

## *Beco e InSPIREd*

### India Summer Program Inspiring Reflective Exploration

“Here comes a rough turn guys! Ready? Row left NOW!”

There we were, the InSPIRE party of ten, sitting in an economy-sized raft, taking on the Yamuna River rapids with paddles in hand. Together we faced the Yamuna’s turbulent whitewaters. Together we enjoyed the peace of calm, still waters. Together we played in clear, shallow waters. Together we traveled North India in search of something missing in our lives.

The India Summer Program Inspiring Reflective Exploration (InSPIRE) is an experiment crafted by two Indian-American youth, who dedicated their post-college years to understanding and serving the people and the land of their heritage. The *purpose* of InSPIRE is two-fold. It provides an outlet for South Asian-American youth (18 to 24 years of age) interested in contributing to the social betterment of India. It offers the chance to explore multiple social sectors of India. InSPIRE’s *goal* is simple: to empower youth so they can discover their passions and challenge their assumptions. For me, the program was five weeks of being mentally challenged; it was a call to step out of comfort zones in order to understand myself and my interdependent relationship with society and the environment at a deeper level; it allowed me to feel the strength of connecting with another human being.

As its namesake implies, InSPIRE was about getting *inspired* to set and achieve goals. Inspiration came from every interaction we had with NGO volunteers, villagers, slum dwellers, children, and each other. In each city, we interacted with NGOs working for positive change in a gamut of social sectors. We participated in workshops on service work, the human connection, economics, urban development, education, self-awareness, organic farming, consumerism, and our footprint in the environment. What I found most valuable was that we dove into great detail about these topics. Each workshop made an impact on my thought process, and each changed my perspective on life, just a little. All sorts of perspectives were re-examined including the smell of clean laundry, the taste of drinkable water, and on a more serious note, the implications of urban development in India. However, these changes in mindset did not come easy; it required a lot of internal questioning of our individual perceptions of reality. In this way, InSPIRE was intense because a strong will was needed to reevaluate and strengthen ideals.

InSPIRE was about *connecting* with ourselves and humanity. Through the course of five weeks, the InSPIRE gang became each other’s second family. Every night we sat together and reflected about the day’s events. We pushed each other to think more critically about our role in the world. We developed a strong understanding of each other’s perspectives and truly respected one another. We helped each other progress in our paths of life. We routinely sat for group meditation sessions. The mind and body connection was vitalized by doing yoga in the morning. We were creating harmony within ourselves which could be used to spread positive energy to those we interacted with.

Serving humanity was the essence of what was missing in our lives; and we realized that by serving India’s people through InSPIRE. Most of us did not speak the native language, and yet we still found ways to connect with people. Non-verbal communication made the connection

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profound and real. I was surprised by how much I benefited from serving people. The amount of happiness I gained was much more than the gain of the people I served. This happiness came from acting out of love for humanity.

“Everything is clearer when we’re in love.”

When I first heard this quote on the second day of InSPIRE, I was amused by its simplicity. I categorized the quote as one of those ill-translated Hindi sayings. But by the end of the trip, I felt the power behind the unique order of these words, as it became the motto of y InSPIRE.

We worked for the service of others; we faced emotionally turbulent times; and we enjoyed the smiles of our labor of love. We did it together.

If you are interested in learning more about InSPIRE or if you would like to apply for the program, please visit our website: [www.SummerInIndia.org](http://www.SummerInIndia.org)

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