This summer, I had the wonderful opportunity to intern at Mumbai Mobile Creches, a non-profit organization that provides free day care as well as other social and educational support for migrant construction workers and their families. The families they serve are often in very difficult situations, having migrated to a new state in search of a viable income. Without Mumbai Mobile Creches’ intervention, many young children living on construction sites would be left to look after themselves all day in a hazardous environment. Through their day care program, after-school program, and community initiatives, Mumbai Mobile Creches (MMC) has supported the health, safety, and education of over 100,000 children living on construction sites in the Mumbai area. Interning at this organization over the summer allowed me to learn new skills, meet amazing people, and learn about how successful non-profit organizations work.

As a human rights major, many of my classes at Columbia have examined non-profit organizations and their potential to initiate social change. My time at MMC was invaluable because it allowed me to experience first-hand the inner workings of an effective non-profit and learn many skills that I will hopefully be able to use in my future career. During the two months I volunteered with Mumbai Mobile Creches, my role was to support the organization’s fundraising and communications team. I spent most of the summer working on the annual report, which provides detailed information about MMC’s programs, organizational development, and demographics of the population served. I edited a draft of the annual report for grammar and clarity, and designed its infographics. This was one of the aspects of my internship that I enjoyed the most, because I had the opportunity to learn the new skill of using Adobe Illustrator to create designs that represent information in a clear, interesting way. Other tasks that I worked on included drafting a video about one of MMC’s reading programs, designing the layout of emails
for a fundraising campaign, and researching new ways to effectively demonstrate the organization’s impact.

But beyond the concrete skills that this internship taught me, just getting to know the people who work at MMC taught me much about what makes a successful non-profit. Each person that I met at MMC was entirely focused on the mission of the organization: that each child will one day be able to have a nurturing and happy childhood. This attitude showed both through their work ethic and the grassroots approach of the organization. Ever since the first week of my internship, I noticed that MMC employees stayed as late as they needed to finish their work each day, often an hour or two after the office was supposed to close. But everyone had such a positive attitude and were happy to stay because they knew that all their efforts would help the children enrolled in MMC’s programs. Furthermore, even though I spent most of the time working in the office, the fundraising and communications team would regularly take me to visit one of MMC’s day care centers, because they knew that it was important for each volunteer to see what the organization is really about and to establish a relationship with the children.

Visiting the day care centers is probably my fondest memory from my internship this summer. Anyone who visits can see clearly how much MMC is able to accomplish in each construction site they work in. Their day care centers and after school programs are housed in modest rooms provided by the construction companies, and the centers have three classrooms, dividing the children up by age. The children seemed really excited to meet a new person, and we had so much fun playing games and drawing. They taught me some words in Hindi and Marathi and we read stories together. I could really see MMC’s mission shine through at these
centers, because the children were so excited to be there, learned new concepts very fast, and had a lot of fun with their classmates and teachers.

Spending the summer working on the annual report and having conversations with my supervisors also really familiarized me with MMC’s grassroots approach to developing their program. Through constant interaction with the migrant construction workers they were serving, MMC is able to appreciate the intricacies of their situation and shape their programs accordingly to facilitate the best outcome. For example, by law each child is entitled to an education. However, many migrant parents worry that their children are not eligible for school because they do not carry national ID cards. Through regular informal interactions with these parents, MMC teachers were able to identify this lapse in communication and now regularly help enroll their children in schools. Even though MMC also advocates for policies that help migrant families at the national level, the root of their work is molded by the communities they serve. This was a great principle to learn that I will take with me in my future career.

My time with MMC this summer reinforced my goal of working at a non-profit organization after I graduate, and gave me insights and skills that will help me achieve that goal. Often times when talking about careers in social work or non-profits, people emphasize how easy it is to become frustrated and disillusioned with your work. But spending the summer with the dedicated and hopeful people at Mumbai Mobile Creches inspired me to continue to pursue this career path by showing me that if you believe in the mission of an organization and offer all your efforts to directly help people, you will motivated to keep working hard with a positive attitude. I am very grateful to Mumbai Mobile Creches, the Columbia Experience Overseas program, and the CCE Summer Funding Program for this opportunity. I feel very lucky to have
met all the MMC employees, teachers, and children and would definitely recommend anyone who is interested in working for a good cause to apply to this internship.