

Jeevanalaya is a home for destitute and street children. It is located about 35 km outside Bangalore in a place called Nelamangala. This houses 43 girls ranging in age from 5 years to 16 years. I did not know what to expect when I visited Jeevanalaya in early Feb 2013. The home is located on a desolate road with a few trees and not much else in sight. We entered the gates and drove on a long dusty stretch, which ended in a small garden area surrounded by a few old buildings. We were greeted by the Redemption Sisters, who smiled and welcomed us to their home. We entered one of the buildings in which four caretaker Sisters resided. They offered us tea and described their work and activities. After exchanging pleasantries, the Sisters led us across the garden area to another building which housed the children. As we entered the room, we saw little girls sitting cross-legged on the cold floor and leaning against the walls of the room. They were dressed neatly, with their hair combed and plaited with little bows at the ends. Some had slippers, but most were bare-feet. At the behest of the nuns, the girls greeted us and each stood and introduced themselves with their name, age and school grade.



**Entrance to Jeevanalaya**



**Receiving Snacks**

Jeevanalaya comprised of dormitory-style living, where each child slept on the floor and owned a few clothes neatly placed by their sleeping mat. They were provided with three meals a day and admitted to local schools in the vicinity. The Sisters helped the kids with their homework when they returned from school each evening. After their study time, the kids had play and recreation time, where the older girls taught the younger ones some Indian dances and songs.

The kids were mainly destitute and picked up from the streets. Some had parents who visited on the weekends. The primary purpose of the Home was to rehabilitate these girls and give them a fresh start in life by building a strong foundation with a good education and decent living standards, a far cry from their previous surroundings.

After the introductions, the kids performed some group dances, sang songs and bantered with us. The kids seemed happy by our visit. Some smiled incessantly while others just stared with an empty look of desolation. I wished I could see what ran through their minds. I wondered how

these children, some with no parents and meager belongings, coped without a proper family structure.

We brought a few snacks and drinks and handed them to the children, who accepted them with a beautiful broad smile. One of the little girls, about 5 years old, looked me in the eye and said, “thank you for coming uncle, because of you, I get to wear my best clothes.”



**Posing in the Garden**



**Putting Names of Juice Boxes**

Within an hour, we were ready to leave. All the kids came up to the car to say goodbye. They broke out in applause and waved to us as we left. I wondered what the future had in store for these young ones. Would they complete their schooling provided by the Redemption Sisters or would some of the girls return to the streets? A sense of sadness descended on me as I left with mixed emotions. I sat in silence on the hour-long trip back home. My thoughts were filled with the laughter of the kids and the happy demeanor that some of them had. It was an eye-opener as I left the world of these kids and returned to my own. Even though we have so much, we are still not as happy as these little ones. Where did they derive their strength? How were they radiating so much joy? How did they manage with just three sets of clothes each? How did they live in a world with no family structure? I had more questions than answers.

When I got home, I got on my knees and thanked the Lord for our many blessings. How could I ever complain? How could I be unhappy for a single moment after seeing these children who had nothing but still chose to be happy? I guess I will never know the answers. Through this experience, I learned a very important lesson.....that God may not give us everything, but HE has definitely blessed every one of us with the gift of being Happy. How and when we want to accept that gift is left entirely to us. The children at Jeevanalaya had made their choice.....now I must make mine.

***Contributed by David Faria***

**Appeal:** If you would like to help the children at Jeevanalaya, please contact us via email and 100% of your donations will go to support these children. In the U.S., every donation is tax deductible as Prema Jyothi is a 501c-3 non-profit organization.