

Dear Friends of Operation Shanti,

We're in our **seventh** year of our work and our children's home, Karunya Mane (KM), has been open for almost **five** years. In this newsletter, we talk about educating our kids and the issues we often face doing so. The kids sure are getting taller as they continue on the right path to good health and good grades in school, and we are proud of what they are accomplishing. See our website (www.operation-shanti.org) and our blog (operationshanti.blogspot.com) for ongoing updates. Thank you for the generous support over the past seven years. We couldn't have done it without you.

Project Home: Focus on Education

The Little Ones

A child growing up on the street has little structure and guidance, and his parents (if he has any) aren't concerned about his education; they are just trying to figure out where the next meal will come from.

Generally, the younger a kid is when arriving at KM, the better our chance of having a positive influence on her life, particularly regarding education. We are seeing some of our kids from the streets and slums hold their own in school with middle-class kids, particularly when given the right support and guidance from a young age. This year, our two littlest ones, Jeevan (age 2½, below left) and Venkatesh (age 3½, right), are attending very good private schools in our area.



Venkatesh was born into a homeless family and lived on the streets until he came to Karunya Mane at the age of 3. His primary caretaker was his grannie Kaveriamma, who lives on the streets with his mom and dad, who were only 16 and 18 years old at the time of his birth and are incapable of caring for him.

Jeevan was born in a grass shack in a slum and lived there for the first two years of his life before coming to Karunya Mane. This year, we enrolled him in the Montessori-based school in the neighborhood for super-teeny-tots (2-year-olds). Jeevan attends school from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on weekdays, and enjoys activities like learning rhymes and the ABCs, playtime with educational toys and games, project work (building a house), watching a plant grow at home, snack time, and outings and picnics. The little ones even have "exams" comprised of a singing and rhyme competition.

Their teachers say that both little boys are excellent students in school—they are well behaved, play with the other children, are learning to recite the ABCs and several rhymes in English ("Twinkle Twinkle..."), exhibit an ever-expanding vocabulary, and listen!



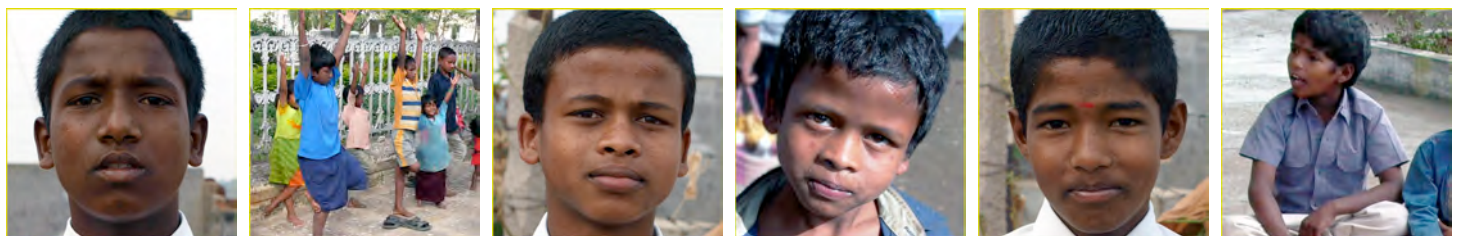
The Older Kids

When we started Karunya Mane, eight of our older (age 10-13) street kids came to live with us. They were the first kids we met when we started working on the streets in 2005. Of these eight, four remain with us. The road has been rocky with these kids, primarily because they were older, lived on the streets, and were set in their ways when we met them. Street kids enjoy freedom and independence at a young age, and although they attended school for a year or two or sporadically over the years, they rarely did homework or prepared for exams. Living at Karunya Mane, with its structure and rules, was a difficult adjustment. The four who left told us that they were no longer interested in an education or living at KM, despite the free services and care available to them, including food, shelter, and medical.

Hanging in There

This past year was a milestone for our four remaining ex-street kids, Harish (age 15, bottom right pictures), Manikanta (age 14, middle two pictures), Sreenivas (age 17, bottom left pictures), and Asha (age 19, above and right). They continue to pursue their education and are determined to go as far as they can. Watching their friends quit last year was not easy and, except for Asha, the boys are sometimes tempted to join them back on the street to enjoy the perceived freedom and independence of their old lifestyle. Yet, these four teens understand that the only way out of the cycle of poverty is to get an education and then get as good a job as they can. They know that we are here to support them for as long as they stay in school. We provide constant encouragement and fill their free time with tutoring, extracurricular activities, and volunteer work at our neighbors, the animal shelter.

