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I come from a total poverty line background and when my father died I was enrolled in a children's home in my town with my older brother.

It was both 'good and bad' luck that I developed patches confirmed as leprosy. It did mean changing to another children's home at New Hope, Vizianagaram. I had to shift because the Home manager feared having a child with leprosy in the Home in those days. At New Hope I received multidrug treatment and am cured totally without deformity. I now advocate more use of the medical definition of 'Hansen's Disease' as against the still stigmatised word of 'leprosy'.

It also meant that I had the opportunity after 10th standard to work for the organisation. I was an under study for various jobs to the director.

In staying at the Home I had my first experience in meeting and learning about children that came to live and beg on railway station platforms. New Hope run programmes for these children. Many of the children from the platform became my closest friends. It gave me insight to their problems.

Experience:

Out of the 10 odd years that I spent with NEW HOPE I gained not just training to be a capable project implementer and manager, but a number of direct project responsibilities and experiences:

- 3 year's preparing and presenting the monthly reports of the NEWHOPE Children's Home programmes-in Andhra -Pradesh. This involved monitoring both the financial cost and the 'care level' of children being looked after.
- Following the Orissa Cyclone in 1999 I was involved in setting up the post cyclone 'Stayput' programmes on railway -platforms.
- Preparation and translation of the Home manuals and development of the `Child to Child` concept into-the programmes.
- Monitoring and Reporting for the HIV/AIDS project that covered the Gunupur Sub-Division of Rayagada District, Orissa-- including all schools. The monitoring position was for 2 years.
- Management of the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh state AIDS Cell programmes in Vizianagaram District for 1 year. This --included planning, implementation and reporting of the work carried out.

Seminars and Training:

- I am a promoter of the concept of changing the name of 'leprosy' to H.D (Hansen's Disease) to bring about a lower stigmatisation problem. I have attended a number of workshops (All India Leprosy Workers Congress, IDEA --International) on this and presented papers at same.
- A fund-raising workshop run by the South Asia Fund-raising Group for 6 days in Hyderabad.
- Project Planning and Management training, at Cenderet, Bhubaneswar for 7 days.

Office Experience:

It would be fair to say that I have managed office administration including staff of up to 5 persons over the last 5 years. I basically know all needed computer programmes. I am also familiar with report formats as used by the UK Community Fund.

Present Position:

In January 2000 I decided to take all of this background and experience and branch out on my own. I have founded an organisation, HEARTS (Health, Education, Awareness, Rehabilitation and Treatment Society) and have established a home for Street Children in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

In June 2001 I had the opportunity to work part time as a co-ordinator for a UK based NGO, The Railway Children. This involves visiting, reporting of the funded NGO partners and supervising childcare.

HEARTS - ACTIVITIES REPORT - DECEMBER 2002

Background:

As we look back over the past year, we feel a great sense of achievement. A little cash/kind contributed by our donors and benefactors, a few words of wisdom/advice from our experienced elders and well wishers. A little time spent by the Management Committee members with assistance of our dedicated staff has brought light and life to the burdensome existence of our children who subsist from day to day.

You would be happy to note for example, that donations from the UK have made it possible for a number of Street Children to live in our Night Shelter rather than on Streets or Platforms.

To us the issue of children's rights lies at the heart of the Indian dream. For the child is TODAY - and it is a society built on the promise of Today rather than the ever-repetitive cycles of the past that can truly be free. By freeing the child, we are in effect freeing our present to create the golden dreams of tomorrow.

We believe that India's most powerful and potent resource is YOU - the people who support our work. All the children, whose lives you have touched, have affirmed our faith in YOU. With your support we can and will see this freedom for children. We can assure you that any contribution in cash/kind will go a long way to build the self-reliance of these less fortunate children.

NIGHT SHELTER FOR STREET CHILDREN

The target groups are socially disabled and the majority have economically poor family backgrounds. These children are runaways from home for social and economical reasons.

They live in dangerous conditions on the platforms. They sweep compartments, beg and steal to survive, are abused by gangsters through drugs or sexually (which can lead to HIV/AIDS).

Our area of operation is the Guntur Railway station, Andhra Pradesh. The target population are the street children found begging and living on the railway station platforms, who are runaway, abandoned and/or abused. On an average 35 - 40 children can be seen every day on the platforms.

The children coming to the Guntur Railway can be orphaned, abandoned or runaway. They live and sleep on the streets or at the stations. For them, violence and abuse are a way of life. Some, as little as six, survive through begging, street trading and petty crime. Many are at the mercy of perverts, drug dealers and abusers. Railway stations are magnets for these 'forgotten children'. They arrive on trains or go there in search of food, shelter and companionship.

HEARTS is a point of contact for children coming on to the platforms and we provide them with help and advice and seek to reunite them with their families, or offer them shelter and care. Our Night Shelter gets them off the streets and offers a steppingstone to a better life. In the Night Shelter the children are offered nutrition, health & hygiene, care, education, vocational training, advocacy and protection from abuse. The children that we target are between 6 and 18 years.

Objectives:

a) To meet children found begging and living on the Guntur railway station and offer them emergency services i.e. snacks, first aid and counselling and , where possible, reunite them with their families.

- b) To identify these children and accommodate them in a Night Shelter where they can get nutritional, medical and recreational needs.
- c) To offer them Vocational Training, Formal and Non-Formal Education.
- d) To counsel the children considered capable of going to school where they can be integrated into the formal system ---through special arrangements with local educational institutions.
- e) To use this elementary stage as a means to get older children into apprenticeships that will ensure they are able to ---become employed and self-reliant.
- f) To offer them Health Education classes on various diseases and also awareness on STDs - HIV/AIDS.