



Shallin Scott-MacNeil sat next to a 40-year-old painting that symbolizes strength and good luck while visiting a city palace in Udaipur during her "Me to We" trip to India back in July. While there, she also participated in a painting class with a city palace painter.

—Submitted photos

'Me to We' trip to India enjoyed

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she explained.

"I believe they ended up using most of the water we carried back for them."

A Fort Frances High School student selected as one of the winners of the Rainy River District School Board's travel scholarship recently embarked on a "Me to We" trip to India.

During her stay there from July 3-18, 15-year-old Shallin Scott-MacNeil did work with regards to women's rights, building schools, and creating sustainability in less-fortunate communities.

She also learned about the country's culture, traditions, and customs, as well as how to speak Hindi, which was very enjoyable for her.

"The trip was very culturally-focused," Scott-MacNeil said. "We focused on women's rights which is something I'm very passionate about."

She said there currently is a struggle for gender equality in India and that the "Me to We" group she stayed with did work to help lessen that gap.

One of the more surprising things Scott-MacNeil learned while speaking with local female students was the prominence of child marriage.

"Child marriage is quite a big thing there," she remarked. "Even though there's laws to help protect against it, it still happens."

In fact, she admitted to experiencing some culture shock when the Indian schoolgirls were asking her group why they weren't yet married.



Shallin Scott-MacNeil wore a sari during her two-week "Me to We" trip to India earlier this summer.

"It was one of the more shocking things," Scott-MacNeil conceded.

While there, her group helped demolish a section of a local school that was built incorrectly to allow them to build a more suitable learning area.

"We were helping to make this school a lot more cooler in temperature because when you're inside one of those classrooms, it's really dark, humid, hot, and hard to learn in," she explained.

Scott-MacNeil also had the chance to participate in a "water walk" while there, in which she transported a pot of water long distances from the water source back to the community.

"We did the water walk to see what it's like and to just help out the families there, too,"

she said for them. Building wells for water-less communities was another important part of Scott-MacNeil's experience.

"Some people walk at least eight kilometres to reach a well, which is kind of insane," she remarked.

Halfway through the trip, the local teen had the chance to visit some markets and engage in some bartering.

"Bargaining is a big thing there," she noted, adding it's a part of their daily life.

Her favourite part of the trip was interacting with the locals, learning the language, and trying to connect with them on a personal level.

Scott-MacNeil recommends other high school students apply for "Me to We" trips if they're passionate about making a difference, adding it was really gratifying to visit India and was an "eye-opening experience."

Looking ahead, Scott-MacNeil hopes to embark on a "Me to We" trip to the Amazon down the road, as well as return to India.

After high school, she hopes to do humanitarian work in less-fortunate countries.

"One of the things I'd like to do when I'm older is help people in other countries that need it," Scott-MacNeil enthused.

"Be some sort of humanitarian aid."