

Emily Fisher  
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I went to New Delhi this summer to learn how individuals with autism spectrum disorder receive services, and how these individuals interact with greater Indian society. It is estimated that one in sixty-eight people in India fall somewhere on the autism spectrum. There are an increasing amount of services available for those with ASD, though they are still scarce and often overcrowded due to the overwhelming need in Delhi's population of almost ten million people. Limited awareness, a social stigma still associated with the disorder, and a lack of available diagnostic services and therapies restrict opportunities in care for people with disability in the city. Resources for individuals with disabilities are rarely an area of governmental focus because of the enormity of other social issues that plague this developing nation. However, I realized upon my arrival that my experience should center on the incredible resources and research I had the chance to observe and be a part of, rather than an absence of care. My experience taught me about how disability care and services are integrated the local community in Delhi, and how impactful the placement of these services can be for the neighborhood, the city, the nation, and the region.

Through my Experience the World Fellowship provided by the Kellogg Institute, I spent my time in India interning at Action for Autism, a nonprofit organization with a mission to serve children and adults with autism spectrum disorder through a special needs school, research, therapies, education for families, advocacy work, and an adult vocational center. Action for Autism was founded in the 1990s when two mothers took it upon themselves to provide a quality education and therapeutic services to their children. The organization has a strong credibility in the southern Delhi neighborhood of Jasola Vihar, and throughout greater India; families have

traveled from several states away to receive treatment and diagnostic services at the organization's headquarters. Very unique to the region, Action for Autism establishes the cost of its services contingent on the ability of the family to pay; contrastingly, most special needs programs and schools in Delhi are very expensive and only available to the affluent. During my five weeks at Action for Autism, I worked as an assistant teacher at the adult vocational center and a research assistant. I also observed several diagnostic and therapy sessions, to gain an understanding of all the services available to individuals and families at the organization.

I anticipated that communication would be a challenge during my time in India, due to my limited knowledge of Hindi, the predominant language in Delhi. Additionally, the condition of autism spectrum disorder is trademarked by deficits in social interaction and communication. As an assistant teacher I struggled to connect with the adults in the program for lack of Hindi with those individuals who were verbal, and those who had limited social interactive ability. I was determined to make connections and get to know the adults in the program, and over time I was develop a unique relationship with each individual. A common misconception about autism spectrum disorder is that individuals do not want to interact and communicate, although usually it only appears this way due to the deficits themselves; people with ASD still crave to form relationships with others. These communicative barriers forced me to become creative in my approach to engage each individual, and over the course of my internship I was able to form strong, impactful friendships with every adult in the vocational center program.

The most significant challenge I faced during my time in Delhi was the newfound independence, and responsibility I had gained overnight, with little idea of what to expect. I lived in a single apartment on the top floor of the Action for Autism building, responsible conjuring up most of my meals and planning my time outside of work hours. I was alone, seven thousand

miles from home, new to Indian culture and incompetent in Hindi, with more free time than I knew what to do with. “Culture shock” was definitely an issue during my first week or so in Delhi, but I was determined to use my time to learn as much as possible within my means, both at work in the context of developmental disability in India and generally in the history and culture of Delhi. Living alone in Delhi taught me more about independence, self-reliance, and the necessity to explore and learn from other cultures than anything I have ever done before. Small tasks such as understanding the metro lines, ordering food, and exploring cultural heritage sites on my own became great accomplishments. I remained cautious and alert while traveling in the city, but I learned the most when I was able to immerse myself in Delhi and its amazing culture and history.

My opportunity to volunteer, research, and observe at Action for Autism taught me about how important this nonprofit organization was to its community and beyond. In seeing the great work that Action for Autism does, unfortunately I also saw the necessity for expanded services to reach more people in need—every program at the organization has a lengthy waiting list. In consulting with teachers and researchers at the organization, it seems most pressing that adult services become more available; there are more special needs schools in Delhi now than ever before, but little for families to access for their children once they age-out of school-run disability programs. My work as an assistant teacher, and the research I participated in involving a longitudinal study of adults with ASD in Delhi affirm this need; many adults with autism spectrum disorder have the potential to become integrated into larger society with the right resources, but their progress is stunted when the services that improved their ability are no longer available. Action for Autism and the city of Delhi affirmed my passion for working with individuals with disabilities, showed me the power of dedicated individuals to make a difference

in seemingly hopeless situations, and reminded me how much there is to learn from a culture distant from my own.