that social work can be, and often is in India, a lifestyle. It reminded me... that there is still room ... for radical thinking and that sometimes settling for current policies is the worst thing to do.

Experiences while in India gave me more than learning from books-only, lectures and TV programs. You think you can understand, but until you are there with your senses all in tune to your surroundings, you understand the theory behind what people and their organisations are trying to achieve in relation to human rights and social justice.

Human rights are entitlements to resources – not begging for resources. There is dignity in human rights work... and the creative and effective use of limited funds.

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Decisions and actions we take in our own society, communities and individually, impact on others...Social work has a responsibility to think broadly and act to engage the communities we work in... This study tour brought the complexities of this home to me.

For many students, the intensity of the program seems to have created an opportunity to reflect on a range of theory and practice issues as well as critical analysis. This underlines the importance of adequate academic preparation and program facilitation (Panos et al., 2004; Lough, 2009).

### *Impacts on understanding of international social work*

The efficacy and importance of experiential learning was also reflected in comments on 'international social work' like:

I am interested to see how social work looks and operates in another country. I realised how much social work practice is influenced and impacted by the culture in which it is occurring. In India there is more community focus and in Australia, more individualism.

Prior to this trip I had very limited knowledge of international social work. My experiences in India have completely changed the way I view international social work.

The use of a human rights framework in community development was particularly valuable given the dominance of the therapeutic approach in the area in which I work.

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For these students, the opportunity to directly experience another non-Western culture and to experience social work practice had significant impacts on awareness of their cultural context and how Western social work is constructed within its context with a focus at the micro level. The study abroad experience helped to emphasise social work's mezzo and macro domains.

### *Impacts on cultural sensitivity*

Students rated how their experiences in India affected their appreciation of what it means to be 'culturally sensitive'. Fifty-seven percent rated 7, 29% rated 6, 14% rated 5 indicating that their international field experience had a significant, positive impact of this aspect of social work practice. Again student comments were revealing and indicate some real growth in cross-cultural understanding:

From the minute we landed in India until the time we left, we were required to be constantly mindful of Indian culture and customs and adjust our behaviours so as to conduct ourselves in a manner appropriate and sensitive to everyone we met.

The trip provided me with strong learning experiences about how communication is filtered through our own cultural lens. Not being able to rely on my usual communication reference points was a challenging learning experience.

Lough (2011) asserts that intercultural competence is most likely to be gained via longer-term programs with an emphasis on cultural immersion, guided reflection and reciprocity. These responses indicate that even short-term programs can have a positive impact on cultural competence, with guided reflection being a key factor in maximising learning.

### *Impacts on understanding of community work and social work as a profession*

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Students rated how the program impacted on their understanding of community development work. Seventy-one percent rated 7 and 29% rated 6 on the 7 point scale, again indicating significant, positive benefit. The comments were insightful:

The work I have seen in India is so innovative... we could adapt it to our context... I have a better understanding and a keen interest in community development as the result.

We saw active consultation, goal-setting and decision-making to create social change at the grassroots level, rather than from the top-down.

Participants were asked to consider whether their understanding of social work as a profession has been enhanced by the experiences in India. Again the ratings were affirmative (71% rated 7, 29% rated 6) and again the comments reflected real learning and depth of understanding and a reaffirmation of the worth and potential of social work core values:

This trip has really confirmed for me the diversity and scope of social work... It is exciting to know that ... I can work in a lot of different contexts... and to remind me of the important work that social workers do on an individual, group and especially at a community level.

Knowledge and skills I have learnt are transferable in another context, culture and country. This has given me the confidence to look outside my own backyard for social work opportunities.

The trip provided a vivid and at times confronting opportunity to broaden my understanding of the international social justice aspects of our profession.

### **Other impacts**

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### *Behaviour and self-awareness*

Importantly, participants were asked to personally reflect on the changes they may make as a result of the program and the ideas and actions they may have already undertaken as a result of the experience. Responses included, at a personal level to: be less materialistic; share photos of India with family and friends; renew their sense of being a global citizen; use Fair Trade and ethical products; take a more holistic view of social justice and poverty; and, to increase charitable donations. At a profession and social level, participants identified: child sponsorship; fundraising; guest speaking in community organisations; and, through an ongoing commitment to placement agencies. Other ongoing activities included: continued research into issues in India; use of online sites to maintain connections with other participants; presentations to and networking with other social work students about international field work; writing journal articles; and, planning return trips to India. It is difficult to predict the longevity of these changes but it is hoped they are sustained. Further follow-up research on this aspect of the program would be informative.

### *Host community and agencies*

There were tangible benefits for the host community and placement agencies as a result of students' activities. For example, students worked directly with service users and agency workers for the benefit of the community; they assisted in classrooms, updated agency documentation, completed funding submissions, completed evaluation reports, systematized agency records and provided material aid in the form of donations of clothing, educational equipment and a range of supplies. The multidimensional value of these contributions is considerable; students developed meaningful, ongoing relationships with their host agencies and since the trip, ongoing, sustainable activities have been initiated to ensure that the

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University's contribution to social justice and equity outcomes for the rural poor in one part of India is sustained.

As evidence of the impact of the program on student and staff development, the following list indicates the breadth of impact that the 2010 program had on partner organisations in India.

Within six months of completion of the on-site phase of the program, the following activities had been initiated:

- A student spoke at her local (small, regional town) community service club and others delivered co-presentations at several of the university's residential schools for DE students; others have established and actively maintain online social networking sites;
- A grant of \$2000 (AUD) to the Natural Buddha School for construction of additional accommodation, water filtration and sanitation upgrades;
- Students on placement at KESBO wrote a submission for a university grant of \$1500 (AUD) for some high priority health and sanitation work identified in their report. The grant was subsequently approved and the repair work commenced;
- At least an additional seven children are being sponsored in orphanages as a result of this trip;
- One participant advocated for the CSU Social Work Student Association to sponsor a child through student donations;
- Accounts of the Study Program have been published in Australian Association of Social Workers newsletters;
- On-going email contact with Indian agencies;
- A nebuliser was provided for the health van at Malavli.



## CONCLUSION

Based on experience, the keys to success for short-term international study programs include: adequate academic preparation, ongoing facilitation and support; purposeful program design to encourage mutually beneficial outcomes for students, host agencies and the communities they serve; and given the intensity of the program, adequate opportunities for guided reflection, de-briefing and discussion appear integral to the program's success.

Data from evaluations provides some evidence of the potential impacts on student learning, engagement and motivation with many students describing the program as the highlight of their time at university. Outcomes indicate the potential for short term international programs to generate genuine educational, transnational relationships and collaboration between students, staff and partner organisations.

Based on outcomes from the inaugural program, further development is needed to extend the program beyond its current unilateral basis by developing bilateral and multilateral opportunities to enable students from non-Western countries to experience social work in another context. This would encourage a broader notion of global citizenship and mutuality in international social work. More research is needed on the process of academic facilitation and the process of recruiting and preparing staff to work in unfamiliar contexts.

Short-term programs have a meaningful role to play in social work education ideally as part of a wider range of educational opportunities open to students. Adequate liaison with and preparation of all stakeholders as well as consistent academic facilitation appear to be key ingredients for success. Shorter-term study abroad programs also have the advantage of being more accessible for DE, mature-age and part-time students. In the interests of equity and

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accessibility, ideally students should be offered a range of programs to encourage experiential learning in international social work.

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