

Dear Friends of Operation Shanti,

Our big news is the opening of our first shelter, Karunya Mane (in the local language *karunya* means compassion and love for the poor, *mane* means home). We also want to highlight our experiences with our women with HIV/AIDS, given its prevalence among the destitute and illiterate. And, a couple of our recent volunteers share a few words about their experiences working with our kids and moms. For more information on how your support has been put to good use during the past few months, please see *News for You* on our website at [www.operation-shanti.org](http://www.operation-shanti.org). Enjoy, and thank you for your continuing support.

### **Karunya Mane and the Street People Program**

Our home for kids and destitute elderly, Karunya Mane, is open... and we're almost full! KM took in its first residents on February 10, and we are now at five adults and 24 kids. Most (90%) of our residents used to be homeless on the streets of Mysore, and the other few come from slum areas and desperately need shelter given special situations. The adults at Karunya Mane help out around the place with chores and taking care of the kids, and all children attend school.

The Street People Program has reached a milestone at its three-year point in helping 60+ homeless individuals. Over 65% of the homeless who used to live there—the kids, the women, and the families—are either at Karunya Mane or now live in houses. Since pictures often say more than words, here are a couple of before and after:



**Before (Prema putting away her sleeping mat)**



**After**

Nevertheless, our work on the street is just beginning. While we settle in at Karunya Mane, we continue to make our daily rounds on the street to help those remaining and to expand and reach out to new kids and moms, as the “empty” spots on the sidewalk will surely fill up with new faces. Stay tuned for future updates on changes and expansions to the Street People Program.

### **Experiences with HIV/AIDS**

In the past few months, three destitute women with HIV/AIDS have come to us for help. All three had no husband to help take care of them and their kids. Two died from AIDS-related complications, primarily because they were simply too far gone before receiving proper medical attention. A third woman in her early 40's is quite ill in the hospital, weighing only 60 pounds. They often get to such critical conditions because they do not have the knowledge or education to know where to go for help, or don't come forward until they are desperately ill. Even if they seek help, chances are that the medical help they turn to is afraid to touch them, and cannot or will not provide meaningful assistance. Of the people in this country with HIV, 80% are estimated to be unaware they have the virus.

Moreover, given the prevalence of tuberculosis in India, HIV+ individuals are at high risk of contracting that illness. Three of our HIV+ women died from tuberculosis. Fortunately, our child with HIV managed to beat tuberculosis and is now on antiretrovirals.

The other battle that PLWHA face is the stigma related to the condition. Because HIV in India is transmitted among adults primarily through sexual contact, it's just not something that's talked about, as any discussion about sex—and even sex education—is socially and culturally prohibited. Most of the time, women contract HIV either from their husbands who unknowingly bring the disease into their home, or from having to turn to prostitution to feed themselves and their kids.

What's encouraging is that a couple of excellent HIV/AIDS clinics exist in Mysore. One dispenses free antiretrovirals and both educate and raise awareness within the community. Our HIV+ women and child are registered at the clinics, and they know that if they take good care of themselves and comply with their treatment regime, they can live healthy lives—even if they are the poorest in society. One of our HIV+ women has been on antiretrovirals for eight months and the improvement in her health has been dramatic. The same can be said about her little boy, also taking the medication, whose weight has increased by 40% during this time. He now enjoys good health most of the time, eats voraciously, and plays happily with the other kids. Another of our women, who does not yet need antiretrovirals, goes for monthly checkups, takes excellent care of herself, and has been very healthy for three years.

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**Unexpected Blessings -- Kim from Denver/Mysore**



Volunteering for Operation Shanti has enriched my life in ways I never could have imagined. This experience has changed my perspective on life and what we truly need as human beings to live a happy and fulfilled life, not to mention how very fortunate most of us are, even though we may not realize it.

I've witnessed the best and the worst in humankind. I joyfully greeted baby Kesava into the world, only to mourn his passing shortly thereafter when he contracted pneumonia and then septicemia, which he could not fight off. I've seen how amazingly resilient a person can be and how one's spirit can help him/her overcome astounding obstacles in life—obstacles we could never imagine—like a little boy with HIV who was very sickly but who now is healthy and active because his street mom has learned how to take good care of him. And my heart has never been more open as it is now after spending time with little street children like Vishnu, who has nothing other than the tattered clothes on his back but who sees the wonder in the world around him and experiences the pure, simple joys of life every day.

My sincere hope is that my work with the charity has brought as many riches to those we help as it has to me.

**Our Time with Operation Shanti -- Maike and Jan from Germany**

The Internet made it possible: while looking for a non-government organization to work for in India, we found Operation Shanti and simply loved the homepage to start with. We, Maike and Jan, are students of political science from Munich, Germany, and spent three months as volunteers with Operation Shanti in Mysore.



We were involved in most of what Operation Shanti works for, especially the Street People Program. From the first day on, we worked with Operation Shanti on the street. Mohan, two years old, was the first kid who welcomed us. It took us some moments to realize in what situation we were, but those fabulous, absolutely adorable kids gave us no chance to hesitate falling in love with them. We found ourselves sitting on a mat on the sidewalk, each of us having several kids on our laps, laughing and playing with them even though back then we did not understand their language.

Every morning we went to the street, to the same place, at the same time, seeing almost the same kids and moms. That helped us get to know them quite quickly. It felt right to do something good—at the same time, it was deterring. Remembering what we longed for as kids and comparing that to Mohan, Vishnu, Surya, Saumya, and all those other little ones living in extreme poverty, we felt ashamed.

To fight an uneasy feeling of helplessness, we tried to get carried away with the kids—drawing, first attempts at writing skills, and building small and big houses, cars and picture cameras with plastic building blocks...



We also took street people who were sick to the hospitals in and around Mysore. Several times, we took nine-year-old Prema to her ear doctor. We will never forget the puzzled face of her little brother Mohan when we entered the elevator in the hospital—something he had never seen before. Prema cried when her doctor let about 20 medical students poke in her ear—also hard to forget. But oh how proud she was after the exam, when we got her medicine and a little piece of candy for her. What a great girl!

After about three months, it was time to say goodbye, not a very easy thing to do. But kids will be kids: On the very last day, the last moments with them on the street, a street magician showed up and got the kids' attention. We said goodbye to the mothers and tried to say bye to the little ones, but no, they were running around the magician trying to get a better view—we felt thankful for the quick goodbye. It was good to see them so happy and we assured each other that we would be back as soon as we raised enough money for the flight and got enough time off from college. It is certain that we will never forget them, their mothers, and Operation Shanti!

**How You Can Help**

- Donate to support the Street People Program and Karunya Mane. We continue our work on the street and meet new kids in desperate need of help. They appreciate your support.
- Check our website in July for sponsorship opportunities for a Karunya Mane Kid.
- To volunteer, send us an email about your interest.



- We now take donations through Google Checkout.
- Give in other ways: host a luncheon, take up a collection at your school or workplace, spread the word to everyone you know on **Facebook** (search for Operation Shanti under 'causes'), write about us in your blog... be creative!
- And, thank you for your nonmonetary donations, and excellent fundraising efforts!

**Make a Difference. Donate Today.**