After seven years with these kids, we can say without a doubt that they are very intelligent; have incredible potential, a streak of independence, proactiveness, and initiative unique for kids their age; and have lots of love and positive energy to give to the world; they simply lacked the support that kids need and deserve during their early childhood years.



Other Challenges

A challenge we sometimes face is taking in a “medium” size kid (as one of our sweet house mothers calls our kids between ages 9 and 12-ish) who has gone to public/government school for years but, for various reasons, can’t read or write. School system rules do not allow a child who is behind in studies to enter a grade lower than her age (“redshirting”), so a 9-year-old who can’t read or write is required to be admitted to 3rd grade, making it very difficult for her to learn appropriately. One of our older girls who used to live with her mother on the street and is now in 9th grade is struggling because she never had the chance to develop a good foundation from grades 1 through 7 before arriving at KM two years ago.

One More Thing

Emphasizing education is critical, of course, but equally important for children to perform to their potential in school is good physical, emotional, and mental health. However, when caring for 44 kids of all ages, and all with different needs and requirements, ensuring that everyone is emotionally satisfied, healthy, and well-fed (and not throwing their dinner vegetables in the trash can when nobody is looking!) can be interesting. We continue to refine and systematize our basic “operations,” including the ever-important daily schedule, food delivery and use, clothing management, and medical care, and have implemented a volunteer mentor program and counseling—all of which give the house mothers more time to spend on a one-on-one basis with the kids where needed.


Finally... as we end Year Five...

Hats off to our tutors, or tuition (tutoring is called “tuition” in India) teachers for their dedication and hard work over the past four academic years at KM. We are fortunate to have nine dedicated, talented teachers—most who have been with us for the entire time at Karunya Mane. They come every day after school for two hours to teach our kids, help them with their homework, and impart in them good habits and positive life lessons.

Our teachers have seen our kids change from misfits who used to fight in class, speak inappropriately, and not bother to wash up before studying into disciplined children who take much better care of their books and pencils and who rarely utter a bad word (at least not in front of the adults!).

Little Shilpa came to KM at the age of 7 in April 2011, about a month before school was to begin. Before coming to KM, Shilpa lived in a grass shack with her little brothers Vishnu and Jeevan, whom she took care of when mom went out to find work. She had never attended school and could not read or write.

Chandrika, one of our tutors, took her under

her wing and taught her diligently during the month of May. After Shilpa started in 1st grade in June, the only grades she received throughout her first year were A+s. She continues her outstanding performance this year in 2nd grade.

Mamatha Miss, our 2nd grade teacher, has been little Jyothi’s tutor for four years (LKG, UKG, 1st, 2nd). Jyothi, once a malnourished baby living on the streets of Mysore, excels in school with A+s and As. Swarana, also one of Mamatha’s students, failed 1st grade her first time around; after a year of tutoring by Mamatha (above), she passed 1st grade with A+s and is now getting solid A+s and As in all of her subjects in 2nd grade.

Our star pupil, Surya, went from 1st rank in his 1st grade class to 5th rank in 2nd grade when he stayed for one year in the school dormitory, and he’s now back at KM and has regained his #1 spot in 3rd grade with the help of Priya Miss, his tutor. Priya, our first teacher at KM, has been instrumental in encouraging our kids in their studies and has helped recruit a few of our other excellent teachers.


Project Street and Project Food

We continue to maintain our Project Food and More at 51 kids. The newest additions this year include **Priyanka**, who lost her mom to HIV a few years ago and who now lives with dad in a slum area of Mysore, and **Pooja**, who lost both her parents to HIV and now lives with grandma Jayamma in their village about an hour from Mysore. Jayamma works for daily wages when she can find work and has a difficult time taking care of Pooja. Priyanka’s dad sells fabric on commission and earns about ₹3,000 (US\$65) a month. He is also HIV+ and takes antiretrovirals. For more on Project Street and Project Food, and how you can help, please see our website.

Ways to Help

- Sponsor a Project Food and More kid for just \$25 (₹1,200) a month.
- A few of our kids at Karunya Mane still need sponsors. Want to sponsor Kartik, Lalitha, big Darshan, Manu, Mohan, Netra, Pooja, or Prajwal?
- To donate online (or for other donation options), please see our website for details: www.operation-shanti.org/donate.html
- We’re looking for an art/creativity teacher in Mysore. If you know someone, please send him/her our way!



- We have two short-term needs. (1) **Children’s chewable multivitamins**. If you would like to donate a bottle or two, let us know! (2) Twelve of our older kids need **braces (“clips”)** and we’ll visit the orthodontist in a couple of months for evaluations. From start to finish (one to two years), total treatment per child is approximately US\$350. Please donate if you are able to and let’s give our kids nice, straight teeth!

Really make a difference. Donate today.